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for Education

Children's homes workforce census: Stage 2 and 3

Research report

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Verian and the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to conduct research with children's homes in England. The research builds upon previous research with children's homes conducted in 2014. The overall aim was to provide up to date and comprehensive evidence of the children's homes workforce. The study had a particular focus on recruitment and retention to better understand the issues and inform policies to support the sector. This report presents findings from Stage 2 and 3 of the research. The findings from Stage 1 can be found in the report '[Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#).'

Stage 2 involved in-depth interviews with 64 individuals across 20 children's homes in England. Stage 3 was an attempted census of all children's homes in England sent to registered managers in September 2024. In total, 703 homes took part in the census, the equivalent of 19% of all eligible homes in England. The profile of the homes that took part closely matched the population of all children's homes when looking at the following characteristics: the number of years registered as a children's home, number of places, Ofsted rating, region and sector. Data was weighted at both the home level and the staff level to ensure the findings were representative.

The Stage 3 survey in 2024 was largely a repeat of the Stage 1 survey conducted in 2023, allowing for changes over time to be identified, with the addition of a few new questions.

Services and support provided by children's homes

The majority of homes reported that they provided long term care (89%), with 21% reporting they provided short term care¹. Since 2023, there has been an increase in the number of homes reporting they can meet complex needs (from 66% to 80%), abuse and neglect (64% to 73%) and mental health problems (33% to 40%). Among homes who reported they could meet complex needs, the type of complex needs most commonly reported were emotional and behavioural difficulties (95%) and attention and conduct disorders (90%).

Children's homes reported an average of 3.8 registered places, a decrease from 4.2 registered places in 2023. The average number of occupied places per home was 2.9, meaning that an average of 0.9 places per home were unoccupied. The most common

¹ Homes could provide more than one type of care.

reason for unoccupied beds was waiting for a child referral, which had increased since 2023 (from 34% to 54%).

Staff findings

The estimated workforce size nationally is 46,330 including managerial and care staff, an increase from 39,300 in 2023 and 20,000 in 2014. Between the 2023 and 2024 research, the number of children's homes had increased by 646. The estimated national workforce size was calculated by multiplying the home-level weights by the total number of staff that surveyed homes reported by headcount.

Most members of staff were reported to be employed on a full-time contract (83%) and very few were employed on zero-hour contracts (4%). Managers reported that 30% of staff had worked longer than their contracted hours in the last week that they had worked, a decrease from 34% in 2023.

Overall, pay had increased since 2023². Registered managers were paid an average of £22.51 per hour (up from £20.75), and care staff in a non-supervisory role were paid an average of £13.06 per hour (up from £11.97). This is higher than the National Living Wage, which was set as £11.44 in 2024. Average hourly pay tended to increase with years of experience.

Staff retention

The number of homes that reported no care staff vacancies increased to 47% in 2024 (from 38% in 2023), whilst the number of vacancies for managerial staff remained stable (76% reported no vacancies). Compared with 2023, homes reported filling vacancies for care staff more quickly, with 62% filled within 3 months (an increase from 52%). Overall, the average staff turnover rate based on the number of staff in the home and the number of staff who left the home was 29%. This is similar to a turnover rate of 31% in the 2023 survey.

The main reason that care staff left the home, reported by managers, was for personal reasons (40%). Since 2023, the number of managers reporting that care staff left due to performance issues has increased from 17% to 23%. Fewer managers reported staff leaving due to pressures of the role, career change, better pay elsewhere, better working hours or conditions and feeling burn out or stress.

² Note this has not been adjusted for inflation

Misconceptions and unrealistic expectations about the role, not having suitable skills, and the nature of the role itself were seen as barriers to retaining staff in the qualitative interviews.

Staff recruitment

Surveyed managers continued to report difficulties in finding care staff, although fewer reported finding it difficult compared with 2023 (62% compared with 69%). Around three in five reported finding it difficult to find managerial staff (59%), a finding consistent with 2023.

Surveyed managers reported a range of challenges around the suitability of applicants when filling care staff vacancies, primarily around not having the right experience (74%), the right skills (66%) or the right attitude or motivation (57%). More managers reported visa issues as a challenge (13% in 2024 compared with 7% in 2023). One in five surveyed managers reported recruiting care staff from outside the UK since the start of 2023 (22%). Managers in the qualitative interviews perceived a reduction in international recruitment since the UK left the European Union.

The main motivations for working in the children's homes sector as reported by staff in the qualitative interviews were wanting to make a difference and the variety and challenge of the role. Changes to pay and benefits, increased support for staff and changes to the recruitment process, such as broadening where roles are advertised were some strategies that staff said homes had considered, or had done, to improve recruitment.

Homes' use of agency and bank staff

Around a quarter of surveyed managers (28%) reported that they had used agency staff on at least one day in the previous 4 weeks. Half (49%) reported to have used bank or relief staff on at least one day in the previous 4 weeks.

Some staff in the qualitative interviews had concerns about working with agency staff, including the potential impact on young people and permanent staff. However, some mitigated this by working with consistent staff from trusted providers. Some staff felt positively about agency contracts, as it allowed for more autonomy, and provided an opportunity to learn whether the role was right for them.

Training, CPD and career development

Staff interviewed in the qualitative research acknowledged the importance of training and qualifications, but some felt the quality was variable.

More than half of surveyed managers (53%) reported challenges in providing CPD and training to staff, with lack of staff time (30%) and lack of staff motivation (22%) being the two most commonly cited challenges. Similar findings were reflected in the qualitative interviews, with some reporting that there was not enough time allocated on shifts to complete training, negatively impacting on staff motivation.

Mentoring and support was highlighted as an important way for junior staff to develop skills and knowledge for them to progress in their career, however some staff were reluctant to progress to a manager role because of the extra responsibilities.

The apprenticeship scheme

Awareness and understanding of the apprenticeship scheme was mixed among participants in the qualitative interviews, with some who had not used it having negative preconceptions. Managers who had used the scheme were positive about the quality and coverage of the qualification, with some describing it as more comprehensive than the NVQ route.

The introduction of professional registration

As part of the qualitative research, managers and staff were asked their views about the potential impact of introducing a professional registration process for care staff and managers in the children's homes sector. Some staff felt that this would have a positive impact by giving greater value to the sector and improving recognition, potentially making recruitment easier. Some felt it would streamline training and support, however others were wary of a potentially increased volume of training that could result from a professional registration. There was also some wariness about the procedural components, for example potentially needing to register before recruitment, or to pay registration fees.

Mental health

Surveyed managers reported feeling confident that the staff in their home are able to identify when children and young people are experiencing poor mental health (28% fairly confident and 70% very confident). Only 1% reported not feeling confident.

Background and method

This section outlines the background and methodology for Stage 2 and 3 of the children's homes workforce census.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the children's homes workforce census was to provide up to date and comprehensive evidence on the children's homes workforce. The study had a particular focus on recruitment and retention, and qualifications and training to better understand the issues and inform policies to support the sector.

The research aimed to answer the following research questions:

- what are the challenges around the recruitment of staff?
- what are the challenges around the retention of staff?
- what is the profile of the children's homes workforce?
- what is the current qualification level of staff?
- to what extent do homes rely on agency staff?
- what services do homes provide?

The study had three distinct phases:

- Stage 1: an attempted census of all children's homes in England sent to registered managers in 2023
- Stage 2: qualitative case studies to explore emerging themes from Stage 1
- Stage 3: another attempted census of all children's homes in England sent to registered managers in 2024

This report presents findings from Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the research. Findings from Stage 1 can be found in the report '[Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#).'

This research builds on a previous children's homes census that was conducted in 2013/2014. Findings from the 2013/2014 census can be found in the report '[A census of the children's homes workforce](#)'.

Methodology

At Stage 2 of the research, NCB conducted in-depth interviews with 64 individuals working in the children's care sector from a diverse range of 20 settings across England between September and December 2023. To capture differing perspectives, various professionals were interviewed, such as registered managers, care staff, strategic staff from larger, multi-setting providers, and external specialists such as mental health professionals and teachers.

Verian administered Stage 3 of the research between September and November 2024. Registered managers from all 3,646 registered children's homes in England were invited to participate in the census. Homes were invited to take part by letter and email, with up to 5 reminder letters and emails sent throughout fieldwork to try and encourage participation. A postal questionnaire was also sent to homes who had not completed the online survey, with a reminder letter to take part. Finally, telephone calls were used at the end of fieldwork to encourage any remaining homes to take part.

Stage 2

Sample and participant characteristics

The sample was drawn from children's homes who had completed the Stage 1 census and who had agreed to be recontacted for further research. All participants were recruited via the registered manager of the setting and completed individual consent forms.

In total, 20 children's homes took part in the case studies from a range of settings. Sampling criteria was applied to ensure a range of different homes were included based on the setting type, sector, number of beds, region and the reported difficulty of recruiting staff. The full breakdown can be found in Annex 4 – Sample profile for qualitative interviews. Overall, 64 individuals were interviewed. A median of 4 individuals were interviewed per setting (range from 1 to 6).

Fieldwork

Stage 2 fieldwork took place between 3 September 2023 and 14 December 2023. Each interview was undertaken online and took approximately one hour to complete. Before each interview started, researchers obtained informed consent from prospective participants and answered any outstanding questions.

All interviews took place online on Microsoft Teams and were recorded. Each recording was transcribed verbatim and in full. These recordings and transcripts formed the basis of analysis. The vast majority of these involved a single participant, although some care staff were interviewed together.

Data analysis

Throughout the fieldwork, emerging themes were discussed to develop an initial analysis framework. This framework was continuously reviewed and developed as further data was collected.

Stage 3

Sample design and weighting

Ofsted provided a list of all 3,646 registered children's homes in England as of 2 September 2024 following a request made by DfE, including information such as registered manager name, children's home address, telephone number and email address (where held).

In total, 703 homes took part in the census, the equivalent of 19% of all eligible homes in England: 594 took part online and 109 using the paper questionnaire. Table 1 shows the profile of the achieved sample who participated in the research compared with the population of all children's homes. Overall, the achieved sample was closely aligned with the population across a range of characteristics, shown in Table 1.

Data from the census was weighted, firstly at the home level using the population level data Ofsted provided to correct for minor variations in tendency to respond to the survey between homes. The home level data was weighted by number of registered places; Ofsted inspection rating; region; sector/ownership of home; and years registered as a home. Staff level data was separately weighted to account for where homes had provided data for a selection of staff in the home and adjusted for any differences in types of staff reported on (for example, based on managerial/supervisory responsibilities).

Table 1 Profile of achieved children's homes sample and population

Profile of children's homes	Achieved sample (unweighted %)	Population (unweighted %)
Years registered as a children's home: less than 3 years	47%	49%
Years registered as a children's home: 3 years up to 5 years	10%	10%
Years registered as a children's home: 5 years up to 10 years	11%	9%

Profile of children's homes	Achieved sample (unweighted %)	Population (unweighted %)
Years registered as a children's home: 8 years up to 10 years	7%	7%
Years registered as a children's home: 10 years or more	26%	24%
Number of beds in home: 1 or 2 beds	26%	26%
Number of beds in home: 3 beds	27%	25%
Number of beds in home: 4 beds	21%	22%
Number of beds in home: 5 beds	11%	11%
Number of beds in home: 6 beds or more	14%	16%
Ownership: Private	83%	83%
Ownership: Local authority (LA)	13%	13%
Ownership: Voluntary	4%	5%
Ofsted inspection rating: Outstanding	11%	10%
Ofsted inspection rating: Good	72%	68%
Ofsted inspection rating: Requires improvement to be good	8%	11%
Ofsted inspection rating: Inadequate	1%	2%
Ofsted inspection rating: Unknown	8%	9%
Region: East Midlands	10%	12%
Region: East of England	10%	8%
Region: London	6%	6%
Region: North East	8%	6%
Region: North West	26%	26%
Region: South East	10%	11%
Region: South West	7%	7%
Region: West Midlands	16%	16%
Region: Yorkshire and the Humber	8%	9%

Questionnaire development

The Stage 3 questionnaire was largely a repeat of the Stage 1 questionnaire, with the addition of some new questions. The final version of the Stage 3 questionnaire is

provided in Annex 2 – Stage 3 questionnaire. It was designed to take up to 15 minutes to complete, once the datasheet had been completed. The online and postal versions of the questionnaire were largely identical, except for minor presentational differences.

Managers could only enter data for themselves and up to 5 members of staff in the postal questionnaire for practical purposes, whereas they had the option to enter data for all of their staff online.

Cognitive testing was conducted with 5 homes to test whether the new questions for Stage 3 were worded correctly to be consistently and easily understood. Invite materials were also tested to ensure that these included all the necessary information and were easy to understand. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes and were conducted via telephone or online video conferencing platforms.

Replicating the approach used at Stage 3, individual-level questions about staff at each home (for example, their qualification and experience levels) could be answered for either all members of staff in the home, or for up to 6 members of staff (always including the registered manager plus up to 5 other members of staff). This approach was used to limit the burden on homes and to encourage participation. Managers could choose whether to answer for all staff in the home or for up to 5 members of staff. To ensure the census findings were representative of the workforce, managers were instructed to select staff at random by ranking all members of staff alphabetically by surname and then selecting the first 5 staff alphabetically. Half of homes were asked to list staff by surname from A-Z and half from Z-A.

Of the 703 homes who participated, 414 reported data for up to 5 members of staff and 289 reported for all staff in the home. Staff level data were weighted to be representative of all staff in the sector. This is described in Annex 1 – Weighting.

During data processing, an issue in the script was identified whereby managers who completed the survey online and selected to answer about all members of staff, were asked to provide details for an extra member of staff. To address this, any information entered for an extra member of staff was removed prior to weighting. In total, this impacted 289 children's homes. All data entered before the extra staff member was retained, minimising the impact of this in the findings.

Survey and datasheet administration

Initially, Verian sent the registered manager of each home a pack that included:

- a letter introducing the survey, its aims and objectives, and an outline of how the survey would be carried out
- a datasheet that was designed to help managers collate more detailed pieces of information (for example, data about staff working in the home) before completing

the survey, and also explained how staff should be selected to be included in the census

Registered managers were asked to complete the questionnaire themselves and to provide information about themselves and their staff members. The following rules applied to which staff should be included in the survey:

- include only staff with responsibility for caring for children (excluding support staff such as catering and cleaning staff)
- include both full- and part-time staff
- exclude agency workers (those that were not employed directly by their organisation)
- exclude any teaching or nursing staff
- exclude staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support/services (for example, speech therapists or psychologists)

An invitation letter was sent on 25 September 2024, with details for how managers could complete the census online. An email was also sent where available, with the same information as the letter. A reminder letter with accompanying postal questionnaire was sent on 17 October 2024 to homes who had not completed the census, with a pre-paid envelope to return the questionnaire by post. A series of reminder emails were sent to managers alongside this to try and encourage participation. Finally, all homes which had still not responded received telephone calls between 8 and 15 November 2024, inviting managers to complete the census, with the option for login details to be re-sent to the manager via email, if requested.

Data analysis and processing

Throughout this report, comparisons are significant at the 95% confidence level. Only findings that are significantly different at the 95% confidence level are presented in this report.

Findings have been analysed looking at type of home; the region the home is within; the latest Ofsted rating the home received as of August 2024; and size of home by number of registered places and/or reported number of beds in the home. It is likely that these factors will overlap, so findings should be interpreted accordingly. For example, local authority run homes are more likely to have 6 or more places, whereas privately run homes were more likely to be smaller, with 3 or fewer places. Findings focus on groups of homes with more than 50 responses in the unweighted data.

Reporting notes

Changes over time, between Stage 1 and Stage 3, are discussed throughout where this has occurred. Where there has not been any change over time the report focuses on the findings from the most recent wave, Stage 3.

Insights from the qualitative and quantitative research are provided side by side. The distinction between them is signposted throughout. Where results are reported from 'quantitative research', the 'survey', the 'census', 'surveyed children's homes' or where percentages are reported, this denotes that findings are from the quantitative research survey. Where results are reported from 'qualitative research' or, 'interviews/those interviewed', this denotes the findings are from the qualitative strands of this research.

Where percentages shown in charts or tables do not total to exactly 100% this is due to a combination of rounding to the nearest whole number and because some questions allowed participants to choose more than one response option. Qualitative research seeks to explore views and experiences in greater depth and does not aim or allow for statistical analyses. Qualitative findings are not representative nor generalisable and are not meant to be used to provide statistically significant results. Direct quotes are provided for illustrative purposes where the authors deem this helps to describe a theme. These are not intended to be representative of the qualitative findings as a whole.

In the analysis of the survey findings, homes are analysed by geographic region. These regions are grouped into the following categories:

- the South of England, which includes homes in London, the South East and the South West
- the West of England, which includes homes in the West Midlands
- the East of England, which includes homes in the East Midlands and East of England
- the North of England, which includes homes in the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

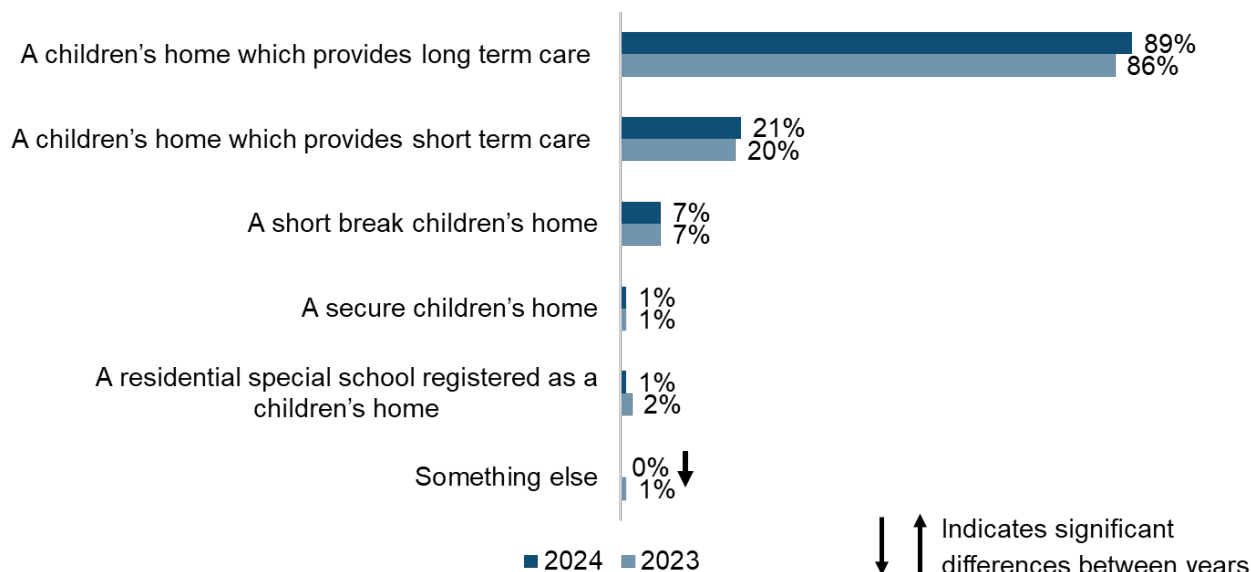
Services and support provided by children's homes

This section of the report explores the services and support that children's homes in England provide; including the range of needs that homes provide for as described in their statement of purpose and the number of places the home can provide for. Homes with available bed capacity at the time of the survey were also asked why they had unoccupied beds.

Types of children's home

Surveyed managers were asked how their home is best described, as outlined in their statement of purpose. A statement of purpose sets out the overall aims and objectives of the children's home, more information can be found in the [Children's Homes Regulations](#)³. Managers could select more than one answer. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of responses. Most managers described their home as 'a children's home which provides long term care' (89%). Around one in five described their home as 'a children's home which provides short term care' (21%) and around one in twenty reported they were 'a short break children's home' (7%). There was no significant difference in the types of home compared to 2023.

Figure 1 Types of children's homes - as described by their statement of purpose



Base: All children's homes (2024: 703 homes, 2023: 835 homes).

Source: Which of the following best describes your home (as described by your home's statement of purpose) (select all that apply)?

³ More information about children's homes regulations can be found at [Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations](#)

There were some differences by sector / ownership of home. Private homes were more likely to report that they provide long term care (95% compared with 62% of local authority run homes). Local authority run homes were more likely to report they were short break homes (29% compared with 2% of privately run homes).

Short break homes were more likely to be in the South of England (14%), compared with homes in other regions in England (6% in the North, 4% in the West, and 2% in the East).

The range of needs met by children's home

Surveyed managers were asked which needs their home's statement of purpose says they can meet. Managers could select as many needs as applied to their home.

On average, children's homes reported that they were able to meet 3.5 of the types of needs in Figure 2 below. This is a significant increase since 2023 where, on average, homes reported they were able to meet 3.1 types of needs. Local authority run homes reported they were able to meet a higher number of types of needs than privately run homes (3.9 and 3.3 respectively).

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of responses. Four in five homes (80%) reported that they were able to meet complex needs including drug or alcohol dependence, sexually harmful behaviour, attachment disorders, emotional and behavioural difficulties, offending behaviour, going missing, self-harm, history of harming themselves and/or others, attention and conduct disorders/ADHD, communication difficulties, and unspecified complex needs.

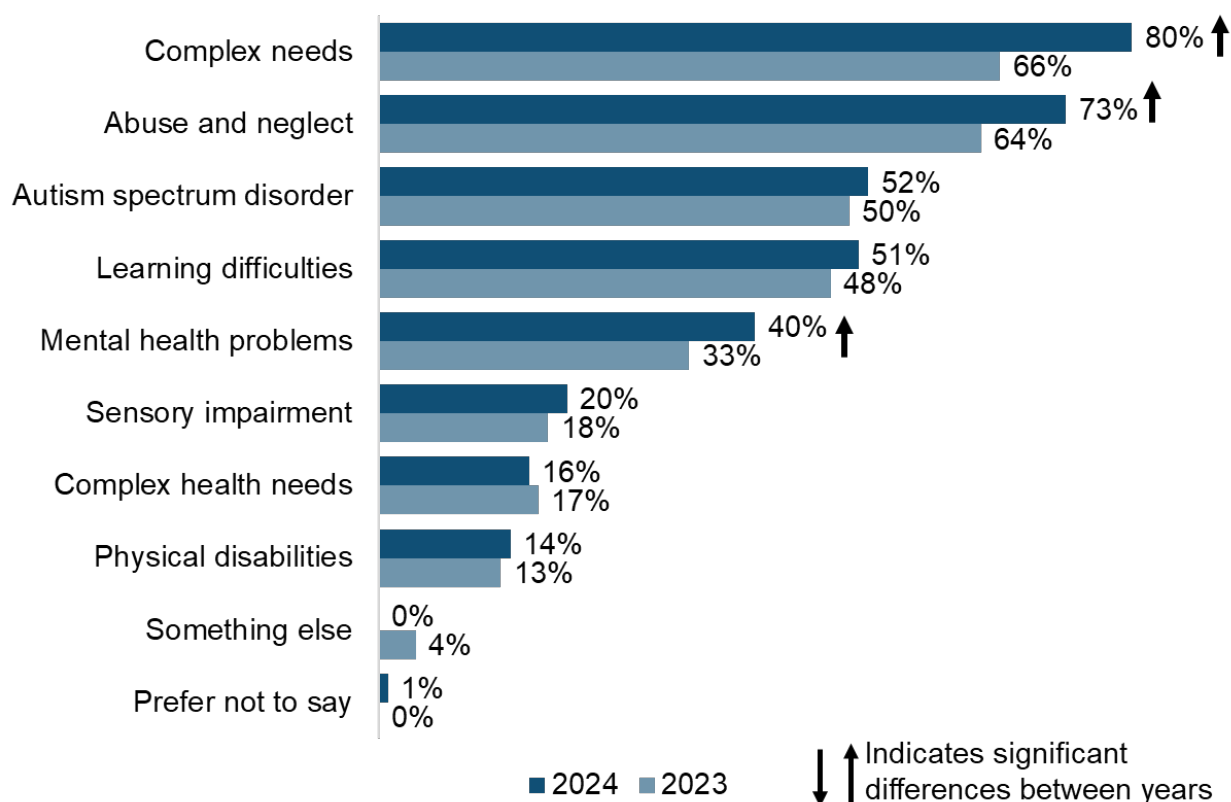
A similar proportion (73%) said they were able to meet needs associated with abuse and neglect including trauma, child sexual exploitation, neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and unspecified abuse.

Just over half reported that they were able to meet autism spectrum disorder needs (52%) and learning difficulties (51%). Two in five homes (40%) were able to meet needs associated with mental health problems. Fewer homes were able to meet sensory impairment needs (20%), complex health needs (16%) and physical disabilities (14%).

There has been an increase in homes who reported that they were able to meet the following needs since 2023:

- complex needs (80% compared with 66% in 2023)
- abuse and neglect (73% compared with 64% in 2023)
- needs associated with mental health problems (40% compared with 33% in 2023)

Figure 2 Types of needs met by homes, as described in their statement of purpose



Base: All children's homes (2024: 702 homes, 2023: 832 homes).

Source: Please describe the range of needs your statement of purpose says that you can meet?

Local authority run homes were more likely to cater for autism spectrum disorders (65% compared with 49% of privately run homes), learning difficulties (66% compared with 47%), sensory impairment (32% compared with 17%), complex health needs (28% compared with 13%) and physical disabilities (35% compared with 10%). Privately run homes were more likely to report that they catered for complex needs (83% compared with 69% of local authority homes) and abuse and neglect (76% compared with 60%).

Homes with 6 or more places were more likely to cater for the following needs compared with homes with 4 or fewer places:

- learning difficulties (70% compared with 47%)
- autism spectrum disorders (66% compared with 48%)
- sensory impairments (37% compared with 16%)
- physical disabilities (34% compared with 7%)
- complex health needs (32% compared with 12%)

Homes with fewer than 4 places were more likely to cater for complex needs (84% compared with 67% of homes with 6 or more places), and abuse and neglect (79% compared with 51% of homes with 6 or more places).

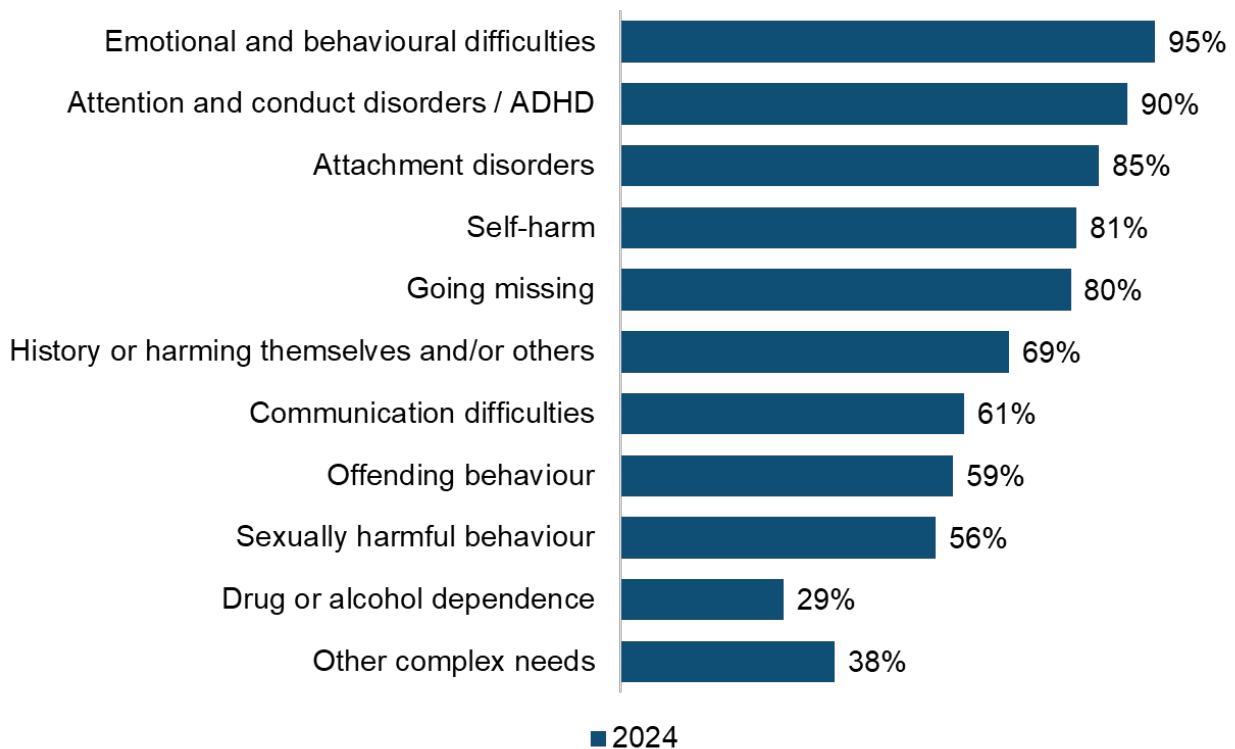
Types of complex needs homes can accommodate

If a surveyed children's home reported that they were able to meet complex needs, they were given a list of complex needs and asked which of those needs they were able to accommodate. Managers were allowed to select multiple options and were also given an 'other' option to write in needs that were not on the list. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of responses below.

Nine in ten homes reported that they were able to accommodate residents with emotional and behavioural difficulties (95%) and with attention and conduct disorders (90%). Around four in five homes reported that they were able to accommodate residents with attachment disorders (85%), residents that would self-harm (81%) or would go missing (80%).

More than half of homes reported that they were able to accommodate residents with a history of harming themselves and/or others (69%), communication difficulties (61%), offending behaviour (59%) and sexually harmful behaviour (56%). Fewer homes were able to accommodate residents with drug or alcohol dependencies (29%). Around two in five (38%) said there were other complex needs they could accommodate, and responses given were for a variety of reasons such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Figure 3 Types of complex needs that can be accommodated by homes that meet complex needs



Base: Childrens homes that meet complex needs in their statement of purpose (2024: 553 homes).

Source: Which of the following types of complex needs can your home accommodate?

Homes with 1 or 2 places were more likely than homes with 6 or more places to report that they can accommodate residents with the following complex needs:

- emotional and behavioural difficulties (98% compared with 85%)
- attachment disorders (89% compared with 78%)
- self-harm (87% compared with 74%)
- going missing (88% compared with 66%)
- history of harming themselves/others (79% compared with 61%)
- offending behaviour (67% compared with 48%)
- sexually harmful behaviour (68% compared with 43%)

Homes that held an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating were more likely than homes that held a 'Good' Ofsted rating to report that they can accommodate residents with communication difficulties (74% compared with 58%) and sexually harmful behaviour (69% compared with 53%).

The number of registered places and the number currently occupied

Overall, surveyed children's homes had an average of 3.8 registered places available for children and young people, shown in Table 2. The average number of occupied places per home was 2.9, meaning that an average of 0.9 places per home were unoccupied.

Since 2023 there has been a decline in the average number of registered places available, from 4.2 in 2023 to 3.8 in 2024. This decline was predominantly in local authority run homes, where the average number of registered places fell from 5.7 to 4.0.

Table 2 Average number of registered places in 2024

Type of contract	All homes	Local authority homes	Private homes
Average number of places	3.8	4.0	3.6
Average number of vacancies	0.9	0.0	0.9
Base (all children's homes, except short break homes)	660	65	576

Maximum number of nights available in short break homes

The base size for surveyed short break homes is small (42), so the following findings should be treated with caution.

Short break homes were asked about the maximum number of nights per month that children and young people could stay in their home. Overall, they reported an average of 12 nights available for children and young people with a range of 2 to 31.

Unoccupied beds

In 2024, around half (52%) of surveyed managers reported they had unoccupied beds in their homes. The following types of homes were more likely to have unoccupied beds:

- privately run homes (54%) compared with local authority run homes (31%)
- homes rated Requires Improvement by Ofsted (68%) compared with homes rated as Good (50%) or Outstanding (41%)

Reason for unoccupied beds

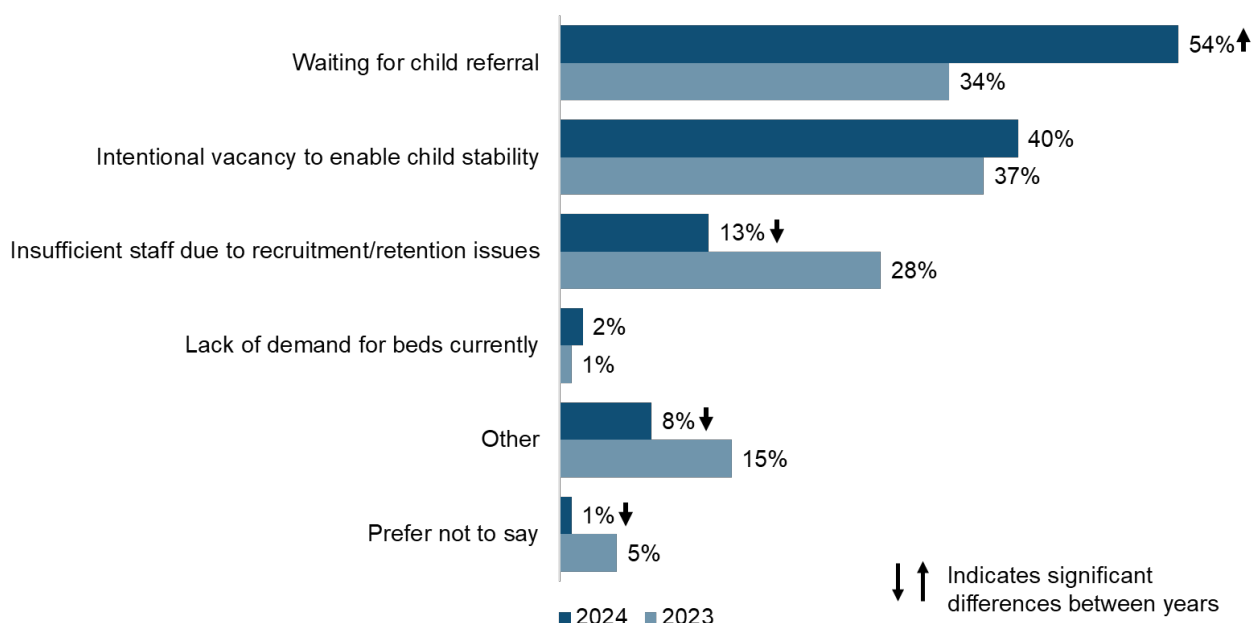
If a surveyed children's home had fewer residents than registered places, they were asked why they had unoccupied beds.

As shown in Figure 4, just over half (54%) of homes reported that waiting for a child referral was the most common reason for having unoccupied beds. This was followed by homes having intentional vacancies to enable child stability (40%), insufficient staff due to recruitment or retention issues (13%) or a lack of demand for beds (2%). A further 8% reported "other" reasons for having unoccupied beds, such as:

- need for 2 staff for every child or young person
- the home being refurbished, or redecorated

Compared with 2023, more homes reported waiting for child referral (54% compared with 34%) and fewer homes reported insufficient staff due to recruitment or retention issues (13% compared with 28%) as reasons for having unoccupied beds.

Figure 4 Reasons why homes have unoccupied beds



Base: All children's homes with unoccupied beds (2024: 327 homes, 2023: 386 homes).

Source: What is the reason that you have unoccupied beds?

Homes in the West of England were more likely to cite insufficient staff due to recruitment and retention issues (30%), compared with all other regions (10%).

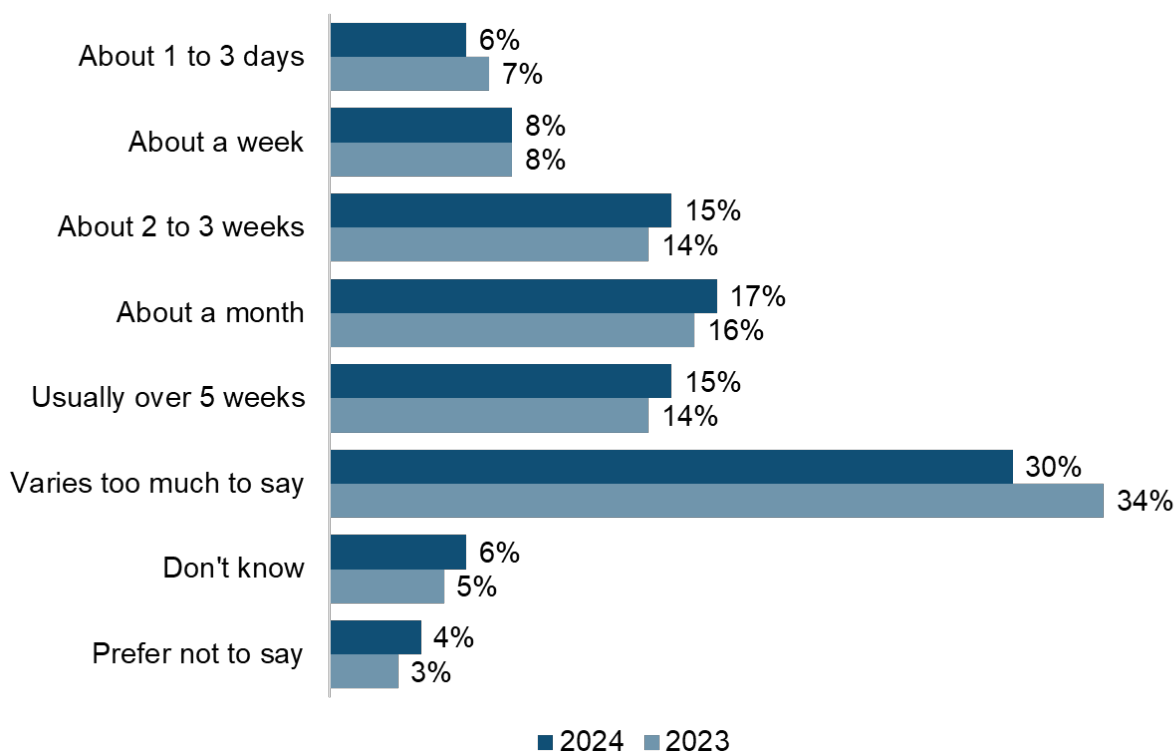
Homes with fewer than 4 places were more likely to cite intentional vacancies to enable child stability (48%) compared with homes with 4 or more places (36%).

Length of time beds are unoccupied for

Surveyed children's homes which were not classified as short break homes on their statement of purpose were asked how long beds were typically unoccupied for.

As shown in Figure 5 around one in seven (14%) reported that beds were typically unoccupied for a week or less (6% for about 1 to 3 days and 8% for about a week). A similar proportion said that beds were typically unoccupied for about 2 to 3 weeks (15%), about a month (17%) or over 5 weeks (15%). Three in ten (30%) of these homes said that the amount of time that beds were unoccupied varied too much to say.

Figure 5 Length of time beds are unoccupied for



Base: All children's homes excluding short break homes (2024: 638 homes, 2023: 722 homes).

Source: Which of the following is closest to the amount of time that the beds are unoccupied for?

Length of time beds are unoccupied for, due to insufficient staff

If a surveyed home reported having unoccupied beds due to insufficient staff, they were asked how long those places typically remain unoccupied. Only 40 homes answered this question, so results should be treated with caution.

Of the 40 homes asked, 23 homes reported that the time beds remained unoccupied varied too much to say. One home said that beds were unoccupied for 1 month or less, 4 homes reported unoccupied beds for between 1 and 3 months, and 9 reported

unoccupied beds for more than 3 months. The remaining 3 homes were unsure how long places typically remained unoccupied due to insufficient staff.

Staff findings

This section of the report begins with an estimate of the total staff in the children's home sector in England followed by survey findings about the total number of staff and managers/supervisors who worked in the home at the time of the census. It then explores the profile of those staff. Managers were asked how many hours staff were contracted to work for, whether staff had worked over their contracted hours in the last working week and staff's hourly rate of pay.

Population estimates

Table 3 presents estimated total staff in the children's homes sector in England by contract type. These estimates are based on the findings from the homes that responded to the survey. The table presents the confidence intervals around these figures. Within the table, not given refers to don't know, prefer not to say, or blank responses.

The estimated workforce size nationally is 46,330 including managerial and care staff. In 2023 this was estimated to be 39,300 and in 2014 it was estimated to be just over 20,000. Population estimates were calculated by multiplying the home-level weights by the total number of staff the surveyed homes reported by headcount. The weights were created by scaling the number of homes who took part in the survey to the total number of children's homes. For more information on the weighting approach, see Annex 1.

Table 3 Estimated total staff in the children's home sector

Estimated total staff in the children's homes sector	Number (to the nearest 10)	+ or – confidence interval (at the 95% level)
Estimated total staff	46,330	1,801
Contract type: full-time	38,510	1,377
Contract type: part-time	4,240	784
Contract type: zero hours	1,810	728
Contract type: other	130	72
Contract type: not given	1,630	807

Number of staff and supervisors/managers working in the home

Homes were asked in the 2024, 2023 and 2014 census, how many staff work in the home with a caring role (headcount). In 2024, homes were also asked for the first time about the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff working in the home.

Headcount

In 2024, 15% of children's homes had 6 or 7 staff with a caring role, whilst around a quarter had 8 or 9 staff with a caring role (23%). Around two in five (41%) had between 10 and 15 staff with a caring role, while just under one in ten had between 16 and 20 (9%) or more than 20 (8%). The average headcount of care staff in children's homes was 12.5. This is similar to the findings in 2023 where the average headcount was 12.8.

Looking at change over time, the number of staff with responsibility for the care of children and young people per setting changed relatively little between 2014 and 2024, as shown in Table 4⁴.

Table 4 Number of staff (headcount) with a caring role over time

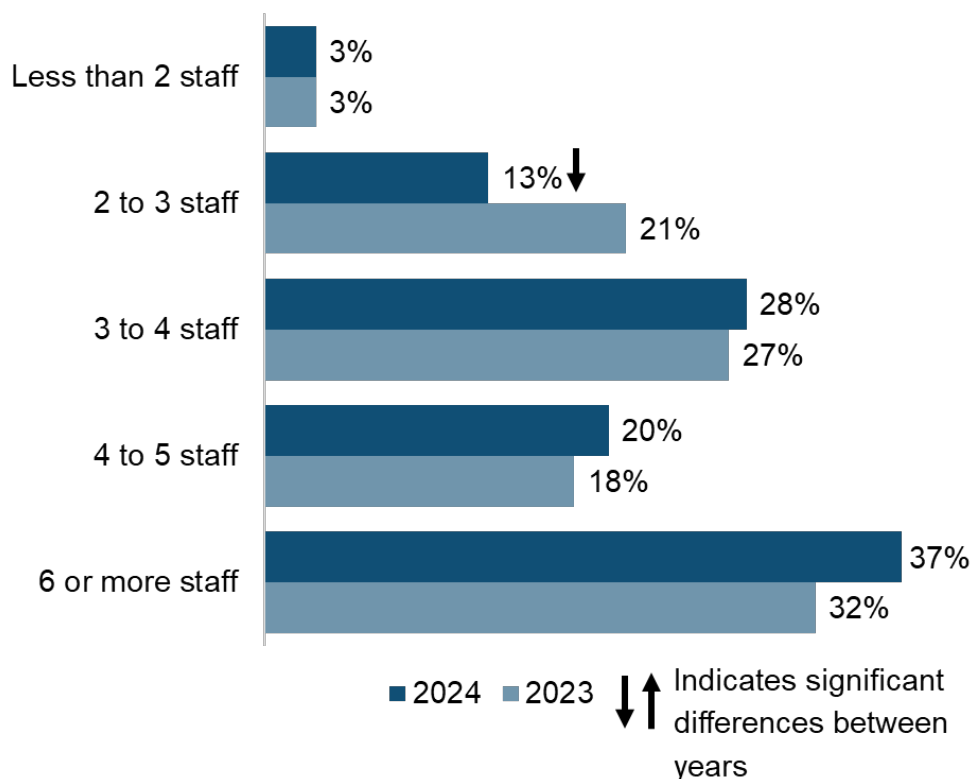
Total number of staff with a caring role	2014	2023	2024
Up to 5	6%	4%	3%
6 or 7	17%	18%	15%
8 or 9	20%	20%	23%
10 to 15	40%	37%	41%
16 to 20	10%	11%	9%
More than 20	7%	10%	8%
Base (all surveyed children's homes)	783	748	695

Looking at average staff to bed ratios, Figure 6 shows the breakdown of how many staff homes reported they have per occupied bed. Homes were most likely to report 6 staff or more per reported occupied bed (37%). A small minority reported 2 or fewer per reported

⁴ When comparing 2024 and 2023 headcount, some caution should be taken as it is possible that a home could have not included absent staff in 2023. In 2024, managers were specifically asked to include staff who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave, whereas they were not specifically asked to include these in 2023.

occupied bed (3%). Compared with 2023, there were fewer homes that reported 2 to 3 staff per reported occupied bed (13% compared with 21%).

Figure 6 Staff to bed ratios based on occupied beds



Base: All surveyed children's homes who gave valid responses (2024: 646, 2023: 748).

Source: Currently how many children and young people are resident in your home provision? Overall, how many staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who have responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Children's homes were also asked how many staff were responsible for supervising or managing other members of staff based on headcount. In 2024, around a quarter (27%) of children's homes had 1 or 2 staff members with a supervisory or management role. Around a fifth had 3 staff members with supervisory or management roles (20%), 4 staff members (21%) or 5 or 6 staff members in these roles (21%). One in ten had 7 or more such staff (10%). The mean number of managerial or supervisory staff was 4 per home.

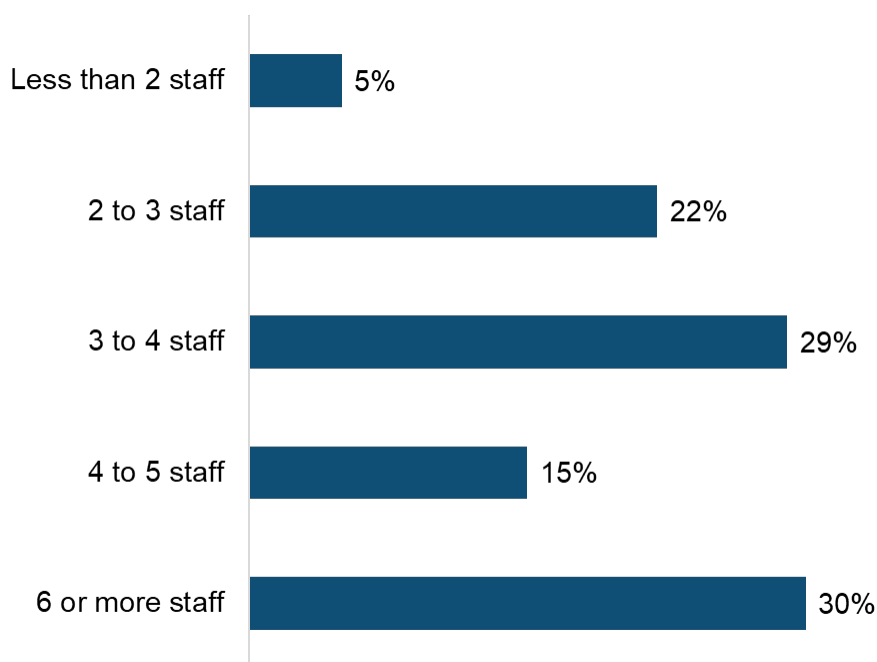
Full-time equivalent

In 2024, surveyed children's homes were asked about the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff with caring responsibilities. Managers were asked to calculate the full-time equivalent by counting all full-time staff as '1' and all part-time staff as a proportion based on their contracted hours. Managers were asked to use their organisation's definition of full-time.

The average full-time equivalent of care staff was 10.4 per home (compared with an average headcount of 12.5). There was some variation by sector, with local authority run homes having a higher full-time equivalent (13.5) compared with privately run homes (9.5).

Looking at average full-time equivalent staff to bed ratios, Figure 7 shows the breakdown of how many full-time equivalent staff homes reported they have per occupied bed. Homes were most likely to report 6 staff or more per reported occupied bed (30%). A small minority reported 2 or fewer per reported occupied bed (5%).

Figure 7 Full-time equivalent staff to bed ratios based on occupied beds



Base: All surveyed children's homes who gave valid responses (2024: 625).

Source: Currently how many children and young people are resident in your home? Overall, how many Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who have responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Children's homes were also asked how many staff were responsible for supervising or managing other members of staff based on full-time equivalent. In 2024, 27% of children's homes had 1 or 2 full-time equivalent staff members with supervisory or management roles. Around a fifth had 3 staff members with supervisory or management roles (22%) or 4 staff members (21%), and 16% had or 5 or 6 staff members in these roles. Around one in ten had 7 or more such staff (10%). The mean number of managerial or supervisory full-time equivalent staff per home was 4.

Staff census details

Surveyed homes were asked to provide details of staff with responsibility for the care of children and young people in their home to create a profile of staff working in the children's homes sector. As described in the methodology section, managers were asked detailed questions about the workforce at each home, and managers could choose to answer for all members of staff in the home, or for up to 6 members of staff (always including the registered manager plus up to 5 other members of staff). This approach was used to limit the burden on homes and to encourage response. To ensure the census findings were representative of the workforce, managers were instructed to select staff at random by ranking all members of staff alphabetically by surname and then select the first 5 staff alphabetically. Half of homes were asked to list staff by surname from A-Z and half from Z-A. Data was then weighted to ensure they were representative of all staff and homes in the children's homes sector in England.

Throughout this section, the figures only include those members of staff who have responsibility for the care of children and young people⁵.

Managerial status

Around a third of staff, including registered managers, were classified as having a managerial or supervisory role of some description (34%). Excluding registered managers, 28% of staff were reported to have managerial or supervisory responsibility.

Two thirds of staff (65%) worked in roles that did not involve the management or supervision of other staff.

These findings are comparable with the 2023 findings.

Throughout this section, findings are presented for registered managers; those with managerial or supervisory responsibilities; and those without managerial or supervisory responsibilities.

Contract type

Managers were asked a series of questions related to contract and working arrangements with staff, including what type of employment contracts their staff were on. Table 5 shows a breakdown by types of contract.

⁵ Managers were asked to include full and part time staff employed directly by the home, and those who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity who are responsible for the care of children and young people. Managers were asked to exclude teaching or nursing staff employed by the home, any support staff such as cleaners and catering staff, staff from outside the home who come to provide specialist support or any agency or bank staff.

More than four in five staff (83%) were employed on full-time contracts and one in ten had part-time contracts (9%). Few staff were employed on zero-hours contracts (4%) and less than 1% were employed on some other basis. Details were not provided for 1% of staff. There were no changes compared with the 2023 research.

Those who did not have management or supervisory responsibilities were more likely to have part-time contracts (13% compared with 4% of those in managerial or supervisory roles and less than 1% of registered managers).

There was some variation by sector, with staff in privately run homes more likely to be employed on a full-time contract (86%) compared with staff in local authority run homes (75%). Staff in local authority run homes were more likely to be employed on a part-time contract (22%) compared with staff in privately run homes (6%). Part-time contracts were also more widespread in homes with 6 or more places (16%) compared with homes with 4 places or less (6%).

Since 2023, there has been an increase in the proportion of staff who do not manage or supervise staff employed on a zero-hours contract (6%, from 3% in 2023). Staff with a managerial or supervisory role were more likely to be employed on a full-time contract (95% compared with 91% in 2023), and less likely to be employed on a part-time contract (4% compared with 7% in 2023).

Table 5 Profile of care staff – Type of contract

Type of contract	All staff	Registered managers	Staff with a managerial or supervisory role*	Staff who do not manage or supervise other staff
Full-time	83%	99%	95%	81%
Part-time	9%	<1%	4%	13%
Zero-hours	4%	<1%	<1%	6%
Other	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%	<1%	0%
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes)	5,393	702	1,750	2,884

*This excludes registered managers

Number of hours worked in week

Surveyed managers were asked how many hours staff worked each week, excluding overtime. There was a relatively high level of non-response to the question, with 7% of staff members not being allocated a specific response. The following figures are based only on those staff members for whom data was available.

Overall, around one in six care staff (17%) worked for 35 hours or less per week, excluding overtime. Similar proportions of staff typically worked for 36 to 39 hours per week (33%) or for 40 hours per week (36%). One in seven typically worked for 41 hours or more per week (15%). Table 6 shows a breakdown of responses.

The mean number of hours worked was 37.5, similar to the mean number of hours reported in 2023 (37.6).

Table 6 Profile of care staff – Typical hours per week (excluding overtime) by type

Hours per week	All staff	Local authority run homes	Privately run homes
1 to 35 hours	17%	25%	15%
36 to 39 hours	33%	70%	19%
40 hours	36%	1%	47%
41 hours or more	15%	4%	19%
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes)	5,067	749	4,090

Similar to 2023, the typical weekly hours excluding overtime were higher in privately run homes than in local authority run homes. Two-thirds of staff in privately run homes worked 40 hours per week or more in a normal week excluding overtime (47% worked 40 hours and 19% worked 41 hours or more). Excluding overtime, one in twenty staff in local authority run homes worked for 40 hours per week or more (1% worked 40 hours and 4% worked 41 hours or more).

On average, care staff without managerial or supervisory responsibilities were reported to work fewer contracted hours per week (36.7 hours on average) compared with care staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities (38.5 on average), or registered managers (40.1 hours on average).

Whether staff worked more than contracted hours

Surveyed managers were also asked whether the staff reported on had worked more than their contracted working hours in the last week. Table 7 shows a breakdown of responses. Three in ten staff (30%) were reported to have worked more than their contracted hours in the last working week. Around half (56%) had not worked more than their contracted hours and 10% of staff were reported to vary too much to say. A small minority reported that they were unsure whether a staff member had worked more than their contracted hours (2%) or preferred not to say (2%).

Registered managers and staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities were more likely to be reported to have worked more than their contracted hours in the last working week (48% and 33% respectively) compared with care staff without managerial or supervisory responsibilities (27%).

Since 2023, there has been a small decrease in the proportion of staff reported to have worked more than their contracted hours (30% compared with 34% in 2023). There has been an increase in the proportion who had not worked more than their contracted hours (56% compared with 53% in 2023), and the proportion who said it varies too much to say (10% compared with 7% in 2023).

Table 7 Profile of care staff – Whether worked more than contracted hours in the last working week

Whether staff worked more than contracted hours in last working week	All staff	Local authority run homes	Privately run homes
Yes	30%	26%	30%
No	56%	59%	57%
Varies too much to say	10%	10%	10%
Don't know	2%	2%	1%
Prefer not to say	2%	2%	2%
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes)	5,374	788	4,352

Table 8 shows a breakdown of staff's normal working hours in a week, and whether they worked more than their contracted hours as reported by the home manager. Staff whose normal working hours were 41 hours or more (39%) per week were more likely to be reported to work more than these normal hours than those whose normal hours were one to 35 hours (19%), 36 to 39 hours (33%) or 40 hours (32%).

Table 8 Whether staff worked more than contracted hours in the last working week

Whether staff worked more than contracted hours in last working week	1-35 hours normally worked in a week	36-39 hours normally worked in a week	40 hours normally worked in a week	41 or more hours normally worked in a week
Yes	19%	33%	32%	39%
No	67%	55%	58%	51%
Varies too much to say	13%	10%	9%	7%
Don't know	1%	2%	<1%	3%
Prefer not to say	<1%	1%	1%	<1%
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes)	772	1,476	1,997	802

Number of years in the sector

Surveyed managers were asked to record the number of years of experience the staff reported on had in the children's home sector. There was a high level of non-response, with 11% of staff members not being allocated a specific response (including don't know). The following figures are based only on those staff members for whom data was available.

Table 9 shows a breakdown of number of years' experience. Overall, one in five staff had at least 10 years of experience in the children's home sector (20%). A quarter (24%) had one year or less of experience and three in ten had 2 or 3 years of experience (29%). Around one in seven staff had 4 or 5 years of experience (14%) or 6 to 9 years of experience (13%).

Registered managers tended to have more years' experience than other staff members. More than half (57%) had 10 or more years of experience in the sector and 23% had 6 to 9 years of experience. Care staff with managerial or supervisory roles (excluding registered managers) also tended to have at least 10 years of experience (27%) and a further one in five having 6 to 9 years of experience (17%).

Compared with 2023, there are fewer staff with 10 or more years of experience (20% compared with 27% in 2023). On average, staff had 6 years of experience, a slight decrease from 7 years in 2023.

Table 9 Profile of care staff – Years of experience in the children’s home sector by role

Years of experience	All staff	Registered managers	Staff with a managerial or supervisory role	Staff who do not manage or supervise other staff
1 year or less	24%	2%	9%	34%
2 or 3 years	29%	5%	26%	33%
4 or 5 years	14%	13%	22%	11%
6 to 9 years	13%	23%	17%	10%
10 years or more	20%	57%	27%	12%
Base (all staff in surveyed children’s homes)	4,962	683	1,636	2,615

Table 10 shows a breakdown of years of experience by local authority and privately run home staff. Staff in local authority run homes tended to have more years’ experience than those in privately run homes. Those in local authority run homes had an average of 10 years of experience (a decrease from 12 years in 2023) while those in privately run homes had an average of 5 years of experience (a slight decrease from 6 years reported for privately run homes in 2023).

Two in five staff in local authority run homes had at least 10 years’ experience (40%) compared with 15% of staff in privately run homes. Conversely, staff in privately run homes were more likely to have one years of experience or less (26% compared with 12% of those in local authority homes). Since 2023, there has been a decrease in the proportion of staff who had at least 10 years’ experience across both local authority run homes (from 52% to 40%) and in privately run homes (from 20% to 15%).

Table 10 Profile of care staff – Years of experience in the children’s home sector by type of home

Years of experience	All staff	Local authority run homes	Privately run homes
1 year or less	24%	12%	26%
2 or 3 years	29%	15%	33%
4 or 5 years	14%	16%	14%
6 to 9 years	13%	17%	12%
10 years or more	20%	40%	15%
Base (all staff in surveyed children’s homes)	4,962	711	4,021

Hourly rate of pay

Surveyed managers were asked to record the hourly rate of pay for each staff member reported on. There was a high level of non-response to the question, with 19% of staff being allocated a ‘don’t know’ response and 29% being allocated a ‘prefer not to say’ response. The following figures are based on those staff members for whom data was available, a total of 2,284 staff.

Overall, registered managers were paid an average of £22.51 per hour. On average, registered managers in local authority run homes were paid more than those in privately run homes (£26.43 and £21.46 respectively).

Care staff in a non-supervisory role were paid an average of £13.06 per hour. On average, those in local authority run homes were paid more than those in privately run homes (£15.88 and £12.44 respectively).

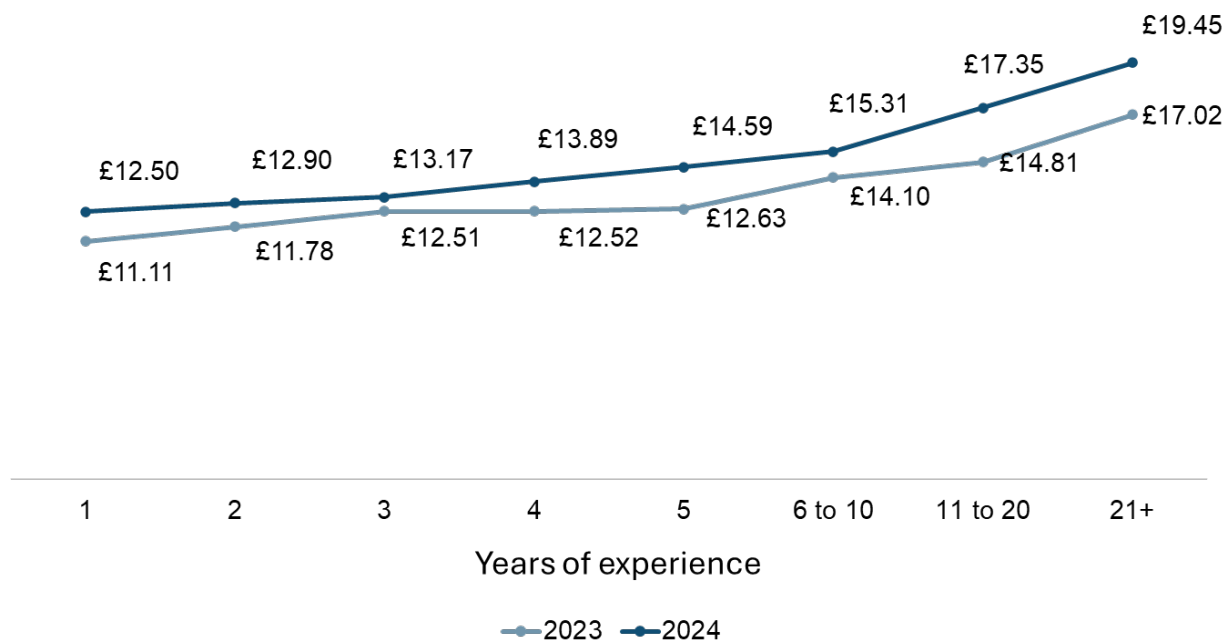
There were also differences by qualification level. Care staff (excluding registered managers) who held a Level 3 qualification were paid on average £13.99, whereas those who were working towards the qualification were paid on average £12.67.

As shown in Figure 8, average hourly pay tended to increase with years of experience, although rates were modestly higher with each year of experience. For example, a staff member with a year or less of experience earned an average of £12.50 while a staff member with 5 years of experience earned an average of £14.59.

There has been an increase in average hourly pay compared with 2023. Average hourly pay for registered managers increased from £20.75 to £22.51. Average hourly pay for

care staff in a non-supervisory role increased from £11.97 to £13.06. Hourly pay is higher than the National Living Wage, which was set as £11.44 in 2024.

Figure 8 Average hourly pay by years of experience in the children's homes sector



Base: All staff for whom an hourly rate was specified (2024: 1 year and under: 566, 2 years: 390; 3 years: 249; 4 years: 191; 5 years: 164, 6 to 10 years: 360; 11 to 20: 225; 21+ years: 88. 2023: 1 year and under: 561, 2 years: 318; 3 years: 270; 4 years: 184; 5 years: 161, 6 to 10 years: 446; 11 to 20: 368; 21+ years: 134.)

Source: What is their hourly rate of pay?

A range of factors influenced pay. Focusing on those with 5 or fewer years' experience in the sector and who did not have supervisory or managerial responsibilities, the hourly rate of pay was higher amongst those who worked in local authority run homes compared with privately run homes. Table 11 shows a breakdown of findings. Qualification level had a smaller impact, with staff with 5 or fewer years' experience and who did not have supervisory or managerial responsibilities with a Level 3 qualification earning an average hourly rate of £12.84 compared with those who were working towards their Level 3 qualification who earned on average £12.49.

Table 11 Comparison of local authority run and privately run homes' staff pay (excluding registered managers and those with supervisory or managerial responsibilities) based on years of experience in the children's home sector

Years of experience	Local authority run homes	Privately run homes
5 years or less	£15.26	£12.30
6 to 10 years	£16.12	£13.15
11 to 20 years	£16.90	£13.12
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes)	431	2,059

Qualifications at staff level

Surveyed managers were asked whether they and their staff either held or were working towards the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care (or an equivalent qualification) or the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or an equivalent qualification). In England, regulations require registered managers to hold the Level 5 qualification or to gain it within 3 years of taking a registered manager position; and care staff to hold the Level 3 qualification or to gain it within 2 years of taking a caring position within a children's home.

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care (or equivalent)

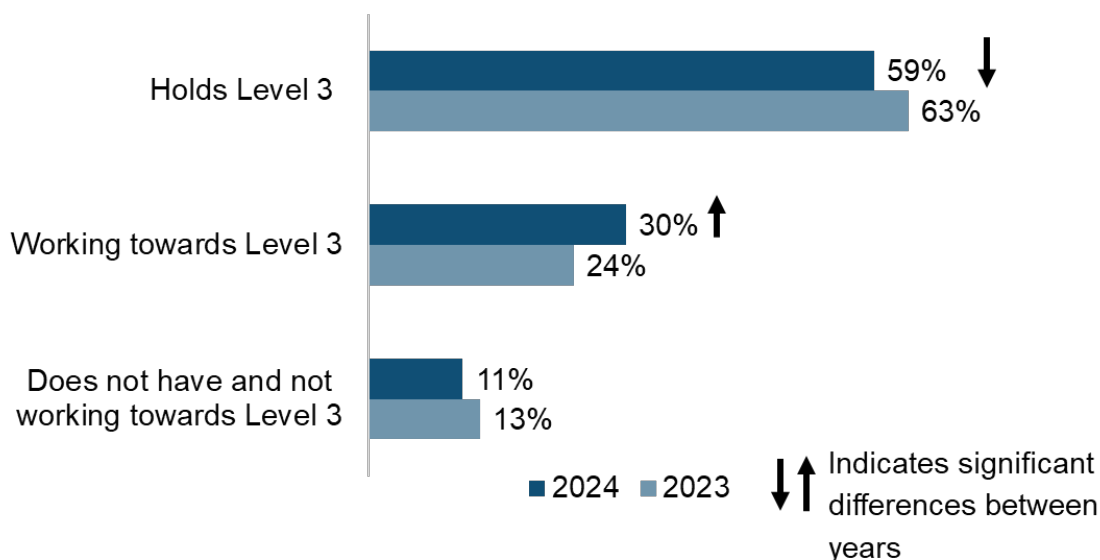
More than four in five (81%) registered managers reported that they held a Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care or an equivalent qualification. One in six (17%) reported that they were working towards the Level 5 Diploma (or equivalent) with 2% reporting they neither held nor were working towards the Level 5 Diploma (or equivalent). Findings were similar to 2023.

Level 3 Diploma for Residential Care (or equivalent)

Among care staff who were not registered managers, 59% reported holding the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare or equivalent and 30% were reported to be working towards it. Around one in ten (11%) care staff who were not registered managers were reported to not hold and not be working towards a Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare. Findings are shown in Figure 9.

Since 2023, there has been a decrease in the proportion of non-managerial staff reported to hold the Level 3 qualification, to 59% from 63%. There has been an increase in the proportion who are reported to be working towards the qualification, to 30% from 24%.

Figure 9 Staff (excluding registered managers) who hold or are working towards their Level 3



Base: All staff in children's homes, excluding the registered manager (2024: 4,641; 2023: 5,298).

Source: Which of the following qualifications (if any) do the staff currently have? - The Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or equivalent)

More than three-quarters (79%) of care staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities (excluding registered managers) held a Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare or some other equivalent qualification. Around half (51%) of care staff who did not have managerial or supervisory responsibilities held a Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare or some other equivalent qualification. Staff who did not have managerial or supervisory responsibilities were more likely to be working towards their Level 3 Diploma than staff who manage or supervise other staff (38% compared with 11% of care staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities (excluding registered managers)).

Privately run homes were more likely to report care staff without managerial or supervisory responsibilities were working towards their Level 3 Diploma (45% compared with 16% of local authority run homes). Local authority run homes were more likely to report staff who did not have managerial or supervisory responsibilities held the Level 3 Diploma (80%) compared with privately run homes (41%).

Staff with fewer years' experience were less likely to hold the Level 3 Diploma (or equivalent) but be more likely to be working towards it compared with those with more experience, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12 Staff (excluding registered managers) who hold or are working towards their Level 3 Diploma for Residential Care (or equivalent) by years of experience

Staff who hold or are working towards their Level 3 Diploma for Residential Care	1 year or less	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
Working towards Level 3 Diploma	60%	45%	33%	11%	7%
Holding Level 3 Diploma	23%	45%	61%	84%	87%
Base (all staff in surveyed children's homes excluding registered managers)	1,046	767	529	342	291

Reasons for not working towards a Level 3 qualification

Surveyed managers who reported that some staff did not have or were not working towards a Level 3 qualification were asked about the reasons for this. More than half of managers (58%) reported that it was because staff were still in their probation period, and around a quarter (27%) said that staff did already hold or were working towards the qualification⁶. Fewer than one in ten reported that they were relief or bank staff (8%), they did not want to do the qualification (3%), they started the qualification but are now leaving (2%), or a lack of time to undertake training due to resource constraints (1%).

⁶ Of staff reported to not hold or were not working towards a Level 3 qualification, 27% were reported to hold a Level 5 qualification, and a further 6% were reported to be working towards a Level 5 qualification.

Staff retention

Retention of staff has been reported to be challenging in the children's homes sector. This section covers the number of open vacancies in homes and how long it takes to fill them on average. It also explores the number of staff who managers reported had left their home in the last 12 months, what roles staff have moved to when they have left the home; reasons why staff left the home; and which factors could help to retain staff within the children's homes sector.

Number of open vacancies in children's homes

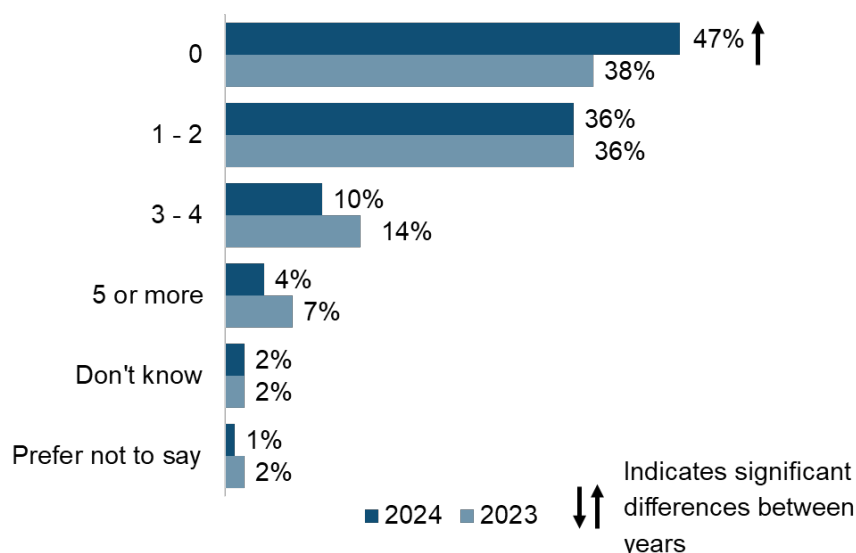
Surveyed managers were asked about the number of open vacancies which they had for care staff and managerial and supervisory roles in their home.

Care staff vacancies

Nearly half of homes (47%) reported having no open vacancies for care staff, marking an increase from 38% in 2023. In comparison, 36% of homes had 1 or 2 vacancies, while 10% had 3 or 4 care staff vacancies. A small minority (4%) had 5 or more vacancies.

On average, homes had a mean number of 1.25 care staff vacancies. This represents a decline in vacancies compared with 2023, when the average number of care staff vacancies was 1.6.

Figure 10 Number of care staff vacancies



Base: All children's homes (2024: 700 homes; 2023: 821 homes)

Source: How many vacancies, if any, do you currently have open? – care staff roles

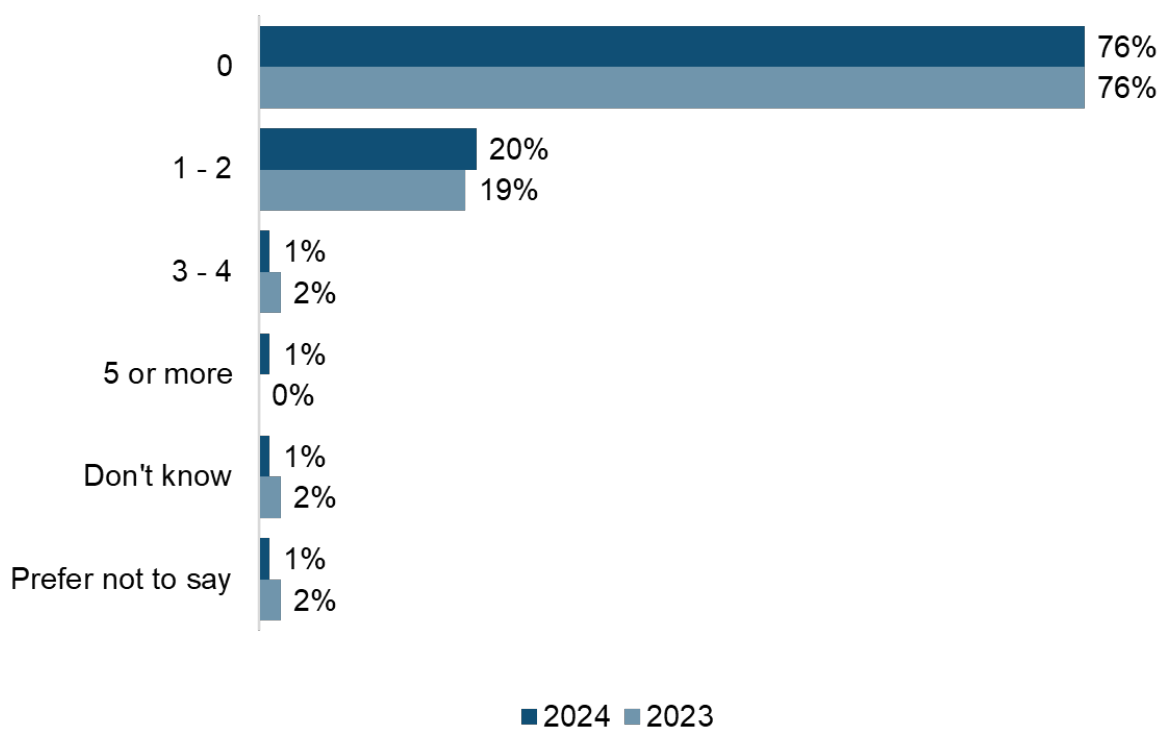
Local authority homes had a higher mean number of care staff vacancies than privately run homes (1.8 compared with 1.0).

Homes in the North of England had a lower mean number of care staff vacancies (0.9 compared with 1.5 in all other regions).

Managerial vacancies

Around three-quarters (76%) of homes reported having no managerial vacancies. One in five homes (20%) had 1 or 2 vacancies and only a small minority (2%) had 3 or more vacancies. On average, homes had 0.35 managerial vacancies. This remains in line with 2023 findings when the mean number of managerial vacancies was 0.29.

Figure 11 Number of managerial vacancies



Base: All children's homes (2024: 689 homes; 2023: 808 homes)

Source: How many vacancies, if any, do you currently have open? – Managerial or supervisory roles

Homes in the North of England had a lower mean number of managerial vacancies (0.2 compared with 0.4 in all other regions).

Time taken to fill vacancies

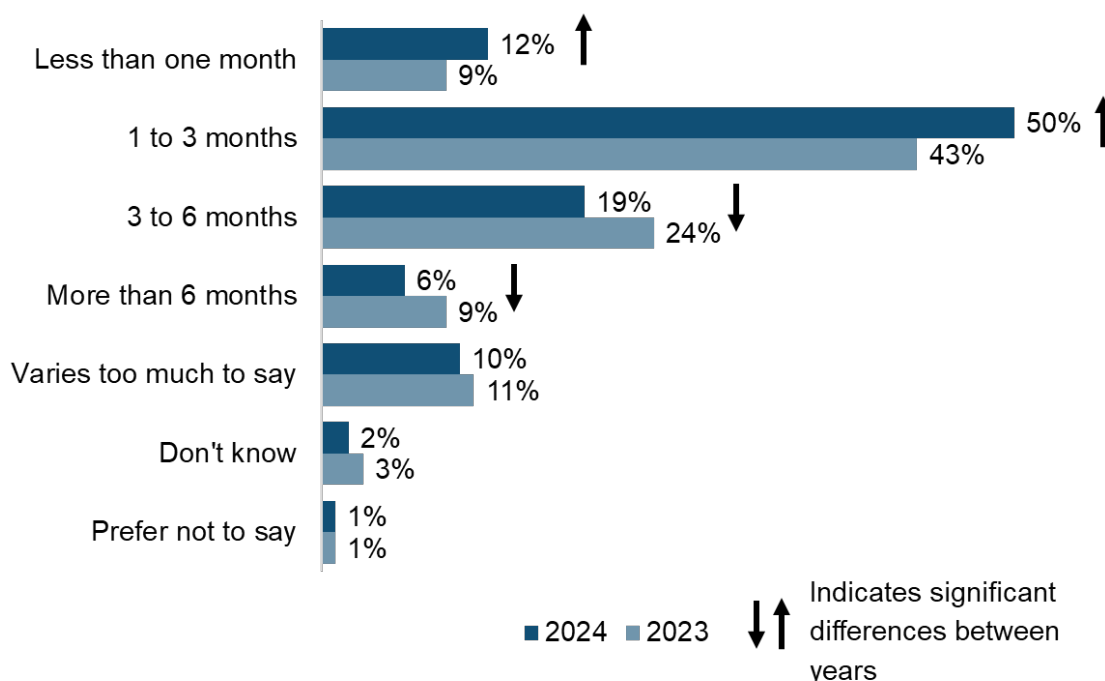
Surveyed children's homes were asked about the average length of time it takes to fill vacancies for care staff and managerial and supervisory roles.

Care staff vacancies

Three in five homes (62%) reported that it takes less than 3 months to fill a care staff vacancy, and 25% reported it takes 3 months or more. A full breakdown can be found in Figure 12.

Compared with 2023, more homes reported filling care staff vacancies within 3 months (62% in 2024 compared with 52% in 2023). The number of managers reporting that it took 3 or more months to fill a vacancy decreased from 33% to 25%.

Figure 12 Average length of time to fill care staff vacancies



Base: All Children's homes (2024: 701 homes; 2023: 834 homes).

Source: On average, how long does it take to fill a vacancy for... Care Staff working with Children.

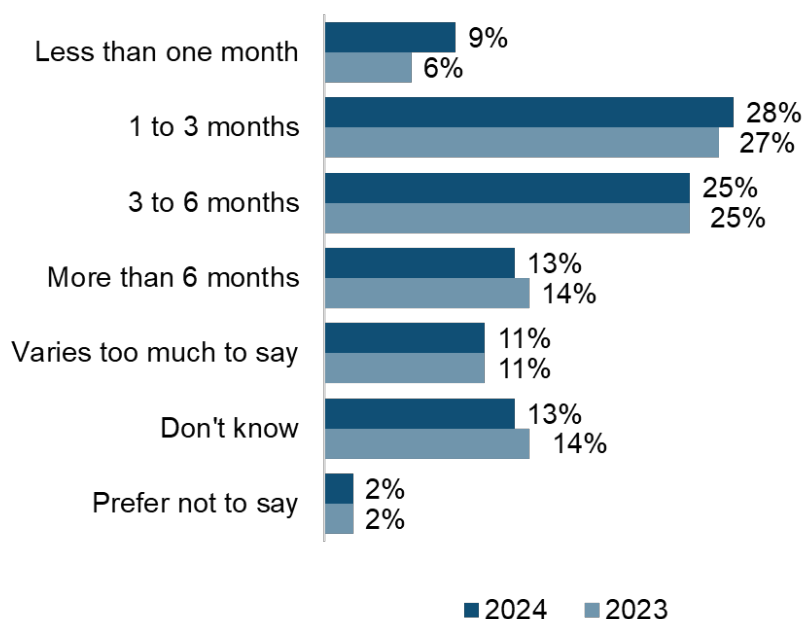
Private homes were more likely to fill vacancies within 3 months compared with local authority homes (67% compared with 31%).

Homes in the East and North of England were more likely to fill care staff vacancies within 3 months (69% and 64% respectively) compared with those in the South (52%).

Managerial vacancies

Home managers reported that it took longer to fill managerial vacancies than care staff vacancies. Around two in five homes (37%) reported that it takes less than 3 months to fill a managerial vacancy, and 38% reported it takes 3 months or more. A full breakdown can be found in Figure 13.

Figure 13 Average length of time to fill managerial vacancies



Base: All Children's homes (2024: 689 homes; 2023: 834 homes)

Source: On average, how long does it take to fill a vacancy for... Managerial or supervisory staff.

Private homes were more likely to fill managerial vacancies within 3 months than local authority homes (40% compared with 20%).

Homes in the East and North of England were more likely to fill vacancies within 3 months (39% and 40%) compared with 31% of homes in the South.

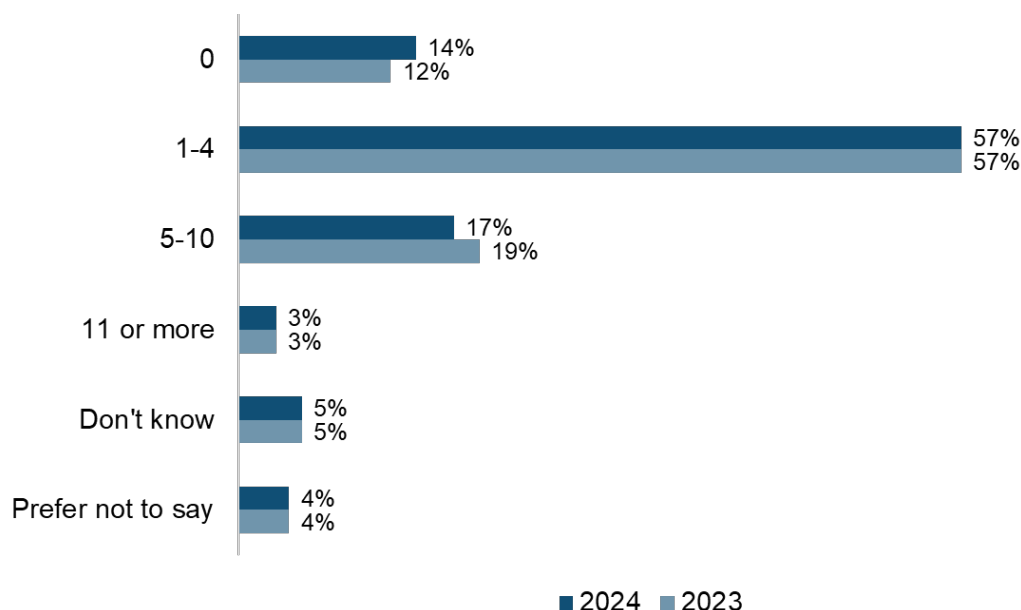
Number of staff leaving in last 12 months

Surveyed children's homes were asked about the number of staff responsible for the care of children and young people who have left the home in the previous 12 months (since September to November 2023, depending on when the survey was completed). Figure 14 shows a breakdown in responses.

More than three in four homes (78%) had at least one staff member leaving in the previous 12 months and 14% had no staff leave. The rest either did not know (5%) or preferred not to say (4%).

Homes reported an average of 3.1 staff members leaving the home in the last 12 months. This is a decrease from 2023, where homes had an average of 3.4 care staff leaving.

Figure 14 Number of care staff who have left the children's home in the last 12 months



Base: All children's homes (2024: 703 homes, 2023: 832 homes).

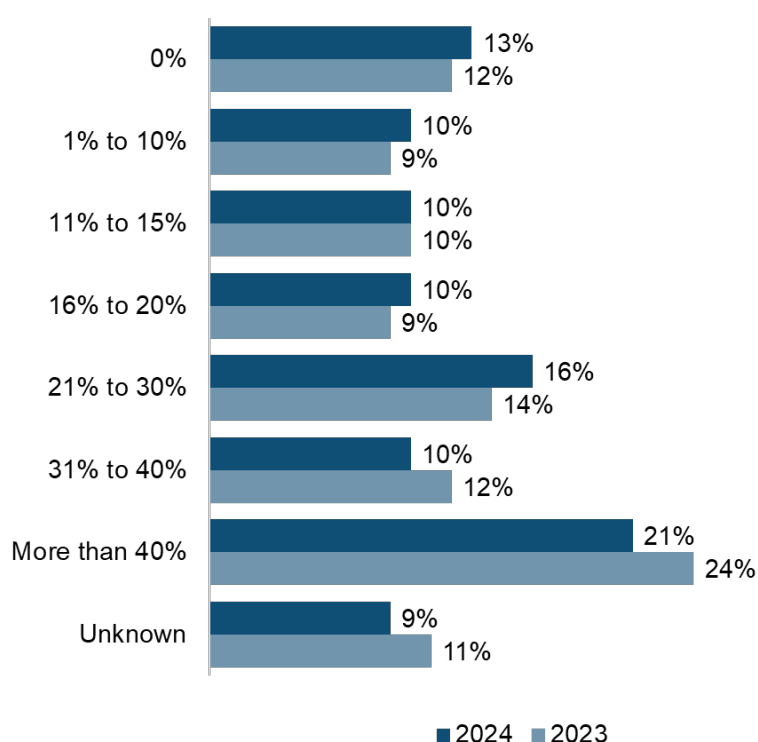
Source: Since September 2023 / October 2023 / November 2023, how many staff members who have responsibility for the care of children or young people have left your children's home? Note question text updated dynamically depending on when it was completed to show a 12 month time period.

Homes rated 'Outstanding' had fewer care staff leave on average (2.2 compared with 3.4 homes rated 'Good').

The turnover rate was calculated by dividing the number of care staff who had left each home in the previous 12 months by the total number of care staff they reported having in their home at the time of the survey. Figure 15 shows a breakdown in responses.

The mean turnover rate per home was 29%. This remains in line with 2023, when the mean turnover rate was 31%.

Figure 15 Turnover rate based on total number of staff and number who had left



Base: All children's homes (2024: 703 homes, 2023: 832 homes).

Source: Overall, how many staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who have responsibility for the care of children and young people? Since September 2023 / October 2023 / November 2023, how many staff members who have responsibility for the care of children or young people have left your children's home? Note question text updated dynamically depending on when it was completed to show a 12 month time period.

Private homes were more likely to have a turnover rate of more than 40% (23% against 10% of local authority homes).

Homes more likely to have a turnover rate of 20% or below included:

- local authority homes (57%) compared with private homes (41%)
- homes rated as Outstanding by Ofsted (65%) compared with homes rated as Good (39%)

Reason for leaving role

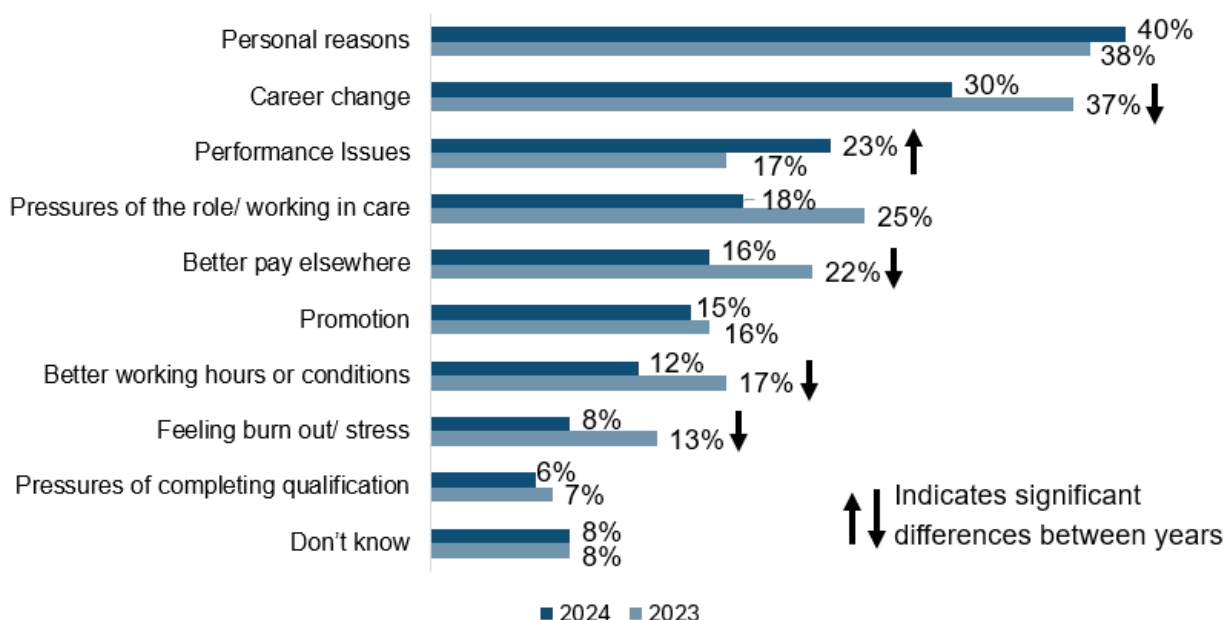
Surveyed managers were asked to select from a list of reasons why staff left their role. Figure 16 shows a breakdown in responses. The most commonly reported reason why staff left their role was for personal reasons (for example, caring for family or moving location (40%)), followed by a career change (30%) and performance issues (23%).

Around one in five (18%) managers cited pressures of the role and 16% mentioned better pay elsewhere as reasons for staff leaving. A similar proportion (15%) reported staff leaving the role due to a promotion.

Around one in ten homes (12%) reported that staff left for better working hours or conditions and 8% cited burn out or stress. Pressures of completing the qualification remained the least cited reason with 6% of homes reporting this as a reason.

Compared with 2023, more managers reported performance issues as a reason for leaving in 2024 (23% compared with 17%). There was a decrease in managers citing career change (30% compared with 37%), better pay elsewhere (16% compared with 22%), better working hours or conditions (12% compared with 17%) and feeling burn out or stress (8% compared with 13%).

Figure 16 Reasons for care staff leaving



Base: All children's homes (2024: 696 homes).

Source: What are the main reasons care staff have left your home?

Staff leaving due to a career change was more likely to be cited by the following sub-groups:

- homes in the South (30%), East (37%) and North of England (32%) compared with homes in the West of England (19%)
- homes with 6 or more places than those with 1 or 2 places (36% compared with 24%)

Staff retiring was more likely to be cited by the following sub-groups:

- local authority homes than private homes (25% compared with 3%)
- homes rated 'Good' by Ofsted than 'Requires Improvement' rated homes (7% compared with 2%)

Pressures of the role was more likely to be cited by homes in the South and Central compared to any other region (27% compared with 15%).

In the qualitative interviews, pay and personal circumstances were seen as key reasons why staff leave the sector. Regarding pay, care staff referred to equivalent or higher paying jobs in other entry level roles with less responsibility and more sociable hours, such as in retail.

"[...] I wouldn't want to do this job on a lower wage. Not when there's much easier jobs and less responsibility. We're bringing up children. We're bringing up somebody else's child. You can go work at [supermarket] for a similar kind of pay [...] I think you've got to be paid right, and you've got to know what you're walking into as well."

Care staff, residential special school, voluntary community sector

"[...] the difference between working here and working in [supermarket] is like £1 an hour or something, but you could be here and having a really tricky, challenging day that's really physical, at [supermarket] you could be stacking some shelves."

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

In the qualitative interviews, staff mentioned work-life balance, changes in health, and family life as reasons why staff leave the sector. In some cases, demands of the job such as physical activities and restraint become more difficult as staff grow older. Shift patterns were difficult to accommodate when staff had their own children. Home managers also highlighted difficulties with work-life balances, as although they had more autonomy than care staff, they also had more responsibility and demands to manage.

"People don't like being away from home for 48 hours. Especially if you've got young kids, to leave your son or daughter at home who might be a toddler, 48 hours is a challenge for some people, and I completely get that."

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), private sector

For some, wider labour market factors such as the increase in the cost of living and the Covid-19 pandemic were seen to have increased the importance of pay and work-life

balance, with some staff feeling less able to justify their choice to work unsociable hours and incurring potential childcare costs, for comparable pay to other entry level roles such as supermarkets. There was also a perception among managers and care staff that they could not compete with flexible and hybrid working offered by other employers since the pandemic, and staff fears about having to work through a future pandemic.

“I think Covid did a lot of damage to the care sector. I think people found different ways to earn money, different ways to live a life, and then they think, well... [...] why would I want to work for two days? Why would I want to work for 24 hours? Why would I want to be sworn at, have my hair pulled, when I can go and stack shelves in [supermarket] for just as much money?”

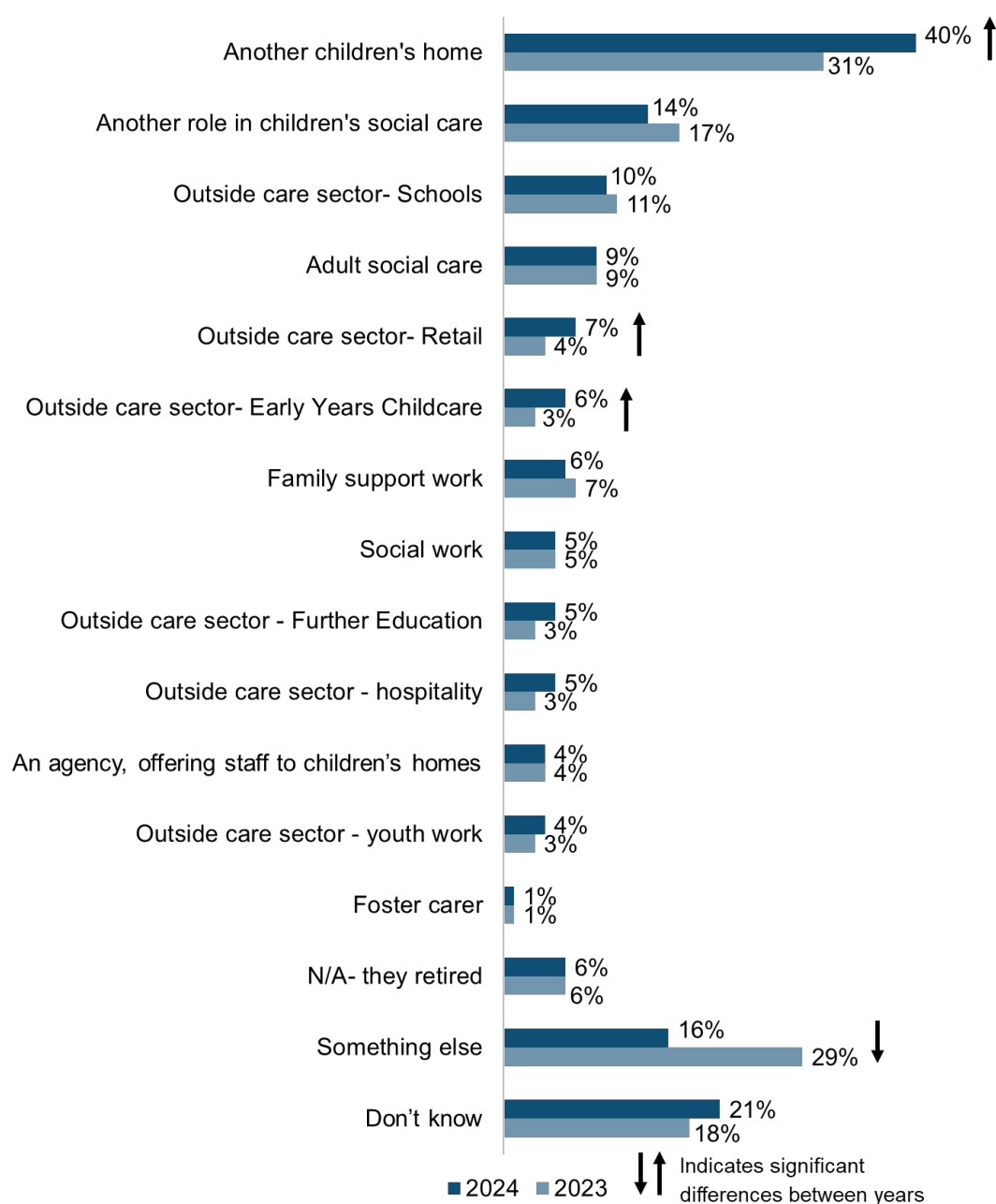
Registered manager, residential children’s home (long term), private
sector

Roles moved to since leaving children’s home

Surveyed homes were asked about the type of roles that staff went on to do after leaving their home. Figure 17 shows a breakdown in responses. The most selected destination was another children’s home (40%), followed by another role within the children’s social care sector (14%). One in ten (10%) cited staff moving to a work in a role in schools and a similar proportion (9%) reported their staff going on to work in adult social care (9%).

Compared with 2023, staff were more likely to move to another children’s home (40% compared with 31%), a role in the retail sector (7% compared with 4%) and a position in early years childcare (3% compared with 6%).

Figure 17 Jobs care staff go on to when they leave children's home



Base: All children's homes (2024: 698 homes, 2023: 828 homes).

Source: And when care staff leave your home, which of the following types of job have they moved to?

There was some variation by the Ofsted rating of the home. Homes rated as 'Outstanding' were more likely to report staff moving to another role in children's social care (24%, compared with 13% of homes rated as 'Good' and 17% rated 'Requires Improvement') and they were least likely to report staff moving to another children's home (30% compared with 43% of homes rated as 'Good' or 'Requires Improvement').

Local authority homes were more likely to report staff retiring than private homes (26% compared with 3%).

Homes in the South of England were least likely to report staff moving to another children's home compared with all other regions (27% compared with 43%).

Barriers to staff retention

Misconceptions about the role

In the qualitative interviews, both care staff and managers highlighted how potential misconceptions about the role of a care worker could be a barrier to retaining staff. Some care staff admitted to having had unrealistic expectations about residential care work, referencing the children's TV programme "Tracy Beaker" as their only source of knowledge about children's residential homes. Unrealistic expectations about the job included the volume of paperwork and desk-based duties, and the role that they would play in young people's lives, for example expecting to be able to directly contribute to radical change at pace. Some staff also felt there were unrealistic expectations around the approach to discipline, with some expecting it to be similar to parenting their own children. For managers, unrealistic expectations could be placed around the nature of the role, which tends to focus more on supporting the staff team and signposting, and less around supporting the young people directly.

"I would say 99 per cent of the staff that come are quite shocked when they actually get into it. A lot that have left said they didn't realise the role entailed what it entails. They see it as a carer's role, and although we are carers, it's a bit more diverse than that in children's residential services."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

"I think there can be some things that are very, not necessarily off-putting, but not quite as people had pictured them to be. We have had some staff come in and sort of say, 'It's not much like Annie.' Well, no, the children's homes aren't really like that... [...] It's very different to how you envisage it to be, I think. It just depends on how robust you are. It depends on what you're prepared to take because actually, the highs are really high, the lows can be really low, but the highs are really high."

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

Suitability for the role

Suitability for the role was seen to be a key consideration in the retention of staff. Staff, managers and those with responsibility for recruiting staff in the qualitative interviews highlighted the importance of employing staff with key attributes such as empathy, resilience, willingness to learn, and the ability to communicate with young people. Personal skills and attributes were generally considered more essential than previous employment history.

Staff interviewed felt that previous experience of the social care sector or working with vulnerable children and young people could contribute to giving staff a realistic understanding of the role, leading to better staff retention. Managers were additionally seen as needing experience in managing staff and working with vulnerable children and young people.

“You need to care. You need to understand what the young people are going through or have been through while they're there. You need to be very resilient. You need to be able to come back again and again with a clean slate. Like tomorrow is a new day. That happened yesterday, we're not going to focus on that. In that trauma-informed way, and a lot of people find this hard, but you have to have that ability to be able to turn things on its head.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

“I think for anybody to be a good residential care worker or anybody to work with children as a whole, they just have to be themselves. They have to be honest and open and no falseness. Children, like adults, as humans, we can read into people, so you need to be honest and open. You need to be able to understand how children would react, how children are. You have to be a people's person. You have to show empathy.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short and long term), voluntary
community sector

The nature of the role

Whilst acknowledging that the role could be very rewarding, some staff in the qualitative interviews felt that the mental and emotional components of the job impacted staff retention. Some described an emotional toll from repeated exposure to challenging behaviour and consistently dealing with mental health difficulties that young people were facing. Managers, in particular, highlighted difficulty 'switching off' from the job as they held the legal responsibility for the home and its residents even when not on duty.

"[...] You can't help but not be able to switch off, and that's one of the things that I would say I'm at fault for is not being able to switch off. I think burnout is real. I do feel that burnout is real. I think you have to be really careful."

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

"[...] an Ofsted registered manager is a very, very difficult job. It can feel quite lonely. You're holding onto a legal responsibility by yourself."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), voluntary
community sector

How staff appeared to manage the physicality of the job varied across individuals and settings. One particular challenge that was highlighted by the staff interviewed was the fear and reality of physical assaults. In some settings these were exacerbated by concerns about inadequate sickness policies and staff being particularly cautious about not having to take any time off work. Staff thought that this aspect of the role put some people off at the point of application and also led to a loss of staff from the sector.

"I think the job is, it's a really tricky role. Really, really tricky role. We're asking the team to come in, to be potentially physically, verbally assaulted on a regular basis. The team have to be very resilient."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term), local
authority

"I would say you tend to get three to four per year who tend to move on, probably because it's a tough job. Sometimes, you think, has it got its shelf life? What I tend to find is, I think the management tend to stay longer than the residential staff, but I know the residential staff do tend to work more direct with the young people, managing some of the challenging behaviours, and it can be hard."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private
sector

Some staff highlighted the procedural components of the role as reasons why some staff left the sector. There were mixed views on the highly structured work environment, a perceived increase in the amount of paperwork, and, in some cases, the expectation to undertake outreach work such as supporting at-risk young people in the community.

“I feel like we spend more time doing paperwork and less time with the children. I feel like it should be the opposite way around, we spend more time with the children. I know we have to do it for rules and regulations and to keep everybody safe, but sometimes it just seems rather excessive, the amount that we have to document.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), private sector

Managing cultural sensitivities was another key theme. Some participants said that some young people demonstrated intolerance or racism towards care staff from minority ethnic backgrounds or other marginalised groups, and homes were not always able to manage these incidents well. Staff cited, for example, young people exaggerating and exploiting language differences of staff recruited from overseas to undermine them. In some cases, managers discussed how homes had employed highly skilled staff (for example, teachers or healthcare staff) from overseas who had brought a lot of value to the home.

Staff recruitment

Having explored managers' perceptions of retention challenges, the survey asked managers how easy it is to recruit care and managerial staff. This section of the report explores managers' perceptions of recruitment compared with one year prior to the census and the main challenges managers reported in filling vacancies.

Ease of finding care and managerial staff

Surveyed managers were asked how easy it is to find care and managerial staff with the appropriate skills and experience.

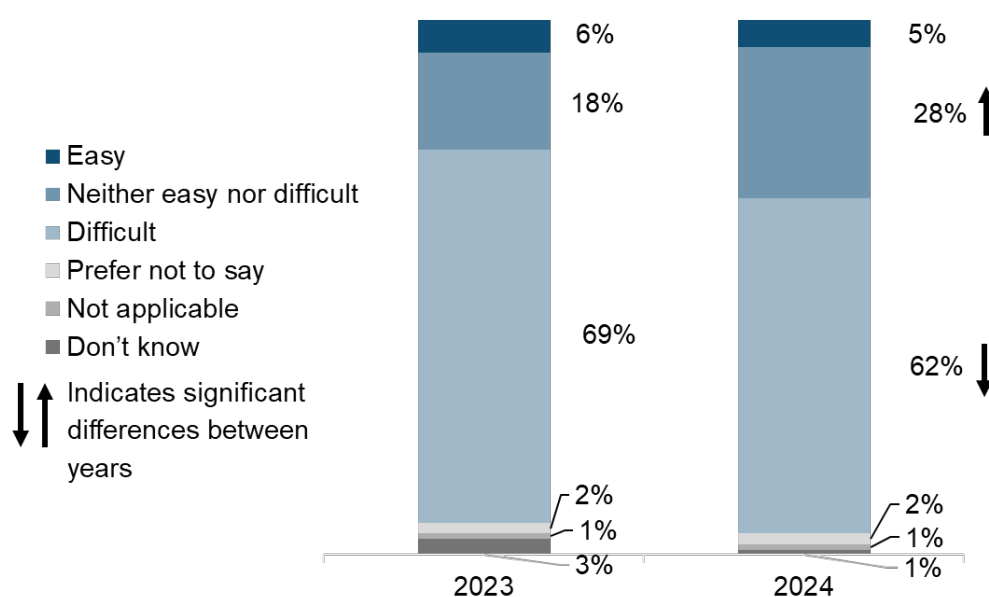
Care staff

Figure 18 shows a breakdown in responses for recruiting care staff.

Around three in five (62%) reported that they found it difficult to find care staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience. Around three in ten (28%) said they found it neither easy nor difficult to recruit, whilst only a small proportion (5%) reported finding it easy to recruit care staff.

Fewer managers reported it was difficult to find care staff with the appropriate levels of skills and experience in 2024 (62% compared with 69% in 2023). There was an increase in the number of managers who reported it as neither easy nor difficult (28% compared with 18%).

Figure 18 Ease of filling care staff vacancies



Base: All children's homes (2024: 701, 2023: 835).

Source: When recruiting, how easy or difficult is it to find staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience?

Local authority run homes were more likely to report difficulties finding care staff with appropriate level of skills and experience than privately run homes (73% compared with 59%).

Homes that were more likely to find it very difficult to recruit care staff with appropriate level of skill and experience included:

- homes in the East of England (26% compared with 16% of homes in the West of England)
- homes with 6 places or more (27% compared with 14% of homes with 1 or 2 places)

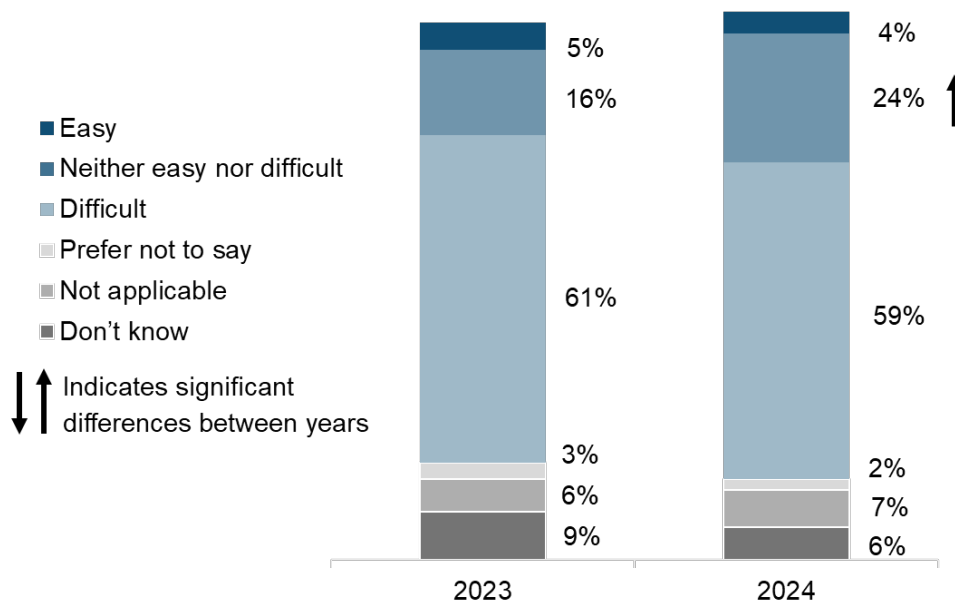
Managerial Vacancies

Figure 19 shows a breakdown in responses for the ease of recruiting managerial staff.

Three in five homes (59%) reported finding it difficult to recruit managerial staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience. One in four (24%) found it neither easy nor difficult to recruit. Fewer than one in twenty homes (4%) reported finding it easy to recruit.

Compared with 2023, there was an increase in those finding it neither easy nor difficult to recruit (24% in 2024 compared with 16% in 2023).

Figure 19 Ease of filling managerial vacancies



Base: All children's homes (2024: 701, 2023: 835).

Source: When recruiting, how easy or difficult is it to find staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience?

Homes in the South of England were more likely to report finding it easy to find managerial staff with the appropriate skills and experience (7%) compared with homes in other regions (3%).

Homes that said it was not easy to find managerial staff with appropriate level of skills and experience were more likely to have staff leave due to better pay elsewhere (75%) than due to better working hours/conditions elsewhere (56%) or performance issues (62%).

Motivations for working in the sector

In the qualitative interviews, the main motivations for staff working in the children's homes sector was their passion to make a difference to young people, particularly those who had faced adversity.

“I just had this real urge to help and support young people and help them to do better and want them to get better in their lives. Now, I can't even imagine doing anything different. I've got so many children throughout my career that have now got their own families that I still keep in contact with, that I still... It's just about these children have been through a really hard time and, to get where they are, it's to try and help them turn their lives around and make things better for them.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term), local authority

Some individuals described coming across roles in the children's homes sector when looking for a job and had found the work interesting and fulfilling and therefore had stayed in the sector long term. For these, passion for supporting young people was not their initial motivation for joining the sector but it was typically the main reason why they had stayed.

“I think that's what keeps me going is the fact that I know I'm making a difference to children, and I think it's a shame people don't stick it out to see that because it's really rewarding. It is a really rewarding job.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

Once in post, the opportunity to learn something new, be challenged, and experience variety, alongside a personal investment in the young people, also factored into people's decision to stay in the sector. Staff described lots of different components to the role, including varied challenges, and often described how ‘no two days are the same’.

“I think if you've got a willingness to learn, a willingness to make a difference, but also enjoy the fact that no two days are the same, I think definitely [this setting] is the place to be. I think if you don't have that caring attitude then I don't think being in a care role is the suitable role for you.”

Strategic staff, residential special school, voluntary and community sector

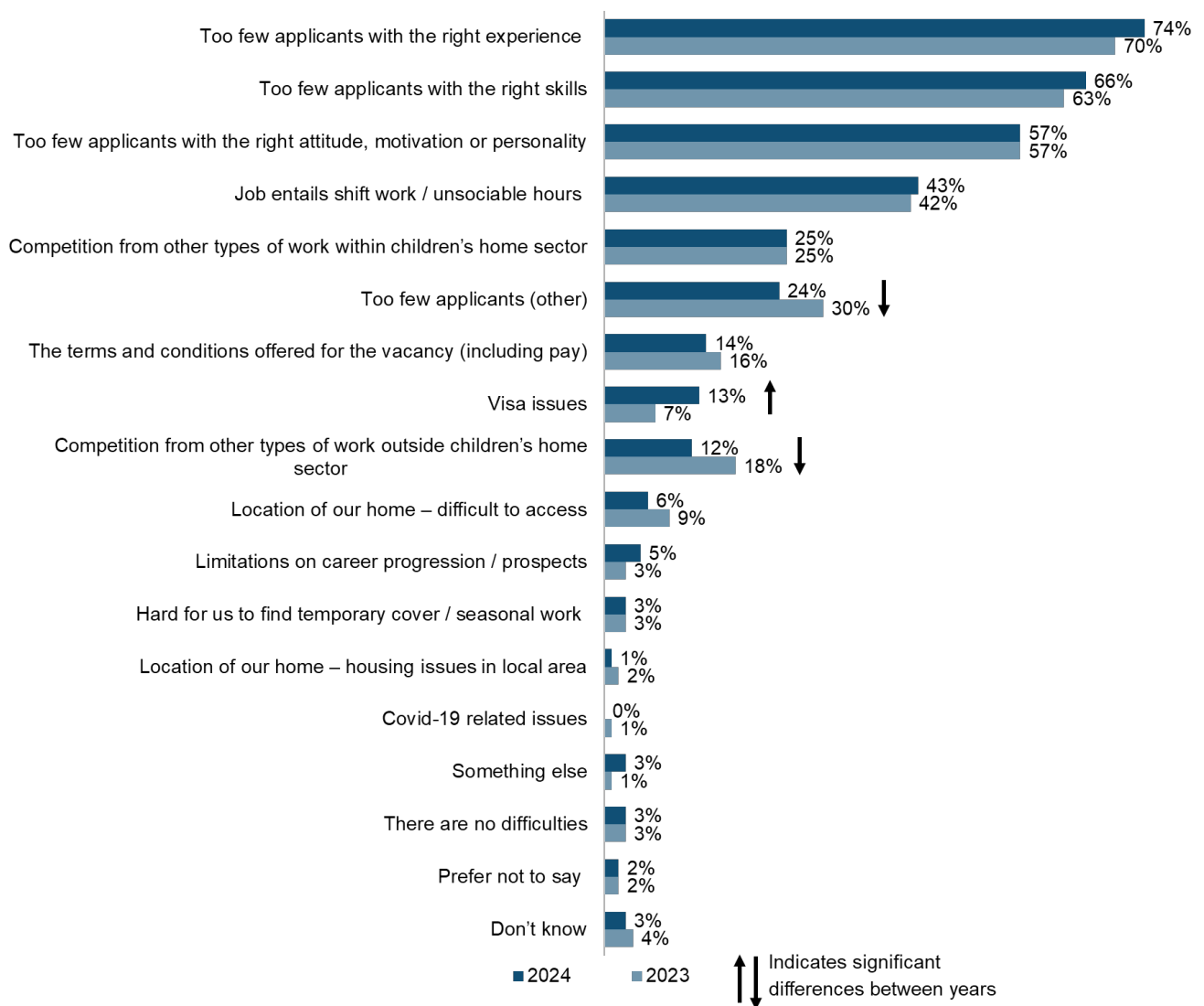
Challenges filling vacancies

Surveyed managers were asked to select from a list the main challenges in filling vacancies for care staff. Managers reported the main challenges in filling vacancies were

related to having too few applicants with the right experience (74%); the right skills (66%) or the right attitude, motivation or personality (57%).

The challenges faced remained mostly consistent with the findings from 2023. However, managers were more likely to report visa issues as a challenge in 2024, with 13% facing this issue in 2024, compared with 7% in 2023. Competition from other types of work outside the children's homes sector was less likely to be reported in 2024, with 12% of homes reporting this in 2024, which was down from 18% in 2023.

Figure 20 Main challenges faced in filling care staff vacancies



Base: All children's homes (2024: 701, 2023: 832).

Source: What are the main challenges in filling vacancies for care staff?

Local authority run homes were more likely than privately run homes to report the following challenges:

- too few applicants with the right experience (86% compared with 71%)
- too few applicants with the right skills (84% compared with 62%)
- too few applicants with the right attitude (68% compared with 54%)
- the job having shift work/ unsociable hours (58% compared with 40%)

Homes rated 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted were more likely to report too few applicants with the right experience (84% compared with 73% of homes rated 'Good' and 64% of homes rated 'Outstanding').

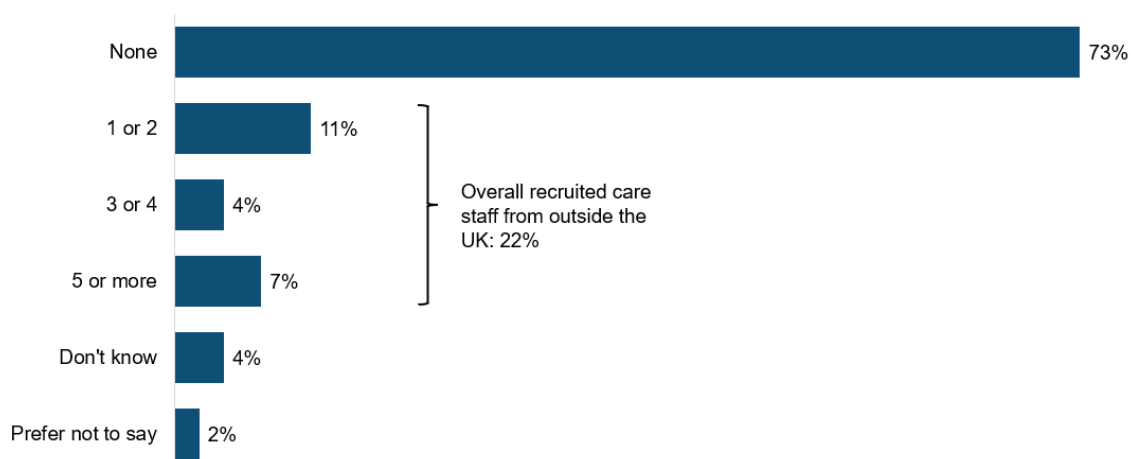
Visa issues were more likely to be reported by homes in the South (21%) and East (19%) of England compared with the North (6%).

International recruitment

Surveyed registered managers were asked about the number of staff who have responsibility for the care of children and young people that have been recruited from outside of the UK since January 2023. Figure 21 shows a breakdown in responses.

The majority of homes (73%) had not recruited any staff from outside the UK since January 2023. Over one in five homes (22%) had recruited at least one staff member from outside of the UK, with around one in ten homes (11%) recruiting 1 or 2 staff members, 4% recruiting 3 or 4 staff members and 7% recruiting 5 or more from outside of the UK.

Figure 21 Number of care staff who have the responsibility for care of children and young people who have been recruited from outside the UK



Base: All children's homes (2024: 702).

Source: Since 1 January 2023, how many people who have responsibility for the care of children and young people, if any, have you recruited from outside of the UK?

Homes in the South of England were more likely to have recruited staff members from outside of the UK compared with homes in the North of England (27% compared with 18%).

Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' homes were more likely to have not recruited any staff members from outside of the UK compared with 'Requires Improvement' rated homes (79% compared with 61%).

In the qualitative interviews, some managers had perceived a reduction in international applicants since the UK left the European Union. Homes that were struggling to recruit were still considering international applicants, but felt they had to weigh up the benefits against the potential financial and legal responsibilities. Some felt that the EU exit had negatively impacted people's perceptions of working in the UK which put them off from wanting to work here.

"Not being in the EU and not being able to recruit from different countries is also having an impact, and having to jump through hoops to try and get people sponsorship through the service has been very, very difficult. We've only just got to that point where we've managed to get sponsorship, and now we've got to go through the process of individually sponsoring people. That's a delay because people are coming with work permits, and you find that they are running out, and they've got no options other than go and find another job that will sponsor them. So that's been a real challenge as well."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term), local authority

"One of the significant changes for us, in terms of that eight, nine-year reduction was Brexit. The fact that we used to have a lot of people from Spain, Portugal, Poland, Eastern Europe, Southern Eastern Europe, that wanted to come to the UK and work [at the setting]. [...] They were incredible people, well-qualified people, generally, very good motivation, and wanted to do the work and get that experience. They'd be here for a couple of years and then go back to home country normally and carry on in the same field of work there. We haven't had that since Brexit. Brexit ruined that for us. Even though that's still possible."

Registered manager, residential special school, voluntary community sector

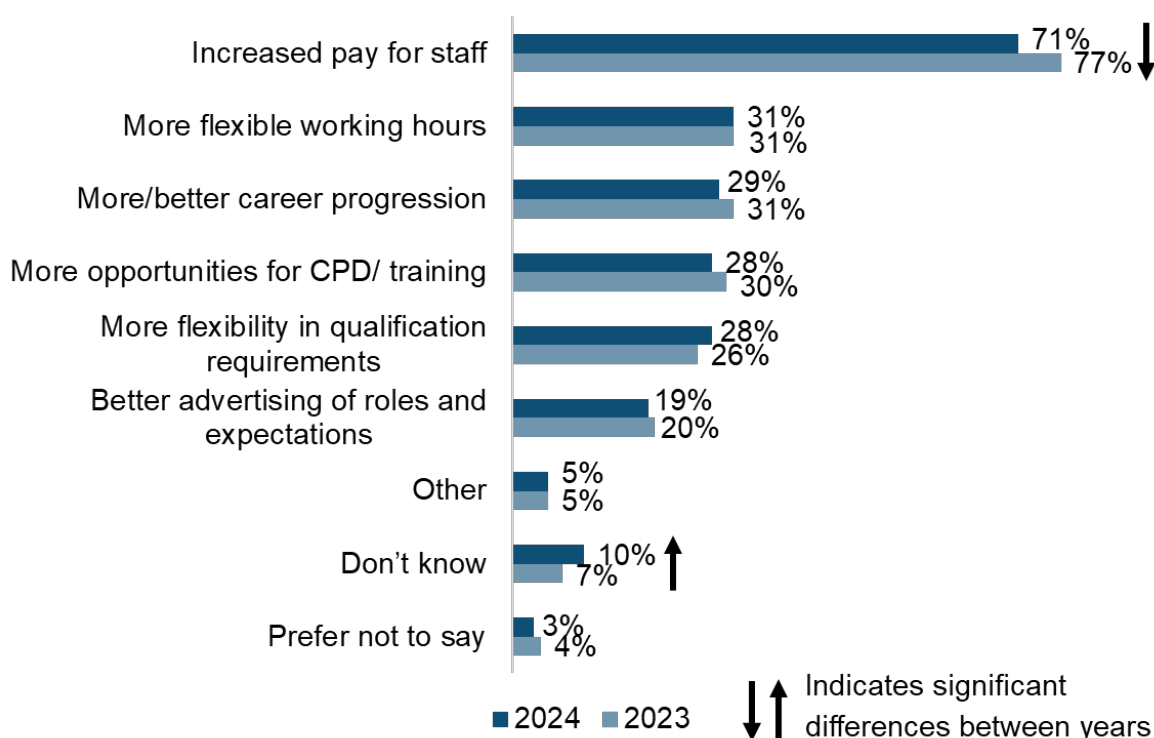
Provider perspectives and strategies on recruitment and retention

Retaining staff

Surveyed managers were asked to select from a list of factors, which they thought would help to retain care staff in the children's homes sector. Figure 22 shows a breakdown in responses. The majority of managers (71%) reported that increased pay would help to retain care staff in the sector. Nearly a third (31%) reported that more flexible working hours would help with retention issues, while 29% pointed to better career progression. Similar proportions of managers said more opportunities for continuous professional development (28%) and more flexibility in qualification requirements (28%) would help retain staff. Additionally, one in five (19%) selected better advertising of roles and expectations as a contributing factor.

Compared with 2023, there was a decrease in managers selecting increased pay for staff (71% in 2024 compared with 77% in 2023).

Figure 22 Factors which managers believe would help with retaining staff



Base: All children's homes (2024: 699, 2023: 829).

Source: What do you think would help most with retaining care staff in the children's home sector?

Local authority homes were more likely than private homes to cite better career progression (50% compared with 25%) and more opportunities for CPD or training (43% compared with 25%) as factors that would help retain care staff in the sector.

Homes in the East were more likely to cite the following factors which would help retain staff compared with the North:

- more flexible working hours (37% compared with 26%)
- more or better career progression (36% compared with 25%)
- more opportunities for CPD/training (32% compared with 21%)
- more flexibility in qualification requirements (38% compared with 22%)

Homes with 5 or more places were more likely to cite more flexible working hours (40% compared with 25% with 1 or 2 places).

Changes to the recruitment process

As part of the qualitative interviews, managers and HR staff discussed various strategies they were considering or had done to improve recruitment practices. Care staff also shared some reflections on ways the recruitment process and available support could be improved.

Specific strategies included broadening where roles were advertised and who they were targeted at. Examples that were discussed included advertising on an online jobs website, as well as through local groups and recruitment fairs, and offering referral payments and sponsorship of overseas applicants, although it was noted that funding for this was limited. Strategies to give potential applicants a more realistic view of the role were discussed, such as the development of promotional materials, setting up taster or interview days, and offering informal chats before the interview.

“[...] the job is undersold. I don't think there's a lot of advertisement about this job role, unless you're particularly looking into residential care. When I started applying for these jobs, none of my friends really knew anything about residential homes. The one thing that they'd relate to was Tracy Beaker, would be how they knew about it. So, I think advertisement of the role needs to be improved, and actually what the role entails needs to be improved. I think it's way more appealing than the job adverts that they put out. I think that would get more people applying for the roles, and more awareness of the role.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short and long term), voluntary
community sector

As well as looking at how roles are advertised, some participants in the qualitative interviews felt that it was important to assess individuals' skills, attitude and suitability, rather than their CV and past experience. There were also some suggestions to change the recruitment process so that it had greater focus on assessing candidates' written skills and their ability to do paperwork, as this was a significant part of the job. Hiring managers had tried prioritising building a picture of the applicant, such as understanding their expectations and attributes, as well as considering how they might contribute to the wider team's skills mix.

"We do look for people with experience but it's not a defining factor. Some of the best members of staff have had no experience when they came here, but it's a positive attitude, a willingness to learn, that we look for the most."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), local authority

Changes to pay and benefits

Changes to pay and benefits were another way through which interviewed managers and recruiters hoped to improve the recruitment and retention of staff. Strategies that had been tried included re-evaluating pay scales, offering incentives for working in difficult to reach locations or during unsociable hours, and offering performance-related pay. In some cases, where pay-related strategies had been implemented, managers and recruiters saw more applicants for roles. Care staff also endorsed improvements to pay and benefits, particularly higher base rates and incentives for unsociable hours, and they felt these changes would help with care staff recruitment and retention.

"I think we really struggled and we just weren't getting the people to come through the door to have interviews, and then they put the 15 per cent market, whatever it was, rate on, and then all of a sudden, we're inundated with people applying. So, it's definitely about money."

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), local authority

"I have family members who work in the care industry but for the council, for instance, and they still get things like unsociable hours and danger money if they get hit. Whereas we don't get that and quite a lot of charities and smaller organisations don't get that."

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), voluntary and community sector

Other than pay, looking at the wider package of benefits was another way some providers were changing, and others considering changing, the offer to potential and existing staff. This included looking at the holiday allowance, pension scheme and sick pay. Lack of sick pay in some settings was given by staff as a reason that homes would lose staff, as there were financial ramifications for taking time off sick, as well as the increased potential for burnout by going into work sick. In some cases, staff reported being financially incentivised for not taking any sick days, again increasing potential for burnout. Comparisons were made to the benefits offered to NHS staff, with some frustrated they did not get equivalent discounts.

“I will be leaving, because I've been injured quite a bit recently, and I can't afford to have time off work. I don't get sick pay.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long and short term), private sector

“I think social care felt sometimes that support workers in particular, not so much care workers, we were forgotten about a little bit. We didn't get the discounts in [coffee shop] and whatever else, and, and we weren't mentioned very much, and you think, well, actually we provide the same kind of care. Sometimes we give the same level of medication as some nurses do, and a lot of the types of care that we do provide sometimes is very complex.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), voluntary and community sector

Support for staff

In the qualitative interviews, interviewees, and care staff in particular, discussed how support varied across settings, but was seen as a key factor in whether or not care staff were able to cope with the challenges inherent to the role. They highlighted the importance of informal supervision, open-door policies, and advice from managers. They also stressed the benefits of working alongside therapeutic staff and specialist colleagues. Organisational culture was also important, including the need to focus on team cohesion and managing a healthy work-life balance.

“You've got to know your team's strengths and weaknesses and make sure that you're available for them and make sure that the conversations you're having are quite regular. [...] So again, it's just making sure that you're having that regular interaction with your team, making them know what's happening and giving them the ability to put their points and opinions across as well, because we haven't got all the answers and sometimes the team, the young people, probably know a bit more than us.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), local authority

“I think it's good management. I think that's the long and short of it. If you've good management, with a good understanding and flexibility with the staff team, and I think we have that here. [...] It's having that flexibility and that understanding. There's a big ethos here about family comes first as well, in a sense. We work and support each other.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short and long term), voluntary community sector

Homes' use of agency and bank staff

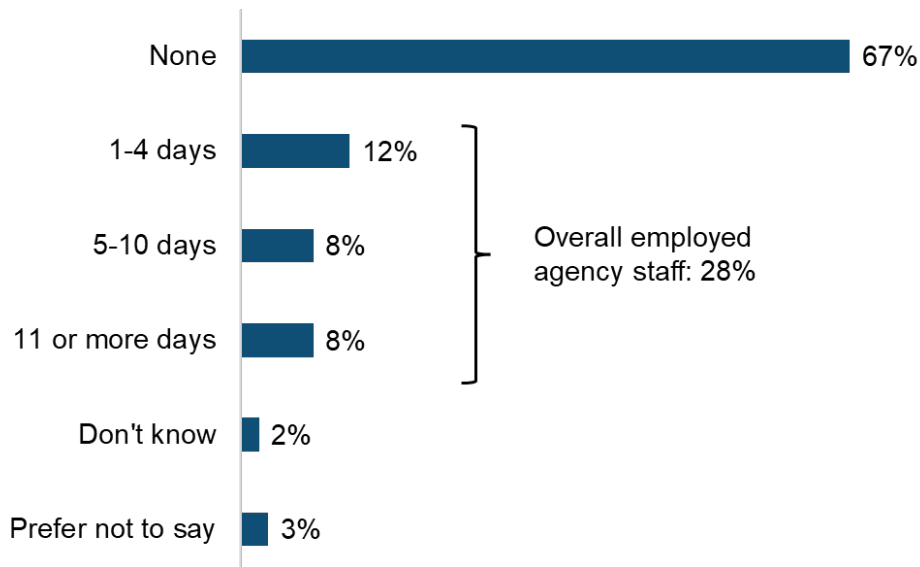
This section of this report explores the number of days surveyed managers reported using agency, bank or relief staff in their home over the last four weeks (at the time of the census). Surveyed managers were asked whether they are using agency staff more or less frequently than a year prior to the census.

Agency staff were defined as individuals employed by an agency who are temporarily assigned to the children's home to cover shifts and who are not employed by the home. Bank or relief staff were defined as a pool of staff employed directly by a children's home provider or local authority rather than workers employed through a third party such as an agency.

Number of days agency staff were employed in the last four weeks

Children's homes were asked about the number of different days at least one agency staff member was used over the last four weeks, who had responsibility for the care of children and young people. The majority of homes (67%) said they had not used agency staff on any day in the last 4 weeks. Just under three in ten (28%) said they had employed agency staff in the last 4 weeks, most commonly for between 1 and 4 days (12%). Figure 23 shows a breakdown of responses.

Figure 23 Number of days agency staff were employed in the last 4 weeks with responsibility for care of children and young people



Base: All children’s homes (2024: 699).

Source: Thinking about the last four weeks, on how many different days have you used at least one agency staff who has had responsibility for the care of children and young people?

The following types of homes were more likely to have not used agency staff in the last 4 weeks:

- homes in the East of England (66%), West (71%) and North (74%) compared with homes in the South (54%)
- homes with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating (79%) compared with homes rated as ‘Good’ (65%)
- homes with no care staff vacancies (77%) compared with homes with at least one care staff vacancy (59%)

Homes in the South of England were more likely to have used agency staff on 11 or more days in the last four weeks (14%) compared with homes in the East (6%) or North of England (5%).

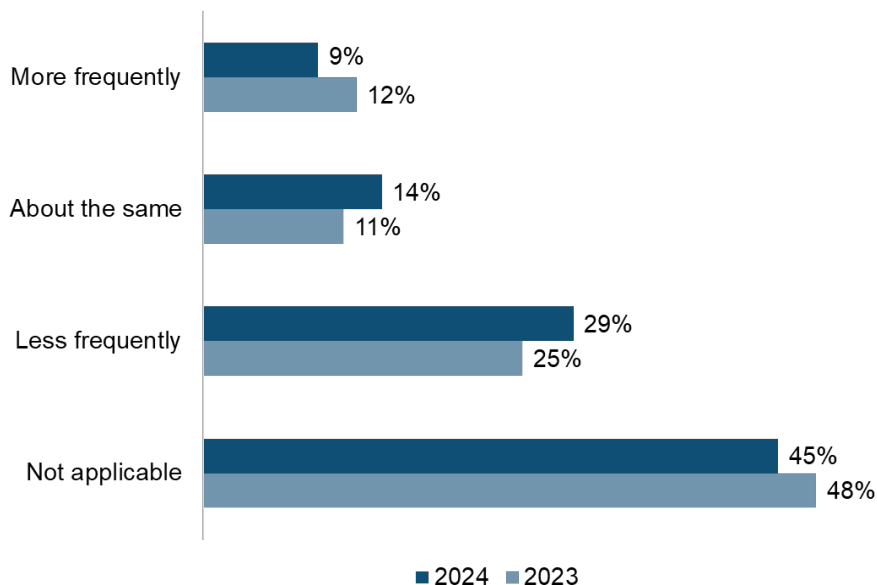
Use of agency staff compared with 12 months ago

Children’s homes were asked how frequently they had used agency staff who have responsibility for the care of children and young people compared with 12 months ago. Nearly half of homes (45%) said this question was not applicable to them.

Around three in ten (29%) of homes said they had used agency staff less frequently than 12 months ago, whilst 14% said they had used them about the same amount. Around

one in ten (9%) said they had used agency staff more frequently than 12 months ago. Figure 24 shows a breakdown of responses.

Figure 24 Frequency that homes have used agency staff compared with 12 months ago



Base: All children's homes (2024: 702, 2023: 821).

Source: Compared to March 2022 / September 2023 (12 months ago), how frequently are you using agency staff who have the responsibility for the care of children and young people in your home?

Homes more likely to report using agency staff more frequently than 12 months ago included:

- local authority homes (17%) compared with private homes (8%)
- homes in the South of England (15%) compared with homes in the East (6%) or North (6%)

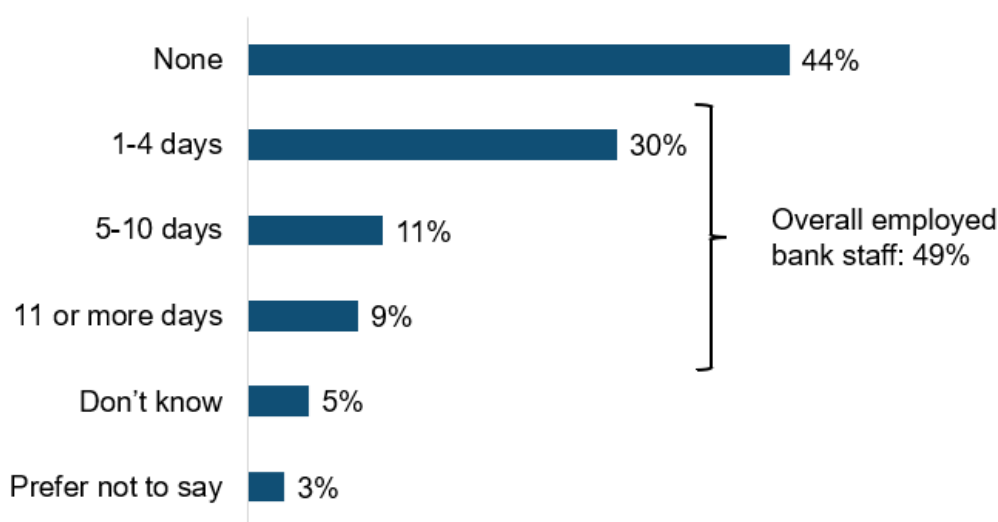
Homes with an Ofsted rating of 'Good' were more likely to say that they used agency staff less frequently than 12 months ago (34%) compared with homes with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating (21%).

Among the homes that reported they had used agency staff on at least one day in the last four weeks, 37% reported they were using agency staff less frequently; 26% reported they were using agency staff more frequently and 26% said the same amount.

Number of days bank staff were employed in the last four weeks

Surveyed children's homes were asked about their use of bank or relief staff with responsibility for care of children and young people in the last 4 weeks. More than two in five (44%) said they had not employed bank or relief staff in the last 4 weeks. Around half (49%) said they had employed bank or relief staff on at least one day in the last four weeks, most commonly on between 1 and 4 days. Figure 25 shows a breakdown of responses.

Figure 25 Number of bank or relief staff employed in the last 4 weeks with responsibility for care of children and young people



Base: All children's homes (2024: 702).

Source: Thinking about the last four weeks, on how many different days have you used at least one bank or relief staff who has had responsibility for the care of children and young people?

The following types of homes were more likely to have not used bank or relief staff in the last 4 weeks:

- private homes (49%) compared with local authority homes (21%)
- homes in the West of England (52%) compared with homes in the North of England (39%)
- homes with no care staff vacancies (49%) compare with homes with at least one care staff vacancy (39%)

Homes in the South of England were more likely to have used bank or relief staff on 11 or more days in the last four weeks (15%) compared with homes in the West (4%) or North

of England (7%). Local authority homes were more likely to have used bank or relief staff on 11 or more days in the last four weeks (20%) compared with private homes (6%).

Views on working with agency and bank staff

In the qualitative interviews, the use of agency and bank staff varied. Most homes did not use agency staff or did so reluctantly.

A common concern was the potential impact on young people in the home and permanent staff, due to the frequent turnover of new staff members. Working with agency and irregular bank staff were often seen as a last resort, but some managers explained that retaining a set of bank staff for a group of homes, or working with consistent staff from trusted agencies, could help mitigate against these perceived challenges. Providers with multiple homes reported sharing staff and this was seen to be a helpful way to reduce the use of agency staff either through flexible deployment of permanent staff or maintaining a pool of regular bank staff for the cluster of homes.

“We tend not to use agencies for all of the reasons that I’m sure other managers have talked about before; they don’t have any commitment to the home. It takes a long while to understand the dynamics and the function of the home. The kids don’t know them. They don’t fit in with the running of the shifts particularly because it takes a lot of time for them to get up to speed. The quality is not great.”

Registered manager, residential children’s home (short and long term),
voluntary community sector

“He’d [agency staff member] never been in our res before. He’d never worked for the company before. He didn’t know the processes in place. So, then, that’s a lot of pressure on the other member of staff that’s on duty, because then the children don’t tend to want to engage with that member of staff because they’ve never met him before in their life. So, it’s difficult, isn’t it? So, it just becomes then just a body. They’re just a body sat there, really.”

Registered manager, residential children’s home (long term), private
sector

For some, the potential route from bank or agency contracts into and out of permanent roles was seen as a positive. In some cases, staff who were initially employed as agency or bank staff used this as an opportunity to learn if the role was right for them, with some staff later going on to commit to regular hours and permanent contracts. However, bank

or agency contracts were also used as a way for staff to step down from permanent roles, ahead of leaving the sector to pursue alternative opportunities.

“Actually, one of my best residential staff started out as a casual for me, and after doing it for, I think it was about three months, she was like, 'Oh, I love it. It's exactly what I thought it was going to be... if they start as a casual, if they like it, but then you're also not bringing someone into the home and the kids get to meet them, for them to go, 'Oh, actually, this isn't for me.' Then that's another person that's left or let the kids down.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long and short term),
private sector

Some people had a preference for being employed on an agency or bank contract, as this gave individuals more autonomy over their time and flexibility with their hours and sometimes was paid higher. Individuals had to weigh this up against the lack of stability that may come with not having a permanent contract, but in many cases, there were enough regular hours available within a particular home or across homes for staff to maintain a level of consistency and stability.

“We've got relief staff now who will run our home. For example, the other night there was four relief staff on who stayed for the 24 hours and ran the home without any problems. Some of our relief staff have been there years. They do as much as full-time. They just tend to like the fact that they've got the flexibility of being able to say yes or no.”

Care staff, residential children's home, (long term), local authority

Training, CPD and career development

This section of the report focuses on views on training, professional development and career development. In the qualitative interviews, care staff and registered managers were asked about their views on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and how well they felt these equip staff to meet the needs of young people in their setting. Within the survey, managers were asked about the challenges they face in providing CPD and training.

The content, format and quality of training offered

Most reflections on the qualification and training offer were shared across managers and care staff. A common theme was getting the balance right between valuing practical experience and making relevant training available, to ensure consistently high standards of care. The content of training was a key consideration, for example how comprehensive, or not, available qualification and training packages were, with specific criticisms around the theoretical aspects of course content, and the preference for, and perceived benefits of, practical assessments and bespoke training offers to address specific needs. Some staff also commented on the format of delivery, with some preferring a return to face-to-face sessions rather than online sessions, whereas others highlighted the limited flexibility in accommodating for face-to-face delivery or different learning styles as a potential barrier.

“I'm more of a hands-on person, so I don't really, I don't learn well from someone just sitting and talking to me. I prefer to be a doer, rather than somebody just talking at me. The online training, I'm not particularly a fan of it, but it's what's required of me, so I have to do it. I'm not particularly a fan of it because, again, it's somebody just talking to me, rather than it being hands-on and learning something.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), private sector

The perceived impact of qualifications and training on knowledge, confidence, and job performance varied widely, for example, many participants explained how these had relevance for understanding the role and wider sector, but did not always meet the demands of the job. For some, they explained that the training they received offered reassurance and helped build confidence; and some said the training they received provided an opportunity to develop and implement new ways of working in practice.

“I think it was very broad, and I think it was things that people know anyway. Well, for me on instinct anyway, because I'd worked with children and young people before, but I think having it quantified and having to go and do the research, making your practice more evidence-based, was really useful.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), local authority

Whilst participants in the qualitative interviews acknowledged the importance of having mandatory training and qualifications, some felt that the training and support offered is highly variable, for example differences between the assessors and the assessment centres responsible for running courses.

“Initially it was a bit... Trying to get the right provider. We had a few providers who were a bit pants, if I'm honest. What we did was, if they're no good then we don't use them, basically. They lose the tender if they don't meet their obligations. It was just those teething issues in the beginning. A lot of the diploma providers aren't up to a lot. I'm not going to lie, some of them are well dodgy. They're pants. At least with the apprenticeships, because they're overseen by government, it's a government incentive. They have to hit their own goals, which makes them do the work.”

Strategic staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

Many care staff said they started their roles in the sector without experience and needed to get qualified on the job. In some cases, lack of access to consistent and high-quality training and support was thought to impact on staff retention, for example, staff members who were unable to complete or struggling to complete mandatory content or to benefit from additional learning, were witnessed leaving the sector. High staff turnover amongst those early in their career, combined with an applicant pool still made up of mainly unqualified candidates was seen as contributing to ongoing recruitment challenges.

“So, they've got about 18 months then to do a qualification. If they get to the end of that qualification and they're having a wobble... I'm thinking, but they can care for these children to the best of their abilities, and they're safe, they're trusted adults that are fantastic at what they do, and now I've lost somebody because they're having a meltdown because they can't pass their qualification. So that for me is probably one of my biggest gripes, in terms of, it's just a shame for some people that they're in that position.”

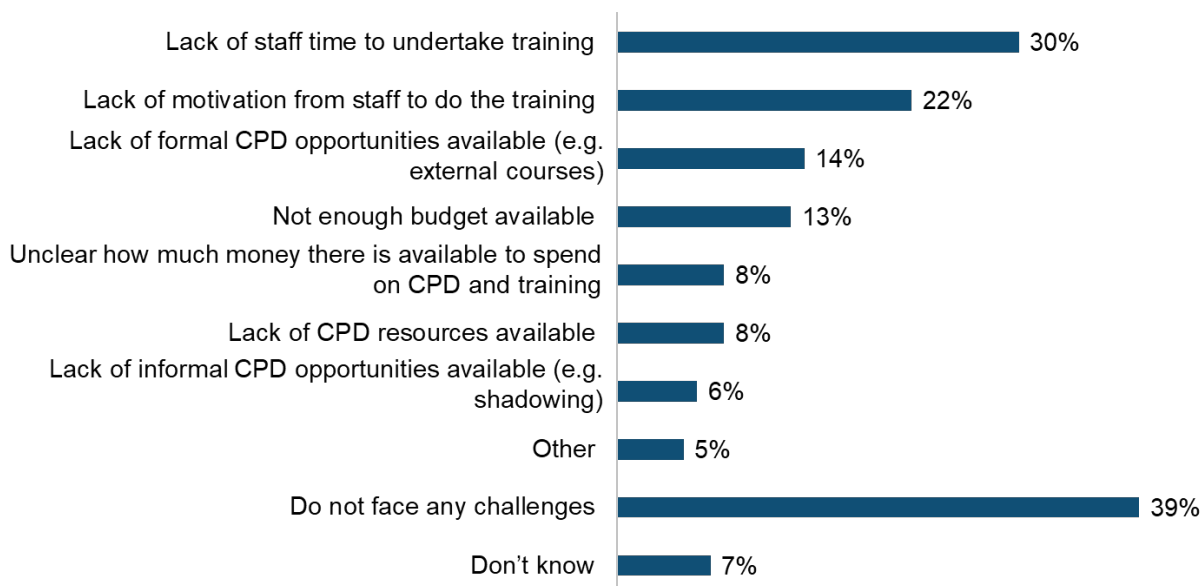
Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

Challenges in staff CPD and training

Surveyed registered managers were asked what challenges, if any, they face in providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training to their staff. Overall, more than half of surveyed managers (53%) reported challenges.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was a lack of staff time to undertake training (30%), followed by a lack of motivation from staff to do the training (22%). One in seven managers (14%) cited a lack of available formal CPD opportunities, and a similar proportion (13%) cited not enough budget as a challenge, as shown in Figure 26. Around two in five managers (39%) said they did not face any challenges.

Figure 26 Challenges registered managers face in providing CPD and training to staff



Base: All children's homes (699).

Source: What challenges, if any, do you face as the manager in providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training to your staff?

Local authority run homes were more likely than privately run homes to cite a number of challenges, including:

- a lack of staff time to undertake training (42% compared with 29%)
- a lack of formal CPD opportunities available (28% compared with 12%)
- not enough budget available (38% compared with 10%)

There were also differences by region. Homes in the North of England were more likely to say that they did not face any challenges (47%) compared with homes in the South

(34%) or East (28%). Homes in the South, East and West (32%, 39% and 35% respectively) were all more likely to say that lack of staff time to undertake training was a challenge than homes in the North (23%). Homes in the East, West and North (13%, 12% and 8% respectively) were more likely to say that they were unclear how much money there is available to spend on CPD and training compared with homes in the South (2%).

The lack of staff time and lack of motivation amongst some staff were discussed by participants in the qualitative research. The qualitative interviews suggested that investment in, and prioritisation of staff varied across settings. Some settings invested in qualification and training courses, but did not provide sufficient time on shift to complete course content. Where settings were already operating on low staff capacity, managers could not always release staff for learning and development, which could then negatively impact staff motivation and morale as well as managers' job satisfaction.

"[on completing the Level 5 NVQ] I'll be honest, I completed a lot of it in my home time, just because the job is so busy. Once you walk through the door in the morning, you're just nonstop. For me, I don't think I ever got time on shift to complete it, apart from when I did the odd waking night. You get time to do stuff then."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

There were mixed views among qualitative participants on the value of engaging with formal development opportunities. Some individuals were interested and actively looking for ways to learn and improve. They saw opportunities to gain qualifications and training as a benefit to the job, with the organisation paying the costs of the courses of mandatory courses and bespoke training.

"I quite like studying, so I didn't mind doing it. It helped a lot because... I didn't know there were children's home regulations or anything like that. It helped a lot to learn what an actual children's home was, like the expectations, the rules, the policies and procedures, all that kind of stuff around it. At the time there were things in it that we had to find out our policies and procedures for our particular home as well, so it wasn't just learning a general. It was learning ours specifically as well."

Care staff, residential special school, voluntary and community sector

However, others completed courses only because they were mandatory or strongly encouraged by law or by the provider and felt obligated to complete them alongside an already demanding workload.

“I had extensions very unwillingly from the tutor. My managers at the time were incredibly supportive, and they gave me study days here and there, and I ended up taking some of my own annual leave. I took about two weeks' annual leave off to just absolutely smash out some assignments and get it done. I was pulling all-nighters. It was a horrible time; it was absolutely awful.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), local authority

In some settings, if staff wanted to leave before finishing their mandatory qualification they would need to pay the cost of the course, forcing individuals to either lose out financially or to stay in the job for longer than they wanted to or felt able to emotionally commit to.

“They don't want to commit to a year or potentially longer to do a diploma, they just want to do the job and do it well and get paid. I think that detracts a lot of people; it excludes them from kind of... We've had a few people who start here and then get to a certain point, I forget what it is now, how many months it is before they have to, really have to, start on the diploma, but they basically said I don't want to do that. They've left because of it.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short and long term), private sector

In some instances, the mandatory qualifications were seen as devaluing prior knowledge and experience, including 'on the job' expertise gained by experienced staff and (sometimes higher level) pre-existing qualifications. For some, they viewed these experiences as a tick box exercise for experienced staff, which was not a substitute for on-the-job learning.

“Some people have come with so much experience and I think then doing the NVQ Level 3 is a little bit, it's something they're doing because they need to do it because it's part of the requirement for the job. But actually, if you looked at what they'd already done, it's probably a little bit of just a box-ticking exercise rather than it actually being beneficial to them.”

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

Some individuals described a training fatigue among some staff. Requirements to complete a lot of mandatory courses in parallel led to a level of disinterest and disengagement from the process of learning and development.

“...it's endless, the training that you have to complete for this job. There's three pages of e-learning or outside agency stuff, of stuff on [a database management system], ... So safeguarding, exploitation, drug use, all of that, you have to do all of that, which is nine or ten courses of that. You have to do first aid safer food, better business, data protection. It just goes on and on really”

Care staff, residential children's home (short term), local authority

The confidence and capability of staff to engage with training materials was also seen to be a key factor by some; for example, some highlighted how low literacy levels might impact on people's confidence and ability to complete the necessary qualifications and training.

“I recently had a couple of members of staff that had gone over the two-year limit, so then I have to put a risk assessment in place, because regulation says it has to be within two years, but I put a plan together to pull them through. They have managed it now, but they were learners that aren't the best at learning. It's not for everybody, is it, education, and they really struggled with it, so I had to then - he would send me the question, and I would rewrite it in words he could understand.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

Career progression and development

As part of the qualitative case studies, registered managers and care staff were asked about their views on career progression opportunities available to care staff. The qualitative findings suggested that career progression and development of staff often hinged on three factors: staff willingness to progress, mentoring and support, and the availability of opportunities in the right places.

The key skills, attributes and experience seen to be necessary for senior and managerial roles were being supportive, organised, taking the initiative and being willing and able to reflect. For registered managers specifically, they needed the amount and level of experience managing staff and working with vulnerable children and young people specified in the regulations.

Availability of opportunities

The qualitative research findings suggested that the availability of opportunities varied across the sector based on the type and size of the provider, staffing levels, the stability

of the team, for example more stable homes having fewer opportunities, and the range of existing intermediate roles within the home, for example whether or not a setting had team leader or equivalent positions.

Several people left their settings to progress into more senior roles in other homes, either within the same or a different provider. Others waited for a long time for a vacancy to come up in their settings, and in some cases, staff recognised that senior roles might only become available when more senior staff retired.

“The process of promotion, because within residential, what you'll find is it's usually one in, one out, kind of thing. So, your natural progression is to become an assistant manager and then a manager. Those positions only become vacant when somebody leaves, and sometimes people are in these jobs for a number of years. I think that's a possible issue.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), local authority

Mentoring and support

Mentoring and support was highlighted as an important way for junior staff to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence required to progress. However, staff had differing experiences regarding access to, and quality of, support from managers and colleagues alike. Both managers and care staff interviewed in the qualitative research indicated that managers were often very willing to share their expertise and to support and develop junior staff. Examples included peer-to-peer learning, effective supervision, mentoring, shadowing, pyramid learning (where senior staff share their knowledge with more junior colleagues, who then learn from this and pass their knowledge onto more junior colleagues), learning from specialists, encouragement to access additional training opportunities, and regular feedback.

“Initially a job came up for it. Didn't even cross my radar. Wasn't something that I wanted to do at all. It was a no-no. Didn't even consider it. Then, about 6-9 months later it came up again, and I was feeling so much more confident. I'd already worked shifts where I had been naturally leading anyway, and I think the feedback and... I can't fault my management staff.”

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), local authority

"I had two seniors apply for the deputy position, one did get the position and one is now working towards a trainee deputy, so even if the position isn't available there is always something we can do to help with that progression ready for when a position becomes available next."

Registered manager, residential children's Home (long term), private
sector

However, in some instances, there was a reluctance from management staff to support and encourage staff to develop into more senior positions, as they felt they did not have the potential.

"Obviously, with all people, there are some people that may have aspirations that we don't feel that they are going to be able to get any - well, not any higher, but where they would like to be. If we've tried everything we have through supervision and guidance, and training, and reflective practice, and tried to give them opportunities, I think we have to be honest and say - I have a member of staff that is a fantastic support worker, but would struggle to be a practitioner."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term) local
authority

Staff attitude and willingness

The desire to progress and develop varied between individuals who were keen to gain promotions, and those who were wary of additional responsibilities. Many linked progression with a reduction of time working with young people, which many saw as a downside of the registered manager role.

"I'll be honest, progression isn't on the cards for me, it's just not something I want. I want to be, as I call it, on the shop floor. I want to be with the children. I don't want to be sat at a laptop, it's just not for me. I'm happy where I am."

Care staff, residential children's home (long term), private sector

"Some people don't want to progress. Some people do. It all depends, I suppose, on their feelings because I can't promote someone unless they're wanting to go for that job, I suppose."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private
sector

Some registered managers also disliked the pull away from direct work with children and young people, although this was still a component of their job.

“How do you divide your time, it's quite challenging in itself. We only have two children in each home, and it doesn't sound like a lot, but the amount of regulation paperwork, and - for me, if you want to do the job properly, it's a massive responsibility, it takes up a lot of your time. Like I want to meet the kids, I want to speak to the kids. Most days I want to be able to touch base with the children I have in my care. They're my responsibility. Same with the staff; I try to spend an awful lot of time with the staff.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private sector

The apprenticeship scheme

The Practitioner in Children's Residential Care apprenticeship was established in 2018. This program provides comprehensive training and practical experience for those working with children and young people in residential settings⁷. This section of the report focuses on perceptions of the apprenticeship scheme route to become qualified in the children's residential care sector. It is based on findings from the qualitative interviews.

Awareness and understanding of the scheme

Although some settings were using the apprenticeship scheme qualification route, many homes had not used the scheme. Many participants in the case studies, including managers and care staff, were not familiar with the scheme and had limited experience with it.

Among those who had not used the scheme, some members of staff had limited understanding, and sometimes negative preconceptions of what it might entail, such as that using an apprenticeship scheme would mean having to introduce young, inexperienced staff into the home. There was also a perception that having people in the home on a short-term basis for placements could impact on the consistency of care and support for young people.

“The only thing that jumps up in my head is - and this is probably my perception is - I think apprenticeship and I think like 16, 17, 18, that's far too young to be anywhere near a children's home. I think my youngest member of staff is 21 and I do think that's something, although that's old enough, when I interview someone, if someone was very young, I would worry about them being a bit too close in age to say, for example, some of my older teenagers... That's just my perception of apprenticeship, being something you do at that age.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (short and long term),
private sector

Some registered managers who were aware and had used the apprenticeship scheme were positive about the quality and coverage of the qualification.

“Yes, the Level 4 is the one we offer, so obviously that's covered by the levy. Well, obviously, it's residential childcare we do, so the standard Level 3 diploma is the

⁷ For more information go to [‘Children, young people and families practitioner’](#) and [‘Employing an apprentice’](#)

Level 4 apprenticeship, so it gives our staff that higher qualification. It's actually a very thorough qualification as well, so in terms of the learning, it's very valued."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short and long term),
voluntary and community sector

Relevance and skillset

Managers who had used the apprenticeship scheme and were also familiar with the NVQ qualification route reflected that the content of both the traditional qualification route and the apprenticeship scheme were of similar relevance to the job and provided similar levels of assistance in completing day to day activities. However, the apprenticeship scheme was described as more comprehensive overall and perceived as a more advanced academic level.

For some, there were mixed views regarding the additional level of comprehension, for example the additional content was useful for those interested in progressing, but more challenging for individuals with lower academic aptitude.

"What we're finding as a company is, quite a lot of our staff are preferring to do the Level 3 course. That's because the Level 4 apprenticeship, it requires you to do your maths and English qualifications, which not all our staff have had. As I say, we sometimes take on some unqualified staff. People with different age ranges. For some people, the thought of doing your maths and English GCSEs is quite daunting, so we have actually lost some staff because of that, because they didn't want to do their maths and English qualifications."

Registered manager, residential children's home (long term), private
sector

"There are certain people that we would still offer the Level 3 for. So, night workers, for example, are not able to complete the work that's required for an apprenticeship, so if they're waking night staff, we would still offer the Level 3 diploma. We've also had some members of staff who've had issues in terms of the way that they learn and the way that they do stuff where Level 4 hasn't been appropriate for them, so they've done a Level 3."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short and long term),
voluntary and community sector

Impact on resourcing

Becoming qualified through the apprenticeship scheme route was viewed as more time intensive due to the higher level of comprehensiveness than through the NVQ route. Managers identified that the apprenticeship scheme also included more allocated home study time, which could impact on staffing levels in the home. It was not clear whether using the apprenticeship had an impact on recruitment or retention of staff, for example, whether the more comprehensive education translated into better practice or better outcomes for children and young people.

“If we get staff that leave and a load of new staff in, the Level 3 apprenticeship requires us to afford those staff 20 per cent of the time studying off rota. Okay, we can afford one or two to be off that time, but if we've just had a new influx of staff and there are six, seven, eight and we lose them off our rota for twenty per cent of the time, there's a real quandary for us because we want the staff to be qualified but we can't afford to lose them from the rota. There's only a set period of time that they have to complete the course, which I think is about 18 months off the top of my head.”

Registered manager, residential children's home (short and long term),
voluntary and community sector

Views of introducing a professional registration

Social workers in England currently register with Social Work England (SWE), a regulator which sets professional standards, oversees standards for qualifications, and removes a social worker from the register where there is evidence of serious concerns about an individual's fitness to practice. As part of the qualitative research, managers and staff were asked about their views on the potential impact of introducing a similar professional registration process for care staff and managers in the children's homes sector.

It was not within the scope of this research to explore in detail the perceived advantages and disadvantages of introducing professional registration or consult on specific proposals. Nevertheless, participants did share some general views on the concept which are covered in this section.

Recognition and credibility

Improved value, recognition and credibility was felt to be a potential impact of introducing a professional registration in the children's homes sector. Although individuals interviewed who work in the children's homes workforce valued the profession and stressed its importance, there was a general sense that this work is not always valued by wider society. Some care staff felt introducing a professional registration would be proportionate to their expertise and responsibilities; it might give them more authority in interactions with other professionals and could encourage staff to see residential children's home work as a career, rather than just a stopgap, and to stay in the workforce longer term.

"I think it would give people the recognition that I think they feel that they deserve. It is a really tricky job, but the skills and the training that we expect people to do, I think it would give them the recognition of actually, you're not just a care worker. You are a qualified worker, a professional worker..."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term), local authority

Streamlined training and support

Some managers and staff interviewed felt that professional registration could potentially result in more streamlined training and support. Some individuals highlighted the potential benefits of a membership body offering advice, and standardisation of training.

"I certainly think you could ensure that a group of staff across the field would have good quality continuous professional development...There's a lot of support and advice out there for social workers but it's non-specific to res care...."

Registered manager, residential children's home (short and long term),
voluntary and community sector

However, there were mixed views on the value of the increased volume of training and qualifications that might result from the introduction of professional registration, with some wary of needing to undertake additional training.

"Is it going to just put something else in the way for our staff to think, oh God, that's too much, or I don't want to do that, or... They already have so much to do and my staff team never stop training. Is it just something else to put on top of them?"

Registered manager, residential children's home (short term), local
authority

Recruitment

Some interviewed managers and staff felt that a professional registration would potentially make the recruitment of registered managers easier by allowing for more flexibility in the recruitment process.

"Yes, the registration would be amazing, updated regulations, and a little more flexibility around recruiting registered managers would solve the crisis of recruiting for those roles virtually overnight, because I can't see any other way of it being fixed..."

Strategic staff, residential children's home (short and long term), private
sector

However, others felt that professional registration would potentially make recruitment more difficult as it may be seen as a barrier to applying for jobs if they are not registered, or do not properly understand the professional registration.

“Some people really struggle to already recruit to the job [...] is it going to cause people to not apply because they have to be registered, or not thinking they can be registered, or jump through more hoops, because I know what hoops we have to jump through to be registered.”

Registered manager, residential children’s home (short term), local
authority

Added procedural components

Some interviewed staff felt that additional procedural components would be perceived negatively, for example staff were wary of the potential need to register before recruitment (rather than on-the-job), or to pay registration fees from a limited income.

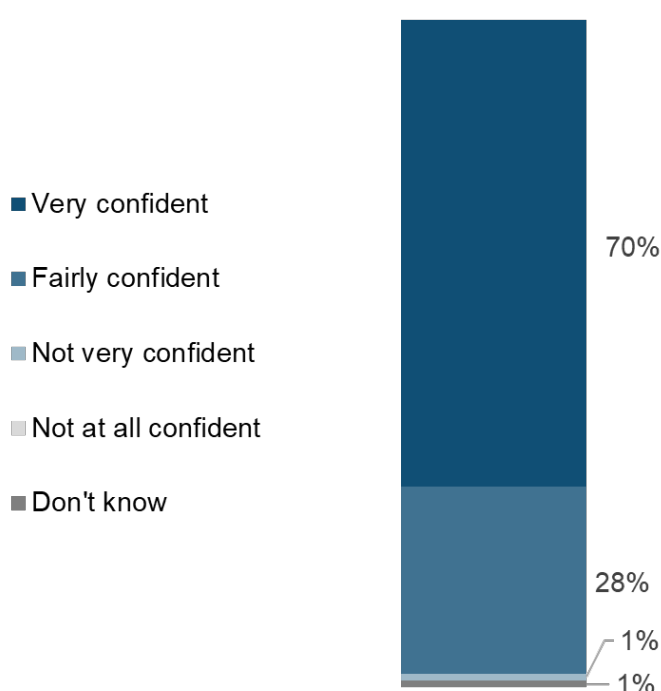
“I think it might put some people off, in the sense that some of my staff - how do I word this? They wouldn't necessarily be the most academic, but they're absolutely brilliant with the kids. Some of them, something that does put some people off is doing the qualification. So, I have some staff that the whole doing it on computers and stuff, it's really not for them. So I've worked with their assessors to do more observations, more verbal narratives. There is some bits of it you can't get away from. They do have to do some written work. So I think for those staff that worry about and get anxious about things like that, when you start talking about professional bodies and stuff, I think that might kind of spook them a bit, maybe, might be the word I'd give it.”

Registered manager, residential children’s home (short and long term),
private sector

Mental health

Surveyed registered managers were asked how confident they feel that the staff in their home are able to identify when children and young people are experiencing poor mental health. Figure 27 shows a breakdown in responses. Almost all managers (98%) said they felt either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in their staff's ability to identify poor mental health amongst the children and young people in their home. Of these, 70% said they felt 'very confident' and 28% felt 'fairly confident'. One percent said they felt 'not very confident' and less than one percent said they felt 'not at all confident'. One percent answered 'don't know.'

Figure 27 Managers' confidence in their staff's ability to identify when children and young people are experiencing poor mental health



Base: All children's homes (700).

Source: How confident do you feel that the staff in your home are able to identify when children and young people are experiencing poor mental health?

The following types of homes were more likely to report feeling 'very confident':

- homes rated 'Outstanding' (84%) compared with homes rated as 'Good' (69%) or 'Requires Improvement' (65%)
- homes reporting no care staff vacancies (75%) compared with those with at least one vacancy (66%)

Annex 1 – Weighting

The children's homes survey was an attempted census of all registered children's homes in England. Whilst all homes were invited to participate, children's homes with different characteristics could respond to the survey with differential rates. Children's homes who did complete the survey could also choose the number of staff members to report on, so staff members in smaller homes would have a higher chance of being represented in the data compared with staff members in larger homes. To account for the impact of differential survey response probabilities and within-home selection probabilities, weighting was required. Weighting consisted of 2 stages: (1) home-level weighting and (2) staff-level weighting. The same approach was followed at both the 2023 and 2024 survey.

Home level weighting

Firstly, data was weighted at the home level. There were 703 children's homes who participated in the research. Their data were weighted to match the profile of the population, of which there were 3,646 children's home in the sampling frame provided by Ofsted. Design weighting was not required as all children's homes in the population were invited to participate in the research.

Raking was used to ensure the sample margins matched the population margins exactly for 5 variables extracted from the sampling frame. The design effect due to the weighting was estimated to be 1.04⁸.

The following variables were used for weighting at the home level:

- Number of places registered
- Home ownership
- Years since registration
- Ofsted inspection rating
- Government Office Region (GOR)

⁸ Design effects were calculated based on the variance of the weights, using the following formula: $1 + (\text{coefficient of variation})$.

Staff level weighting

Managers were asked to provide data about their staff, including pay and contract type, and the qualifications they held or were working towards. The methodology section of this report presents the instructions given to managers to provide this data.

Design weighting was used in the second stage of weighting and only applied to staff level data. Weighting was conducted separately for 3 types of staff members in home: (1) registered managers, (2) supervisory staff (staff with management responsibility but not the registered manager), and (3) non-supervisory staff. This was because they had different selection probabilities, as explained further below.

Homes could choose to provide data for all staff in their home or a subset of them (up to 5 staff members). Data was always provided for the registered manager, so all managers received a design weight of 1.

If all staff members in the home were answered for, every person in those homes also received a survey weight of 1. If managers decided to answer for a subset of staff members, the supervisory and non-supervisory staff answered for were weighted up to their respective total numbers based on the totals provided in the questionnaire.

After the design weighting, data cleaning and re-scaling were required to address any inconsistencies in the self-reported data. The design effect due to the weighting was estimated to be 3.13. This is similar to 2023 design effect, which was 3.10.

Annex 2 – Stage 3 questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

The Department for Education (DfE) have commissioned Verian (formerly Kantar Public) and the National Children's Bureau to conduct a national census of all children's homes in England. All homes were invited to participate in a census in March 2023. The findings from the 2023 census can be found [here](#). We would appreciate your help to complete the 2024 census. This will allow the Department a chance to hear what has changed in the sector over the last year and to understand about some new areas of interest.

This short survey is to collect information on the number and type of staff who work at your children's home and the services you offer to children and young people. The survey will also collect information about any issues you face with the recruitment and retention of staff.

Your support on this project will enable the DfE and wider children's homes sector to have up-to-date evidence regarding the workforce and challenges the sector faces.

The survey may require you to look up certain pieces of information, as outlined in the data sheet you received with the advance letter informing your home about this research. If you have completed the datasheet, the survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. You have the option to pause and return to the survey at any point.

Please note that all data will be reported in aggregate form and your answers will not be reported in any way that would allow you or your children's home to be identified to DfE. If you would like further information on how Verian handles and processes personal data, as well as information on your rights under data protection regulations to access your personal data, withdraw consent, or object to the processing of your personal data, please visit the **[privacy policy](#)**.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the research team at Verian on REDACTED or REDACTED or the Department for Education at REDACTED

ASK ALL

INTRO

Firstly, we would like to collect some information about the services you provide and the number of children and young people you care for ...

ASK ALL

Q1

Which of the following best describes your home (as described by your home's statement of purpose)?

Please select all that apply.

1. A children's home which provides short term care – to provide support to children to enable their return to family or foster care or move to independent living
2. A children's home which provides long term care - caring for children until they are prepared and ready for "leaving care" support, including moving to another placement
3. A secure children's home
4. A short break children's home
5. A residential special school registered as a children's home (accommodate or arrange accommodation for any child for MORE than 295 days a year)
6. A residential special school NOT registered as a children's home (accommodate or arrange accommodation for any child for 295 days a year or LESS)
7. Something else (please specify)
8. None of these
9. Don't know
10. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q2

Please describe the range of needs your statement of purpose says that you can meet...

Please select all that apply.

1. Complex needs (including drug or alcohol dependence, sexually harmful behaviour, attachment disorders, emotional and behavioural difficulties, offending behaviour, going missing, self-harm, history of harming themselves and/or others, attention and conduct disorders/ADHD, communication difficulties, and unspecified complex needs)
2. Abuse and neglect (including trauma, child sexual exploitation, neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and unspecified abuse)
3. Learning difficulties
4. Autism spectrum disorder
5. Mental health problems

6. Physical disabilities
7. Complex health needs
8. Sensory impairment
9. Something else (please specify)
10. None of these
11. Don't know
12. Prefer not to say

ASK IF MEETS COMPLEX NEEDS (Q2 =1)

Q2a

Which of the following types of complex needs can your home accommodate?

Please select all that apply.

1. Drug or alcohol dependence
2. Sexually harmful behaviour
3. Attachment disorders
4. Emotional and behavioural difficulties
5. Offending behaviour
6. Going missing
7. Self-harm
8. History of harming themselves and/or others
9. Attention and conduct disorders/ADHD
10. Communication difficulties
11. Other complex needs

ASK ALL EXCEPT SHORT BREAK HOMES (Q1 CODE 4 NOT YES)

Q3a.

What is the maximum number of registered places for children and young people in your home?

Please record the total number of beds that your home is registered for. Please include any beds which cannot be filled due to issues with staffing, specialist needs of your residents or any other factors.

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK SHORT BREAK CARE HOMES (Q1 CODE 4 = YES)

Q3b.

What is the maximum number of nights per month that children and young people can stay in your home?

Please record the total number of nights your home reports as available per month.

Enter Number
Don't know
Prefer not to say

ASK ALL EXCEPT SHORT BREAK HOMES (Q1 CODE 4 NOT YES)

Q4a.

Currently how many children and young people are resident in your home?

NOTE: That is how many beds are currently occupied.

Enter Number
Don't know
Prefer not to say

ASK SHORT BREAK CARE HOMES (Q1 CODE 4 = YES)

Q4b.

Currently how many nights are available for children and young people to reside in your home per month?

Enter Number
Don't know
Prefer not to say

**ASK IF: Q3A ANSWER > Q4a ANSWER
Q4c.**

What is the reason that you have unoccupied beds?
Please select all that apply.

1. Waiting for child referral
2. Lack of demand for beds currently
3. Insufficient staff due to recruitment/retention issues
4. Intentional vacancy to enable child stability
5. Other (please specify)
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL EXCLUDING SHORT BREAK HOMES (Q1 CODE 4 NOT YES)

Q5a.

Which of the following is closest to the amount of time that the beds are unoccupied for?

NOTE: We know this varies - we are interested in the approximate length of time beds are unoccupied for.

1. About 1 to 3 days
2. About a week
3. About 2 to 3 weeks
4. About a month
5. Usually over 5 weeks
6. Varies too much to say
7. Don't know
8. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL IF Q4C=3

Unoccupied_length

When beds are unoccupied due to insufficient staff, how long are they typically unoccupied for?

We know this varies – we are interested in the approximate length of time beds are unoccupied for due to insufficient staff

1. One month or less
2. More than 1 month and up to 2 months

3. More than 2 months and up to 3 months
4. More than 3 months and up to 4 months
5. More than 4 months
6. Varies too much to say
7. Don't know
8. Prefer not to say

About the staff in your children's home

Next, we would like to collect some information about the staff in your home

ASK ALL

Q9

Overall, how many staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who have responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Please include the total headcount, that is a count of all individual staff, regardless of their working pattern. We will ask about Full-Time Equivalent later in the survey.

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q10.

Of the total number of staff currently working in your home (based on the headcount you just reported), overall, how many of these staff, including yourself, are responsible *for supervising or managing* other members of staff?

Please include the total headcount, that is a count of all individual staff, regardless of their working pattern. We will ask about Full-Time Equivalent later in the survey.

Please use the same inclusions and exclusions as the previous question. [Click here](#) for a reminder of these.

SHOW IF RESPONDENT SELECTS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BUTTON:

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL
FTE_care_numeric

Thank you for providing total headcount. The next two questions ask about the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff.

Overall, how many Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who have responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Please count all full-time staff as 1, and all part-time staff as a proportion based on their contracted hours. Please use your organisation's definition of FTE hours. Some staff work part time, so please express hours worked as a proportion of FTE.

For example:

- If there is one full-time and one half time member of staff, please express this as 1.5 FTE (1 for the full time member of staff and 0.5 for the part time member of staff who works 50% of full time hours).
- If your organisation's definition of FTE is 40 hours per week and you have 2 members of staff who are full-time and 1 member of staff who is part-time and works 30 hours a week, please express this as 2.75 FTE. This is calculated as 2 for the 2 full time members of staff and 0.75 for the part-time member of staff (30 hours worked / 40 full-time hours = 0.75)

Please use the same inclusions and exclusions as the previous question. [Click here for a reminder of these.](#)

SHOW IF RESPONDENT SELECTS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BUTTON:

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

FTE_supervising_numeric

Of the total number of Full Time Equivalent staff currently working in your home (just reported), overall, how many Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, including yourself, do you currently have working in your home who are responsible *for supervising or managing* other members of staff?

Please count all full-time staff as 1, and all part-time staff as a proportion based on their contracted hours. Please use your organisation's definition of FTE hours. Some staff work part time, so please express hours worked as a proportion of FTE.

Please click [here](#) for some examples of how to calculate FTE.

SHOW IF RESPONDENT SELECTS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BUTTON:

For example:

- If there is one full-time and one half time member of staff, please express this as 1.5 FTE (1 for the full time member of staff and 0.5 for the part time member of staff who works 50% of full time hours).
- If your organisation's definition of FTE is 40 hours per week and you have 2 members of staff who are full-time and 1 member of staff who is part-time and works 30 hours a week, please express this as 2.75 FTE. This is calculated as 2 for the 2 full time members of staff and 0.75 for the part-time member of staff (30 hours worked / 40 full-time hours = 0.75)

Please use the same inclusions and exclusions as the previous question. Click [here](#) for a reminder of these.

SHOW IF RESPONDENT SELECTS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BUTTON:

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

International_recruit

Since 1 January 2023, how many people who have responsibility for the care of children and young people, if any, have you recruited from outside of the UK?

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

Enter Number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

INTRO TO STAFF QUESTIONS

We would like to know a bit more about the staff who work at your home. For now, we are interested in the number of people employed directly by your home (full-time, part-time and zero-hour contracts).

We only need to know about those who have responsibility for the care of children and young people. There will be a question about agency staff later.

If you have completed the datasheet we sent to you – you can take the information from this.

You will be able to choose whether to answer about yourself and five members of staff, or all members of staff, depending on your preference.

Please use the same inclusions and exclusions as the previous questions. Click here for a reminder for these.

ONLY SHOW IF BUTTON CLICKED FOR A REMINDER:

For all future questions on staff numbers please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home.
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

For all future questions on staff members please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home.
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff.
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists).
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

There will be rows for the number of members of staff you are answering about, plus an additional first row for you to answer as the manager of your home. Please use one row for one member of staff.

If you choose to answer for 5 members of staff, and your home has more than 5 staff (excluding yourself) please list all staff in alphabetical order by surname [**FIRST HALF**: from A-Z] / [**SECOND HALF**: from Z-A] and provide details for the first 5.

All of the information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence in line with GDPR and no individual members of staff will be identified in the reported survey data. The information is being collected to get a better understanding of the profile of the workforce in children's homes.

ASK ALL

Q11intro

You are about to record the information we included in the datasheet.

You said you have [insert number here] members of staff working in your children's home. How many members of staff will you be providing information for?

Please select one of the options below.

1. 5 members of staff and myself
2. All [insert number of staff selected at Q9] members of staff, including myself

ASK ALL

Q11

[IF 5 staff selected: Please fill out the following questions for 5 staff and yourself. If you have more than 5 staff – please list all staff in alphabetical order by surname [FIRST HALF: from A-Z] / [SECOND HALF: from Z-A] and provide details for the first 5.]

[IF all staff selected: Please fill out the following questions for your staff. Please list all staff in alphabetical order by surname.]

For each staff member:

Contract type

Select from list

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Zero-hours
- Other
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Does this person manage or supervise other staff

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Total number of years working in the children's homes sector

Enter total number of years, to the nearest whole number

- 0-100
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Number of hours work in a normal week, excluding overtime

If hours vary too much to say – please enter number of hours worked in last working week)

- 0-100
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Did this staff member work more than their contracted hours in the last working week?

If the staff member could not work for any reason, please think back to their last typical working week

- Yes
- No
- Varies too much to say
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Hourly rate of pay

Enter figure in £s (e.g.£10.50)

- 0-100
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Qualification questions for staff

We'd like to know more about what type of training and qualifications staff who work in children's homes have.

Over the next few screens please select the type and level of qualification each of the members of staff you are answering for have.

If you have completed the datasheet we sent to you – you can take the information from this.

Please answer for the same members of staff you answered for on the previous screen.

ASK ALL

Q12

Which of the following qualifications (if any) do the staff currently have?

- Only include qualifications they hold, not ones they are working towards
- Please click the qualifications that apply in each column - as many as apply for each member of staff
- If you completed the datasheet this is item X

For each staff member:

- The Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or equivalent)
- The Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care (or equivalent)
- Don't know
- None of these
- Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q13.

Are any of the staff currently working towards any of the following:

- ONLY INCLUDE QUALIFICATIONS THEY ARE WORKING TOWARDS, NOT ONES THEY HOLD
- PLEASE CLICK THE QUALIFICATIONS THAT APPLY IN EACH COLUMN – AS MANY AS APPLY FOR EACH MEMBER OF STAFF
- IF YOU COMPLETED THE DATASHEET THIS IS ITEM X

For each staff member:

- The Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or equivalent)
- The Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Care (or equivalent)
- Don't know
- None of these
- Prefer not to say

IF 'THE LEVEL 3 DIPLOMA' IS NOT SELECTED AT Q12 AND Q13 FOR AT LEAST ONE STAFF MEMBER

Qualification_not

Why are some staff members not working towards a Level 3 (or equivalent) qualification?

Please select all that apply

1. They're still in their probation period
2. Lack of time to undertake training due to resource constraints
3. Lack of time to undertake training due to working an additional job
4. They started the qualification but are now leaving
5. They are relief or bank staff
6. They do not want to do the qualification
7. Another reason (please specify)
8. Don't know

Agency and bank staff

We'd like to ask you about any agency staff in your home.

Agency workers are individuals employed by an agency who are temporarily assigned to your children's home to cover shifts. Agency workers are not employed by your home.

ASK ALL

Q14.

Thinking about the last four weeks, on how many different days have you used at least one agency staff who has had responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Please exclude any roles related to teaching or nursing.

Enter Number [0-300]

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q16.

Compared to [DYNAMIC MONTH: SHOW THE MONTH OF THE DATE SURVEY IS COMPLETED] 2023 how frequently are you using agency staff who have responsibility for the care of children and young people in your home?

1. More frequently
2. About the same
3. Less frequently
4. Don't know
5. Not applicable
6. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Bank_number

Bank or relief workers are a pool of staff employed directly by a children's home provider or local authority rather than workers employed through a third party such as an agency.

Thinking about the last four weeks, on how many different days have you used at least one bank or relief staff who has had responsibility for the care of children and young people?

Please exclude any roles related to teaching or nursing.

- Enter Number [0-300]
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Recruitment

Next we would like to ask about recruitment and retention in your home.

ASK ALL

Q18.

Since [**DYNAMIC MONTH: SHOW THE MONTH OF THE DATE SURVEY IS COMPLETED**] 2023, how many staff members who have responsibility for the care of children or young people have left your children's home?

Please use the same inclusions and exclusions as the previous questions.

Please **include**:

- Full and part time staff employed directly by the home
- Any staff responsible for the care of children and young people who are currently absent due to sickness or other short-term or long-term leave, such as maternity or paternity leave.

Please **exclude**:

- Any teaching or nursing staff employed by your home
- Any support staff you may have such as cleaners and catering staff
- Any staff from outside the home who come in for a limited number of hours to provide specialist support / services (e.g. speech therapists or psychologists)
- Any agency staff or bank staff.

- Enter Number [0-300]
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

ASK ALL**Q19**

And when care staff leave your home, which of the following types of job have they moved to?

Please select all that apply.

1. Another children's home
2. An agency, offering staff to children's homes
3. Family support work
4. Foster carer
5. Social work
6. Another role in children's social care
7. Adult social care
8. Outside care sector - Early Years childcare
9. Outside care sector – Schools
10. Outside care sector - Further education
11. Outside care sector - Youth work
12. Outside care sector – retail
13. Outside care sector – hospitality
14. N/A – they retired
15. Something else (please specify)
16. Don't know
17. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL**Q20**

What are the main reasons care staff have left your home?

Please select all that apply.

1. Better pay elsewhere
2. Better working hours or conditions elsewhere
3. Pressures of the role/working in care
4. Feeling burn out/stress
5. Pressures of completing qualification
6. Lack of qualifications
7. Performance issues
8. Career change
9. Promotion
10. Personal reasons (for example, caring for family or moving location)
11. They retire
12. Other (please specify)

13. Don't know
14. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q21.

What do you think would help most with retaining care staff in the children's homes sector?

Please select all that apply.

1. Increased pay for staff
2. More opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD)/training
3. More/better career progression
4. More flexible working hours
5. More flexibility in qualification requirements
6. Better advertising of the roles and expectations
7. Other (please specify)
8. Don't know
9. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q23.

How many vacancies, if any, do you currently have open?

1. Care staff roles working with children
2. Managerial or supervisory roles

Enter number

Don't know

Prefer not to say

ASK ALL**Q24.**

On average, how long does it take to fill a vacancy for the following roles:

Please consider the length of time between a vacancy becoming available and a new person starting in role.

- care staff working with children
- managerial or supervisory staff

Please consider the length of time between a vacancy becoming available and a new person starting in role.

1. Less than one month
2. One month but less than two months
3. Two months but less than three months
4. Three months but less than six months
5. Six months up to one year
6. More than one year
7. Varies too much to say
8. Don't know
9. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL**Q26.**

When recruiting, how easy or difficult is it to find staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience?

Please think just about staff who have responsibility for the care of children and young people

Care staff working with children

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult
- Not applicable/have not tried to recruit
- Don't Know
- Prefer not to say

Managerial / Supervisory staff

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult
- Not applicable/have not tried to recruit
- Don't Know
- Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

Q27

What are the main challenges in filling vacancies for care staff?

Please select all that apply.

1. Too few applicants with the right experience
2. Too few applicants with the right skills
3. Too few applicants with the right attitude, motivation or personality
4. Too few applicants (other)
5. Limitations on career progression / prospects
6. The terms and conditions offered for the vacancy (including pay)
7. Job entails shift work / unsociable hours
8. Visa issues
9. Covid-19 related issues
10. Hard for us to find temporary cover / seasonal work
11. Location of our home – difficult to access
12. Location of our home – housing issues in local area
13. Competition from other types of work within children's home sector
14. Competition from other types of work outside children's home sector
15. Something else (please specify)
16. There are no difficulties
17. Don't Know
18. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

CPD

What challenges, if any, do you face as the manager in providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training to your staff?

Please select all that apply

1. Lack of formal CPD opportunities available (e.g., external courses)
2. Lack of informal CPD opportunities available (e.g., shadowing).
3. Lack of CPD resources available
4. Not enough budget available
5. Unclear how much money there is available to spend on CPD and training
6. Lack of staff time to undertake training
7. Lack of motivation from staff to do the training
8. Other
9. Do not face any challenges
10. Don't know

ASK ALL

Mental_health

How confident do you feel that the staff in your home are able to identify when children and young people are experiencing poor mental health?

1. Very confident
2. Fairly confident
3. Not very confident
4. Not at all confident
5. Don't know

Re-contact survey questions

ASK ALL

Finally, we ask that the person who completes this questionnaire enters their name, job title, phone number, email address and name of children's home below. This is so the research team at Verian can contact you if we need to clarify any information. These details will not be shared with the Department for Education.

What is your name:

What is your job title?:

Telephone number [validation: please only allow 11 digits]:

Email address:

Name of children's home

Survey close

ASK ALL

You have now completed the survey. Thank you for you taking part.

Annex 3 – Invite letter

Verian (formerly Kantar Public)
4 Millbank, Westminster, SW1P 3JA
Freephone: REDACTED
Website: <https://www.veriangroup.com/>
XX September 2024
Reference: xxx

[First name] [Last name]
<Children's Home Name>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<Address 3>
<Address 4>

Dear [First name] [Last name],

The Department for Education (DfE) are writing to invite [Children's Home Name] to take part in the 2024 Children's Homes Census.

DfE have appointed an independent research company, Verian (formerly Kantar Public), to conduct this research. The findings will help enhance DfE's understanding of the children's homes workforce and inform future policy thinking on issues such as professional registration for staff working in children's homes, strengthening leadership, quality of provision, and supporting recruitment and retention.

We would like to invite the manager to complete the survey on behalf of the home.

Please take part by 18 October 2024. This is a follow up to the census conducted in March 2023. The link to the 2023 findings can be found on the back of this letter.

Why take part?

- ✓ It is quick and easy. Once the initial datasheet is complete, the survey should only take about 15 minutes.
- ✓ The survey will provide DfE and the sector with up-to-date information which will help to better understand the challenges that homes face

How to take part

- 1. Go to REDACTED or scan the QR code on a smartphone**
- 2. Enter your ID: [username]**
- 3. Enter your passcode: [passcode]**

We have enclosed a datasheet which outlines some of the information the survey will cover, including information which you may need to look up in advance of completing the census or ask other members of staff to provide information for.

Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can withdraw from the research at any point. DfE and Ofsted will never see any data that will be able to identify an individual setting or staff member. More details on privacy and confidentiality can be found on the back of this letter.

We hope you will be able to take part in this important research. We recognise the considerable pressures on your time and that of your staff and would be grateful for your participation.

With thanks and best wishes,

SIGNATURES

Deputy Director, Looked after Children Placement Division, Department for Education

Why have I been invited to take part in this research?

You have been invited to take part in this important research as a manager of a children's home in England.

Why are my views important?

Your views are important to help inform the DfE on future workforce policy development, with the aim to help raise the status and profile of the workforce, help with recruitment and retention, and improve the quality of provision. This research is a follow up to the census conducted in March 2023. The findings can be read in full here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-workforce-census-stage-1-findings-2023>

What kind of questions will be asked?

We have enclosed a datasheet which outlines some of the information the survey will cover, including information which you may need to look up in advance of completing the census or ask other members of staff to provide information for. The survey will cover topics such as recruitment and retention and information about your staff such as type of work contracts. The survey does not need to be completed in one sitting – you will be able to save your answers to finish at a later date.

Is this research confidential?

Yes. Your answers and personal details will be treated confidentially in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and will only be used for the purpose of this research. If your home took part in the 2023 survey, by taking part this year you are agreeing for the survey answers to be linked to the survey answers submitted by the home in 2023 for analysis purposes only. No staff level data will be linked in this way and **DfE and Ofsted will never see any data that will be able to identify an individual setting or staff member.** All findings will be made anonymous in the reporting of results. More details about the research and about your privacy can be found at REDACTED.

Who is conducting this research and is it genuine?

The research is being conducted on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) by Verian, an independent research agency (www.veriangroup.com).

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any queries for the Department for Education regarding this census, please email REDACTED

To talk to someone about the research or ask not to be contacted further about this research, please contact Verian on: REDACTED or REDACTED.

Annex 4 – Sample profile for qualitative interviews

Table 13 Profile of achieved qualitative sample

Profile of achieved qualitative sample	Number interviewed
Setting type: Long term	10
Setting type: Short term	3
Setting type: Both long and short term	3
Setting type: Residential Special School	2
Setting type: Short break	2
Sector: Local authority	6
Sector: Private	8
Sector: Voluntary	6
Number of beds in home: 1 to 3	6
Number of beds in home: 4 to 6	11
Number of beds in home: 7 or more	3
Region: East Midlands	4
Region: East of England	2
Region: London	2
Region: North East	2
Region: North West	2
Region: South East	2
Region: South West	1
Region: West Midlands	1
Region: Yorkshire and the Humber	4
Difficulty recruiting care staff: Easy	1
Difficulty recruiting care staff: Neither easy nor difficult	2
Difficulty recruiting care staff: Difficult	16
Difficulty recruiting care staff: Not applicable	1
Difficulty recruiting managers: Easy	1
Difficulty recruiting managers: Neither easy nor difficult	4
Difficulty recruiting managers: Difficult	13
Difficulty recruiting managers: Not applicable	2

Profile of achieved qualitative sample	Number interviewed
Staff type: Registered managers ⁹	19
Staff type: Care staff - junior	16
Staff type: Care staff - senior	12
Staff type: Care staff – assistant or deputy managers	4
Staff type: External specialists	8
Staff type: Strategic staff	4

⁹ A registered manager from all 20 participating settings was interviewed. However, one of these registered managers was classified as strategic staff by virtue of their responsibility for multiple settings.



Department
for Education

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