

Combining Fostering and Other Work



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**The
Fostering
Network**



Department
for Education

Foreword



In England, the majority of children in care live with foster carers. The love, support and stability they offer to some of our most vulnerable children is invaluable.

This report is clear that it is possible to combine fostering with other work if fostering services and employers are supportive and flexible. It highlights the importance of fostering services thinking differently about how they recruit and retain people to care, and provide a positive role model, for some of our most vulnerable children.

Having a foster carer that combines fostering with other work will not be right for every child but where the needs of the child can be met by foster carers who work alongside their fostering role I want to remove any barriers that might prevent people with the right skills and qualities from coming forward. I also want to ensure that those who are already making an important difference in children's lives are offered flexibility and support to enable them to combine fostering with other work.

So, I urge fostering services to consider what they might do differently to enable their foster carers to work alongside their caring responsibilities if they wish to by, for example, offering training and support outside of normal 'office hours'.

I would also encourage employers to consider how they can support their employees who are interested in fostering or that are already caring for looked-after children.

The Department for Education (DfE) has, this year, become the government's first foster-family-friendly employer, offering staff extra support and flexibility to help them balance their work and fostering responsibilities. We hope this will enable us to retain those valuable and experienced people who may otherwise feel they are unable to combine their fostering responsibilities with work. Other government departments and some local councils are following our lead and actively considering implementing similar policies.

The contents of this report provides fostering services and employers with food for thought on how they can encourage and support people with the right skills and experience, who want to combine fostering with another job, to come forward and offer some of our most vulnerable children an opportunity to experience a loving, stable family life.

Edward Timpson

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Some young people would like their foster carers to go to work, others would like someone to be at home and able to spend more time with them –most important is that foster carers want to help young people.

Focus group with young people in Trafford, September 2013 ¹

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Combining work and fostering is not right for every foster carer and not right for every child. However, I believe it can be a very successful model of foster care, and not just for the least challenging or least complex children. ²

Foster carer, 2014

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My partner and I have never felt discriminated against by our fostering service because of our sexuality. But we have felt discriminated against because we work.

Foster carer, 2013

“

Foster carers play an extremely valuable role in our communities, providing care and stability for often very vulnerable children. We are proud to be able to help colleagues who take on this role by giving them the time and support they need to undertake such an important and worthwhile commitment.

Judith Nelson, director of HR, Tesco

Introduction

Today, 63,000 children are living with foster carers across the UK. Most of them are in care because they have been neglected or abused. Foster families can give them the stability, love and support that they need to succeed in life.

The number of children coming into care is rising and we have a shortage of foster carers with the right skills in the right places, especially foster carers to look after those children considered 'hard to place' – children with disabilities, large sibling groups and teenagers. The results can be devastating: children are moved too frequently; placed too far from home, family, friends and school; split up from their own brothers and sisters; or placed in residential care when this may not be the best option for them.

One care leaver described being moved six times when she was in care. As she was moved across London as a 10 year old she said it '*felt like my life was ripped apart.*'³ She did not have the stability she needed.

Children in foster care have many different needs but all require their foster carers to be skilled, knowledgeable, committed to them and work as part of the team that supports them. However, many foster carers are not paid for the skills, time and expertise they bring to fostering. Of those who are paid, few receive anything like a living wage, although a very small number do receive significant fee payments. At the same time, it can be difficult to combine fostering with another job – some foster carers are told they cannot do this and give up employment when they are approved as foster carers.

If we are to recruit and retain foster carers with the right skills then there is an urgent need to think differently. Rather than blanket bans on foster carers working outside the home, we need to consider whether this is possible, and whether this would enable more people to come forward to foster, including those with relevant skills gained from other employment.

And if we are to recruit and retain foster carers who combine fostering with another job, then we need to think about how this would work for children, the foster carers looking after them, the service they foster for, and their employers too. This report begins to consider these issues.

Report overview

This report is part of a two-year project *Supporting fostering services to recruit more foster carers*, funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the Fostering Network. The report draws on a number of sources of information – a survey of foster carers⁴ discussions with fostering services⁵ and employers⁶ and desk research. It includes recommendations for fostering services and employers, information about the *Family Friendly Employers* initiative, as well as links to helpful resources.

The first part of the report includes findings from a survey of foster carers who combine fostering with another job. The first survey of its kind, it explores foster carers' employment before and after approval to foster, sheds light on their experiences throughout the approval process – including the support they receive from their fostering service and their employer; highlights their opinions about combining fostering with other work and identifies what kind of support would help them. There are messages for fostering services and employers, as well as for foster carers and prospective foster carers.

The second part of the report includes foster carer recruitment case studies, information about fostering friendly employers and useful resources for foster carers, fostering services and employers.



Research overview and key findings

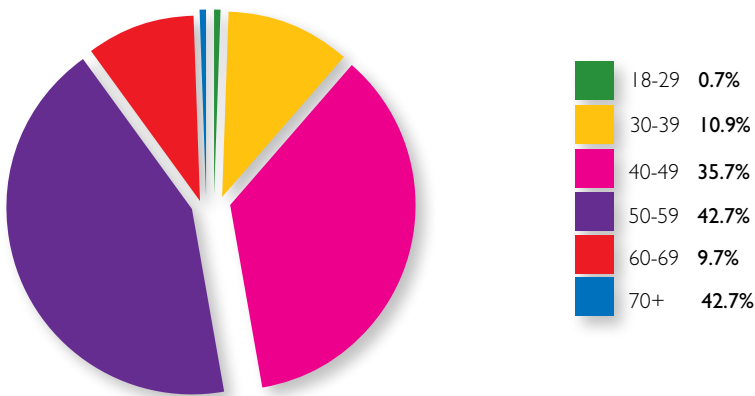
Methodology

During July to September 2013, an online survey was sent directly to 9,000 foster carers, publicised through The Fostering Network's *Foster Care* magazine (with a reach of 58,000 foster carers), and promoted via The Fostering Network's website and social media channels. 703 responses were received from foster carers across the UK, providing rich quantitative and qualitative data. Quotations are used throughout this report and they are from the foster carer survey unless otherwise stated.

Who responded?

- Of the 703 respondents, three-quarters foster with a partner; one-quarter alone.
- The age profile was broadly in line with the national foster carer population with a significant bulge of 36 per cent aged 40-49 and 43 per cent aged 50-59.

Age profile



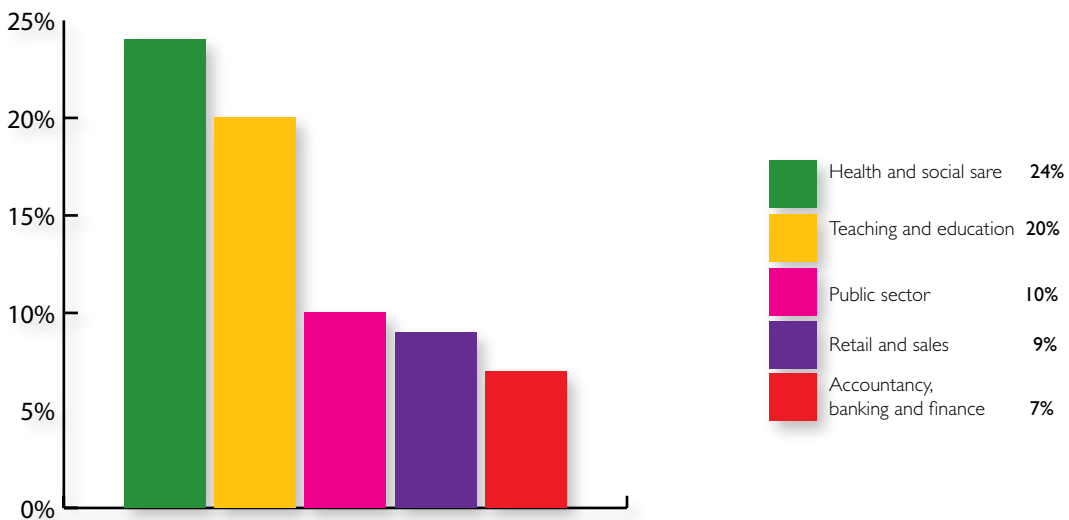


Key finding

88 per cent of respondents were in employment when they applied to foster

A majority worked in health and social care (24 per cent) and teaching and education (20 per cent). Significant numbers were also working in the public sector (10 per cent), retail and sales (9 per cent), accountancy, banking and finance (7 per cent), and hospitality, tourism and sport (6 per cent), with lower representation in all other sectors.

Foster carers' employment prior to fostering, by sector



- Job roles varied with highest concentrations being manager (17 per cent), clerical/secretarial (13 per cent), teacher (9 per cent), civil servant (8 per cent), business owner (8 per cent), services (7 per cent) and nurse (7 per cent).
- There appears to be significant recruitment of teaching assistants, nannies/child minders/nursery nurses, teachers, social workers, carers and nurses.
- However, respondents had worked in a wide variety of jobs, from chef to photographer and computer programmer to solicitor.



Key finding

40 per cent of foster carers say their fostering service required or pressurised them to give up their job to become a foster carer

Foster carers say they were required or pressurised to give up their job to become a foster carer for a variety of reasons which are highlighted below:



Key finding

Policy and practice varies from fostering service to fostering service

Some fostering services do not allow foster carers to work:

I was told I couldn't work and foster.

The fostering organisation I am with does not allow carers to work.

I applied to an independent fostering agency and they make you give up your job.

I was told I needed to be free and fully flexible at all times.

Part of the agreement for fostering was that I give up work to be there 24/7 for the young person.

I was told I wouldn't receive a placement whilst working even though I only worked 10 hours a week term time and during school hours.

Others take a more flexible approach to combining fostering with other work:

No pressure [to give up work] from current fostering agency but had to leave previous agency as they insisted I give up work.

I am still nursing on a 9-3 Mon-Fri term-time only contract.



Key finding

Foster carers felt under pressure to stop working before approval

Kept asking me for the date for resignation.

[I had to] give in my notice before going to panel.

The situation was, unsurprisingly, different for people who applied to foster as a couple or as a single carer.

Where people applied to foster as a couple, one carer could be required to be at home full-time.

One of us had to be at home.

We were told that we would not be able to foster if we both remained in full-time employment.

Our contract says that the expectation is that the main carer will not have another job.

Single carers were under pressure to stop working, heightening the financial risks of fostering without any other form of income.

They stressed due to me being a single carer, I wouldn't be able to attend all meetings and appointments if I was at work.

For me to foster as a lone carer they said it was essential [to stop working] and I could not work even with school age child as I had to be available at all times.



Key finding

Some foster carers chose to give up other work...and they were aware of the financial risks in doing so

I had intended to give up - fostering is a professional job!!!

I left work specifically to foster.

I had to leave my well-paid post [as a teacher] without any guarantee of income.

Many foster carers feel that it is not realistic to work and foster:

I wouldn't be able to foster if both of us were in full-time employment.

The process of being assessed placed me under huge pressure as there were so many long meetings and forms to go through.

[Can't work] due to school runs and contact.

The child I had kept going missing and I was on the phone to police etc. during working hours, many times I had to leave work and get her. I had to take days off work to do this.

I care for babies/preschool, so I have to be home in the day.

[I'm a] specialist therapeutic carer so requirement to be home 24/7.



Key finding

29 per cent of foster carers were expected to reduce their hours of work

I worked part-time to begin with, and [the fostering service] was very, very supportive of this.

They put a lot of pressure [on me] to leave work, compromised to cut hours.

They said I had to cut down work drastically to enable the child to settle in. As a single carer it was very difficult indeed to make ends meet.



Key finding

Looking back at their experience of fostering, 52 per cent of foster carers who were required to give up work to foster think stopping work was the wrong decision

Foster carers expressed a range of reasons why they felt they should be able to combine fostering with other work.

1. Fostering does not provide a steady income – the biggest issue for foster carers

It was my choice to give work up if they paid well enough to allow me to lose my salary.

Despite being told we'd have a placement straight from panel we waited three months for a child meaning we struggled financially.

As a single carer it was very difficult to make ends meet between placements.

[As a teacher] I could do respite care during the school holidays and work, but to do short-term fostering I had to leave my well paid post with no guarantee of income.

Some foster carers described experiences of struggling financially between placements so they had to find other work, only to get fewer placements because they were working outside the home.

2. Decisions should be based on the needs of children

Needs to be some flexibility providing the needs of the foster child are put first all the time.

3. Foster carers as positive role models

Looked after children do need someone who can commit to them but it is also a positive message to young people to see a significant person to them working.

Children need to see [foster carers] working not claiming.

I think it's important for kids to see women working.

4. Foster carers were clear that they needed support to make fostering possible alongside other work.

Flexible employers can support foster carers

I think if the employer is willing to be flexible it can work.

Fostering can work around your job.

Support for foster carers and fostered children is critical

Without respite it would not have been possible for me to work and foster at the same time.

I had to give up work because no support with very challenging child.

I had very good support networks.

Fostering friendly employers?

Foster carers reflected on the ways their employers supported them during the approval process – a time when they need to be trained and assessed before being able to foster. The picture was mixed, with some foster carers praising their employers, especially citing sympathetic and supportive line managers. However, most had felt unsupported and had used annual leave to attend training and meetings. Some had been worried about telling their employer that they were applying to foster, fearing it would impact on their employer or colleagues' perception of their ability to do their job.

They were not at all sympathetic.

I had to take unpaid leave.

I used my holidays.

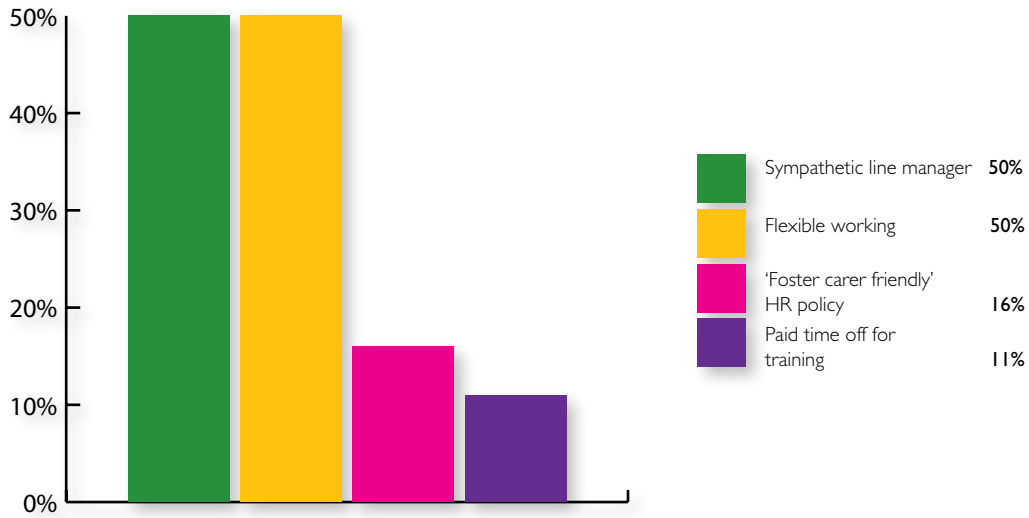
I didn't tell them.

My employer was not happy.

No support, in fact they ended my contract.

Given that employers are not required to offer any support, it is unsurprising that HR policy and practice varies widely – where support was in place, most relied on general flexible working policies and a sympathetic line manager.

Employer support during approval process

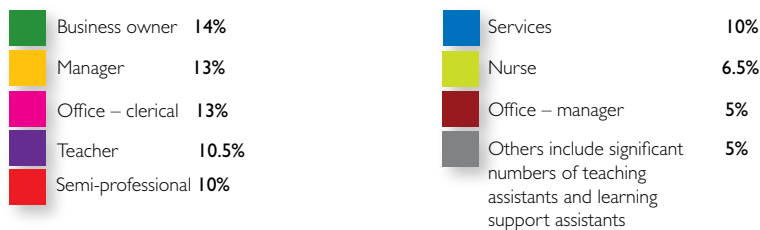
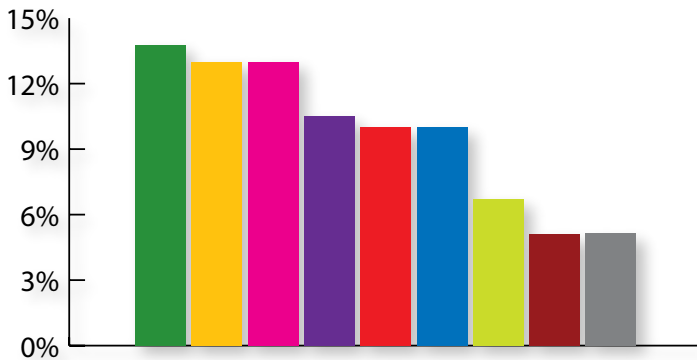


Key finding

37 per cent of respondents are currently working in addition to fostering.

Over half work more than 20 hours per week.

Foster carers who combine fostering with other employment are concentrated in the following types of roles



Fostering Services – Things to think about

- Look at your recruitment materials and consider whether people who work may be ruling themselves out of fostering.
- Consider recruitment campaigns focusing on sectors where part-time, flexible working is well supported, especially where skills are compatible with fostering.

Foster carers described the support offered by their current employer: The picture is, unsurprisingly, mixed.

There are some very supportive employers:

I have everything I need and am supported fully.

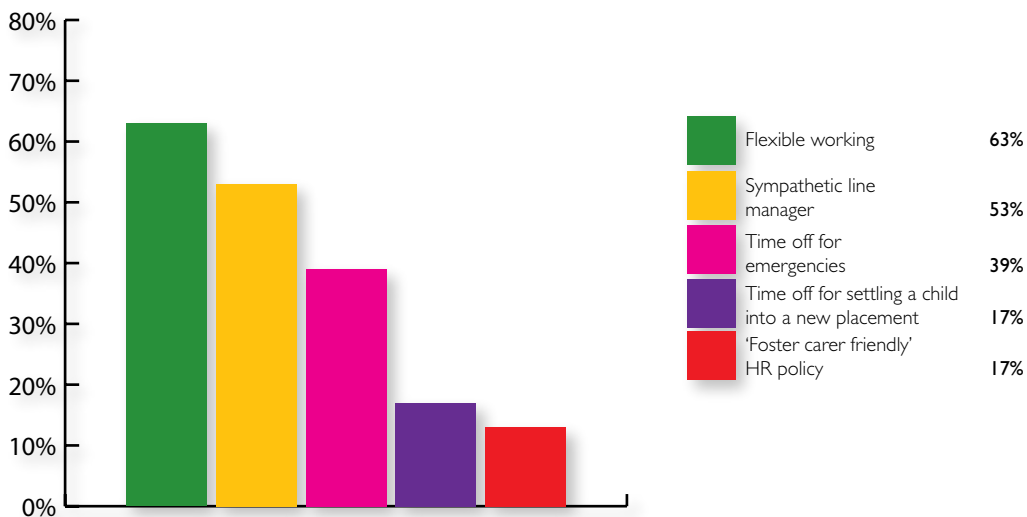
My employers are already very understanding.

They are flexible if I have to attend a LAC [looked after child] meeting.

And some less supportive employers:

Employer not happy with many appointments and time off.

Current employer support for fostering role

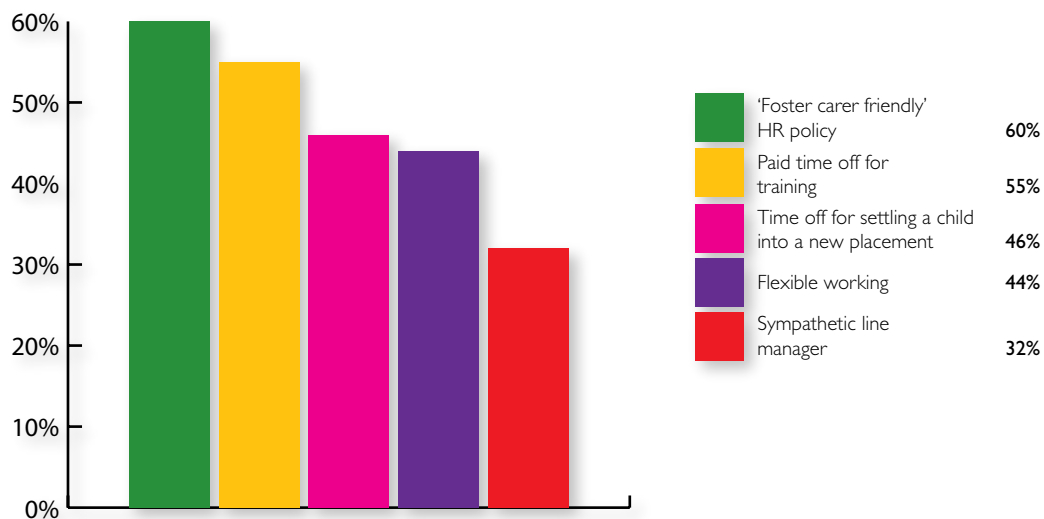


What would help foster carers to work and foster?

Messages for employers

Foster carers say that they need more flexibility and understanding from employers, who often do not appreciate the challenges of fostering and do not have HR policies to support employees who foster, including family and friends foster carers who may have started fostering unexpectedly. Foster carers are clear that they would prefer enhanced ‘rights’ at work, designed to help them balance their working and caring responsibilities.

What would help foster carers to work and foster?



A foster carer’s perspective

‘I work for the NHS and I know that they do offer adoptive parents time off with pay, at the same time they have a family working policy and carers’ leave but this is only if blood relative. I feel this could be expanded on and foster carers included.’ (foster carer, 2014)

An employer’s perspective

‘At O2 we recognise that foster carers make a huge difference to the lives of the children in their care. We want to make it as easy as possible for our people to manage their foster care commitments, whilst balancing their job responsibilities, and are pleased to be able to support our people who take on such a rewarding and worthwhile role.’ (Ann Pickering, HR Director, O2)

Foster carers are clear that having an employer that understands and respects their fostering commitment is hugely beneficial to them.

The Department for Education suggests a number of ways that employers could support fostering:



Foster Family Friendly Policies – Ideas for Employers

Foster carers provide a stable and loving home for some of the most vulnerable children in our society. The children they care for often have complex and challenging needs. A supportive and flexible employer will enable foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Here are some ideas for ways that employers might help support fostering.

- 1. Before children are placed....**

Anyone interested in fostering must go through a robust assessment process and intensive training before they can be approved as foster carers. Employers can support staff interested in fostering by giving them time off to attend pre-approval training which is approximately five days usually spread over a number of weeks.
- 2. When children are first placed.....**

When children are first placed with a foster carer they may feel anxious, upset or worried. Having their foster carer there to settle them into their new home can make all the difference. Access to flexible working or swapping shifts with colleagues could really help foster carers to do this.
- 3. The continuing commitment....**

Foster carers need to be able to respond flexibly to the needs of the children in their care. They are an important part of the core team around the child and must be able to attend the regular meetings about the children they care for. Recognising this and enabling staff to work flexibly will help them to balance their work and caring responsibilities.
- 4. Planning for the unexpected....**

The unexpected often happens. Providing foster carers with the same access to emergency leave as parents, and recognising fostered children as dependents, will enable foster carers to provide a stable and secure home for the children they care for.
- 5. Celebrate and support foster care....**

You can celebrate and support foster care by:

 - o promoting your business as a foster family friendly employer
 - o making information about how to become a foster carer available on noticeboards or intranet sites
 - o linking up with local fostering services to host an information session for your staff about fostering and to explain the support you offer
 - o providing space in your office or store for local fostering services during Foster Care Fortnight (held every May) to support the drive to raise awareness and recruit new foster carers
 - o helping your local foster care association raise money to provide support services and social events for local foster families

To find out more about fostering visit:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare>

What would help foster carers to work and foster?

Messages for fostering services

Consider the impact of current policy and practice on the recruitment and retention of foster carers and what issues would need to be addressed to support foster carers who work.

The system does not support working carers. Fostering services said [us working] was not an issue as the child would fit into our situation not the other way round. But we have come across many hurdles. A lot of the courses and forums that are arranged are only during the school day term time in which we cannot attend due to being at work, nothing is put in place for working carers.⁷

Recruitment

- Be open to foster carers working – so long as this is balanced with the interests of the child.
- Recruit the foster carers you need and allow foster carers to continue working until the first placement is made – too many are without placements and without an income.
- Consider promoting fostering to working people, for example to recruit foster carers with particular skills through Recommend a Carer schemes (see Asphaleia case study), or through organisational networks (see Leeds City Council case study).

Review pay schemes *

- When a fostering service asks that one foster carer must be at home 24/7, they should ensure that the level of fee reflects that requirement.
- Foster carers who work can struggle to access training required to move up to a higher fee level.
- Foster carers who bring highly developed and relevant skills to fostering because they work elsewhere can feel their skills in fostering are not rewarded.

To be on the pay scale I am on it is a stipulation that I am available 24 hours a day which rules out teaching.

Support for children and foster carers is essential

- Ensure that delegated authority is clear, so foster carers can make appropriate support arrangements.
- Support for children is essential – if a child is well-supported by other members of the team around the child, then there is less pressure on the foster carer.

- Support is essential for foster carers too, for example practical support such as access to holiday schemes, breakfast clubs, emergency child care.

[The] lack of support makes balancing fostering and work difficult.

- Consider ways to involve all foster carers in support groups – coffee mornings are not accessible for those who are working between school hours.

Working five days does mean that I have been unable to attend any support groups as they all meet during the day.⁸

Be flexible about times of meetings and training

- Consider the diversity of your foster carer population and offer alternative meeting and training options, such as conference calls or online training.
- Acknowledge evidenced work-related training as part of a foster carer's training portfolio.

Midday meetings for Reviews and supervision created conflict with my boss.

[I took] too much time off to attend courses cancelled at last minute, social worker visits could be planned in the middle of the day...created conflict with my boss.

It is a challenge 'juggling' home and work commitments, but it is possible. Flexibility is needed on all sides for it to work and a good support network from both social workers and 'back up' network...Meetings with social workers are scheduled mostly after school hours which helps.⁹

Ensure there is a culture in the fostering team and foster carer community that values the diversity of foster carers, including those who work outside of fostering

- Foster carers say they have faced hostility from fostering services as well as other foster carers.

My partner and I have never felt discriminated against by our fostering service because of our sexuality. But we have felt discriminated against because we work.¹⁰

I have had quite a bit of negativity from other carers who condemn the fact that I work, but I believe [my foster child] is learning good work ethics and values...she is taught that things don't just land on your lap.¹¹

Things to think about

Local authorities should set clear expectations for independent fostering providers. There is a perception that local authorities will only place children with independent sector carers if they are at home full time.

CASE STUDY ONE

Become a foster carer friendly employer –and inspire others to follow

North Lincolnshire Council is now a foster carer friendly employer. 'We already have six council workers that foster – what better way to champion fostering than through our own staff', says Annemarie Carlberg, services manager, fostering services team. Her team actively promote fostering to local employers.

What would help foster carers to work and foster?

Messages for foster carers and prospective foster carers

Things to think about

- Think about the needs of individual children and discuss expectations with the fostering service, including provision of child care and other support.
- Ensure the fostering service is prepared to support your employment.
- Discuss fostering with your employer and ensure they are able to offer support and you are able to work flexibly if necessary.
- Fostering can be emotionally challenging, so you need to ensure your supervision needs are met for your fostering role as well as at work.
- Consider your support networks, for example do you have a supportive partner or friends who can provide child care if needed?
- Think about how you'll manage school holidays, for example term-time only working, accessing cover in holidays for foster carers, holiday clubs or play schemes and so on. Be ready to negotiate with your fostering service about options.
- Ensure there is adequate support to meet a child's needs. One foster carer described how their local authority responded positively to a request for additional support following permanent exclusion from school – a crisis was turned around and the placement did not breakdown.

CASE STUDY TWO

Broadening the range of foster carers – a focus on combining fostering with employment

Leeds City Council is leading the West Yorkshire Consortium (comprising of Leeds City Council, Calderdale Council, Fostering Yorkshire and Core Assets) that is funded by the Department for Education to explore innovative approaches to foster carer recruitment and retention. The West Yorkshire Consortium agreed on a collaborative approach to trialling new and innovative approaches to recruitment and retention of foster carers with the key objective to secure a diverse cohort of skilled and committed foster carers to meet the needs of looked after children across the consortium region and beyond.

As part of this pilot project, the consortium's plans include increasing the recruitment of foster carers who combine fostering with other work, as well as people with professional backgrounds specifically. The purpose is to reach out to people who have the right background and skills to support the needs of children in care, including those with complex needs.

To measure the success of this aspect of the project, a new tool was developed to collate monitoring data to measure a baseline and subsequent changes in the number of enquiries and approvals from employed/professional status applicants. Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes were used to identify the professional status of those enquiring about fostering. The four agencies will continue to collect data to measure enquiries and approvals against the baseline throughout the project.

In order to improve the recruitment of working people, including those with professional backgrounds, a series of focus groups and interviews were conducted with foster carers and non-foster carers in employment and with those in professional occupations. These explored perceptions and experiences of fostering, barriers, concerns and misconceptions, information gaps, key messages that need to be conveyed and the most appropriate ways of attracting working/professional people into fostering. They provided a rich dataset with examples of the key concerns of prospective foster carers, such as childcare arrangements, the impact on careers and income and the need for flexible training, appointments and support systems. There were strong messages about ways in which fostering services need to adapt their approach to working with and supporting working foster carers. The findings from these focus groups and interviews are being used to inform recruitment strategy and planning. This includes innovative and differential recruitment approaches, such as targeted outreach work with clusters of professionals with relevant specialist skills (for example youth services and specialist schools) and addressing practical issues, such as introducing more flexible training and meeting times. The Consortium are planning recruitment practices that will be sustainable and will be available to all agencies after completion of this pilot project.

CASE STUDY THREE

Recruiting and valuing foster carers who work

Asphaleia, an independent fostering provider, has always encouraged working foster carers and has, through its general marketing as well as its *recommend a foster carer referral scheme*, attracted foster carers with backgrounds as GPs, solicitors and police officers. Some have come forward specifically because of their work and have specific interests in who they want to foster; for example, a solicitor who was especially interested in fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children as a result of his work in immigration. Foster carers are encouraged to continue working outside of fostering and not to rely solely on an income from fostering.

Recently, the agency has experienced a growing number of enquiries from people who want a new career and see fostering as a chance for development and growth.



Fostering friendly employers

Fostering Friendly Employers is The Fostering Network's new scheme designed to support and recognise employers who support fostering. We offer:

- Information and advice about fostering, supporting employers to understand the needs of employees who foster.
- Template foster carer friendly HR policies and advice.
- Opportunities to share good practice.
- National recognition of good practice at the annual Fostering Excellence Awards.

We are also inviting employers to celebrate and support fostering by:

- Promoting fostering and making information about how to become a foster carer available, for example to staff and customers.
- Hosting information sessions about fostering.
- Supporting *Foster Care Fortnight*, the annual campaign to raise awareness of fostering and encourage new foster carers to come forward.
- Supporting care leavers as they move into employment.

Please contact fosteringfriendlyemployers@fostering.net for information about fostering and lots of ideas about how you can support foster carers and fostered children and young people.

Fostering Friendly Employers

We are celebrating the growing list of employers that support foster carers who are providing stable and loving homes for some of society's most vulnerable children.

You can nominate an employer by emailing fosteringfriendlyemployers@fostering.net

Aberdeenshire Council

<http://arcadialite.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/SLProcedure.pdf>

Asda

Boots

British Gas

Carlisle City Council

Carlisle United Football Club

City of Westminster Council

www.westminster.gov.uk/become-foster-family-friendly-employer

Copeland Borough Council

Cumbria Constabulary

Cumbria County Council

www.cumbria.gov.uk/fostering/support/FosteringFriendly.asp

Cumbria Law Centre (Cumbria)

Department for Education

DfE employees who foster are able to take up to 20 days paid leave to attend training or meetings related to their role as a foster carer. They are also entitled to additional unpaid time off for unexpected emergencies, including settling new children. Employees are able to apply for:

- up to five days' leave during assessment
- an additional five days' leave during the approval process or when they are caring for a fostered child – eg meetings, training, settling an emergency placement
- up to 10 days' leave at the start of a permanent placement.

Environment Agency

Essex County Council

Offers five days leave per year to foster carers to attend meetings and/or training commitments. See Leave of Absence Policy: A Model for Schools & Academies: www.thurrockpss.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Essex-Leave-of-Absence-Policy-Sept-2010.doc

Go Ape Grizedale (Cumbria)

Greater Manchester Police

No specific policy but allow time off for dependents, including fostered children.

Hallmark Cards

Hampshire County Council

Kelda Group (includes Yorkshire Water and Kelda Water Services)

Provides three days' paid leave for training and assessment, flexible working to attend appointments and time off for emergencies/parental responsibilities under the company's parental and dependents leave policies. www.keldagroup.com/media/2483/fostering-policy.pdf

Local Government Association

Norfolk County Council

<http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/view/personnel101212item5pdf>

North Lincolnshire Council

O2 (Telefonica)

Telefonica, known as O2 in the UK, employs over 11,000 people. The fostering leave policy was introduced in 2007. Employees are able to take up to five days paid leave per year during the assessment process, and after approval. Further time off is at the discretion of their line manager.

Pioneer Foodservice (Cumbria)

Reading Council

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/documents/26881/Alldocs.pdf>

Royal College of Nursing

The RCN has no specific HR policies related to foster carers but HR policies support foster carers in taking account of their caring responsibilities, i.e. no distinction is made between birth children and those who are fostered - what matters is you have a caring responsibility for that child. This means that foster carers are eligible for up to five days per year paid special or carers' leave for emergencies, such as a foster child being ill. They can also request to change hours of work.

Sainsbury's

Support staff who are foster carers with the opportunity to request flexible working, career breaks and time off work to look after dependent children.¹²

Sellafield nuclear power plant

Tesco

The Fostering Network

University of Dundee

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/hr/policiesprocedures/worklife/fostercareleave/>

Wishes Cockermouth Ltd (Cumbria)

Westcom. Computing Solutions for West Cumbria (Cumbria)

CASE STUDY FOUR

Cumbria: 'Help support Cumbria's looked after children': a county wide foster carer friendly employers' strategy designed to promote good HR practice as well as strong corporate social responsibility

Cumbria County Council's fostering friendly employer scheme calls on employers to help support Cumbria's looked after children by enabling foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities to meet children's needs. There are two main calls to action:

- Recognise the needs of foster carers in employment policies.
- Help celebrate fostering and what foster carers do.

Cumbria County Council

Become a fostering friendly employer

Help support Cumbria's looked after children

Our foster carers have an important role. A supportive and flexible employer enables foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities to meet the needs of the children they care for.

Serving the people of Cumbria cumbria.gov.uk

Benefits of joining the scheme

Build on your brand - Send a message to potential customers that you are fully committed to looking after staff and the local community.

Show strong corporate social responsibility. People in Cumbria have a strong connection to Cumbria, and being seen to look after the wider community sends a clear message that you are a responsible company with a long term commitment to the area.

Supporting staff builds morale.

Promote your commitment to work life balance.

Staff will have access to advice information and support on helping staff who are or becoming foster carers.

Use the fostering friendly employer logo on recruitment material.

Group will:

Group as our media partner will be running a campaign raising awareness of fostering and those who are signing up to be a fostering friendly employer. As part of this you will receive:

- Editorial on your company in your local newspaper.
- Coverage on social media.

Cumbria County Council will:

- List you on our website in a fostering friendly employer directory.
- Announce your membership on our website.
- Announce your membership on social media (over 600 likes on facebook and 7000 followers on twitter).
- Provide support on raising awareness of fostering internally at your company.
- Advert in foster carer newsletter.
- Listing and further info on company in foster carer log on section.
- Advertising of vacant positions in foster carer log on section.

Find out more ▶

Go the website: cumbria.gov.uk/fostering or contact Alice Gill on 01228 226241 alice.gill@cumbria.gov.uk

Become a fostering friendly employer

Fostering friendly policies – ideas for employers

Our carers have an important role as part of the professional team around the child. A supportive employer will enable foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

How you can help: Employment policies

Time off for training

Anyone interested in fostering must go through a robust assessment process and intensive training before they can be approved as foster carers. Employers can support staff interested in fostering by giving them time off to attend pre-approval training which is approximately five days usually spread over a number of weeks.

Flexibility

Foster carers need to be able to

How you can help: Celebrating fostering

Your business could help celebrate and support foster care by:

- Making information about how to become a foster carer available on noticeboards, intranet sites or internal publications.
- Hosting an information session for your staff (we'll help!) about fostering and explain the support you offer.
- Providing space in your office or store during Foster Care Fortnight (held every May) to support the drive to raise awareness and recruit new foster carers.

Business demands that not all changes are the same size fits all, but employers consider if foster carers and do an to help. The reality is a small number of people come foster carers while the impact on your could be minimal, the our ability to recruit foster it be significant.

cumbria.gov.uk/fostering

Resources

Foster care friendly HR policies

Department for Education

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/b00209223/employers

The Fostering Network

Contact us for information and to share your policy by emailing fosteringfriendlyemployers@fostering.net

Other resources

Department for Education foster family friendly employers resources, including information about Tesco and O2, plus a case study of a foster carer who works for the Local Government Association.

The Fostering Network position statement on combining foster care and other work

www.fostering.net/sites/www.fostering.net/files/uploads/pdf/combining-fostering-and-other-work-position-statement.pdf

Foster carer Richard talks about combining fostering with other work

tinyurl.com/qxlhhz7

Next steps

‘Continue to raise the issue [to] protect working carers as well as encourage fostering agencies to take on foster carers who work...’ (foster carer, 2014)

The Fostering Network will:

1. Develop the Fostering Friendly Employers scheme and support employers to develop good practice.
2. Continue to work with the Department for Education, and other governments, fostering services, foster carers and employers.
3. Encourage fostering services to share policy and practice and consider the impact on recruitment and retention of foster carers.
4. Encourage and support fostering services to renew their own HR policies to develop fostering friendly policies.
5. Explore active promotion of fostering to people in other work and whether this could help attract people with the right skills to foster.
6. Explore the benefits for employers who adopt a fostering friendly approach.
7. Encourage debate about the challenges for fostering services in supporting foster carers who are employed in other jobs.
6. Undertake to ensure that children and young people’s views are considered.

¹ Focus groups were facilitated by Trafford Council. We are grateful to them for sharing findings for this report.

² Response to *Foster Care* magazine article from foster carer who wishes to remain anonymous, February 2014.

³ Presentation to the Fostering Network, July 2013.

⁴ Survey of foster carers undertaken by the Fostering Network, July-September 2013.

⁵ Including at the Fostering Network recruitment conference, December 2013; the Department for Education Partnership Learning Day, December 2013; IFP national forum, October 2013.

⁶ Including a seminar with employers, focused on fostering and the workplace, delivered in partnership with Inclusive Employers as part of National Inclusion Week, October 2013.

⁷ Response to *Foster Care* magazine article from a foster carer who works full-time in education, and her partner who works full-time from home, February 2014.

⁸ Response to *Foster Care* magazine article from single foster carer, February 2014.

⁹ Response to *Foster Care* magazine article, February 2014.

¹⁰ Foster carer speaking at seminar with employers, delivered in partnership with Inclusive Employers, October 2013.

¹¹ Response to *Foster Care* magazine article, February 2014.

¹² Email to The Fostering Network from Sainsbury’s Supermarkets Ltd.

The Fostering Network

We're the UK's most important fostering charity and the essential network at the heart of foster care. We bring people together and inspire, motivate and support them to help every child who is fostered to achieve the very best in life. With your help, we make foster care better for every child and every carer, every day.

The Fostering Network

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facebook.com/thefosteringnetwork



follow us on twitter
[@fosteringnet](https://twitter.com/fosteringnet)

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and Wales and SC039338 in Scotland.

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