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Transparency data

# Recruitment and retention in mainstream fostering

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## Applies to England


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# Introduction

There has been an increased focus on the sustainability of the mainstream fostering sector in England following publication of the [Fostering in England 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023](#) statistical release. This release provides further analysis of the recruitment and retention of carers in mainstream fostering, as at March 2023. It focuses on enquiries, applications, the length of the application process and the training and development of foster carers.

At the end of March 2023, there were 43,405 fostering households in England. Of these, 35,005 were mainstream foster care households, which accounted for 59,380 foster carers. 'Mainstream foster care' refers to all foster homes, including those fostering to adopt. It excludes households where the primary placement offer is family and friends foster care.

## Recruitment

### Enquiries to applications

In the year ending 31 March 2023, there were 125,195 initial enquiries from potential mainstream fostering households. This was 9% lower than the previous year (2021 to 2022) and 2% lower than 2018 to 2019. The number of initial enquiries peaked in the pandemic year 2020 to 2021, when it reached 160,635.

#### Figure 1: Number of initial enquiries since 1 April 2018, by sector



[Estimates have been used for the number of enquiries in 2019 to 2020.](#)

View the [data in an accessible table](#).

This year, 6% of the 125,195 initial enquiries to become a foster carer resulted in an application. This proportion has remained between 6% and 8% of initial enquiries since 2018 to 2019.

For independent fostering agencies (IFAs), 5% of initial enquiries resulted in an application being submitted; for local authorities, this was 12%. Enquiries to IFAs made up 79% of the total number of enquiries and accounted for 62% of applications.

The number of initial enquiries has limitations as an indicator of the level of interest in fostering. Feedback from providers across the sector suggests that opinions differ on what counts as an initial enquiry; therefore, we have clarified the definition of an initial enquiry in the 2023 to 2024 fostering collection guidance. Research by [The Fostering Network](#) also highlights that an individual can make multiple enquiries. Therefore, the number of enquiries may not be a true

reflection of the number of individuals interested in fostering.

## Applications

In previous years, the number of approved, withdrawn and rejected applications was reported based on those received and processed within the same calendar year. We have reviewed this methodology to take account of the greater emphasis on recruitment and retention. As a result, we have adjusted it to ensure that the number of approved applications now includes those that were in progress in the previous year but finalised and approved in the current year. This aims to represent the recruitment process more accurately. We have updated the values to reflect this refined methodology. These can be found in the accompanying dataset.

### Figure 2: Outcomes of mainstream applications during the year, excluding fostering to adopt



View the [data in an accessible table](#).

In the year to 31 March 2023, 4,080 households were newly approved, including 400 fostering to adopt households. IFA households made up 56% (2,055) of newly approved mainstream households (excluding fostering to adopt households), despite only making up 43% of all mainstream fostering households. Of the total number of approved applications, excluding fostering to adopt, 47% (1,740) were submitted and approved in year.

During 2022 to 2023, 57% of applications to IFAs completed in year were withdrawn by the applicant or service, compared with 48% to local authorities.

## Length of application process

The process of becoming a foster parent in England involves a 2-stage assessment. The stages can happen separately or concurrently. Further information is available in '[Becoming a foster parent in England](#)'.

Of the mainstream fostering households approved during 2022 to 2023, 76% (2,805) experienced stages 1 and 2 concurrently. A higher proportion of IFAs ran the stages concurrently, making up 85% of households approved in year, compared with local authorities, which ran the stages concurrently for 65% of households approved in year.

In 2022 to 2023, 75% of mainstream foster home applications that were approved in year were completed within 240 days (approximately 8 months) from the start of stage 1 to approval date. This was in line with the '[Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards](#)'. A higher proportion of IFA applications (83%) than local authority applications (63%) were completed in this time frame.

## Retention

In 2022 to 2023, more mainstream households deregistered (5,125) than were approved (4,080). This led to a net decrease in the number of fostering households.

The numbers above include households that were approved and deregistered in year. This accounted for 7% of newly approved households in 2022 to 2023. There were 275 mainstream households that were both approved and deregistered within the same year.

The largest proportion of newly approved carers in 2022 to 2023 were in their 40s and 50s (30% aged 40 to 49 and 32% aged 50 to 59). Of the carers who deregistered this year, the highest proportion were aged 50 or over, at 64%. Those aged 60 or over made up 30%. These proportions have remained similar for the 4 years that we have collected data on carers' ages.

## Training and development

As at 31 March 2023, 84% of all approved mainstream foster carers (50,035), regardless of length of time approved, had completed their mandatory training. Both sectors had similar levels of completed training: local authorities 83% and IFAs 86%. Of those carers who had not completed their training, 50% (4,630) had started, 38% (3,580) had not yet started and 5% (490) were awaiting sign-off.

Foster carers who have been approved for more than 12 months are expected to have completed their [training, support and development standards workbook](#). Of foster carers in households that had been approved for 12 months or more, 91% of carers who remained approved had completed their workbooks, while only 81% of deregistered carers had done so. A higher proportion of foster carers in deregistered households had not yet started their mandatory training (7%) compared with those who remained approved (3%).

### Figure 3: Approved and deregistered mainstream households (approved more than 12 months) by training status, as at 31 March 2023



View the [data in an accessible table](#).

## Annex: data tables for figures

This section contains the underlying data in an accessible table format for all figures.

### Data for Figure 1: Number of initial enquiries since 1 April 2018, by sector

Sector	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023
All England	127,850	137,265	160,635	138,075	125,195
Mainstream (LA)	35,960	32,280	33,645	31,045	25,820
Mainstream (IFA)	91,890	104,995	126,985	107,030	99,375

See [Figure 1](#).

### Data for Figure 2: Outcomes of mainstream applications during the year, excluding fostering to adopt

Year	Number of applications approved	Applications withdrawn by applicant	Applications withdrawn by service	Applications rejected
2018 to 19	4,985	3,300	1,750	90
2019 to 20	4,580	3,165	1,355	75
2020 to 21	5,275	3,380	2,475	75
2021 to 22	3,915	3,680	1,460	90
2022 to 23	3,680	2,675	1,640	90

See [Figure 2](#).

### Data for Figure 3: Approved and deregistered mainstream households (approved more than 12 months) by training status, as at 31 March 2023

Training status	Approved (53,070)	Deregistered (7,230)
Not known	1%	2%
Not yet started	3%	7%
Training in progress	4%	9%

Awaiting sign off	1%	1%
Workbook completed	91%	81%

See [Figure 3](#).

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