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# Quality Standards in Children's Homes

**Early experiences of implementing the new  
regulations**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thechildrenspartnership.org.uk/>

# Executive Summary

## About this report

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a small-scale study exploring early experiences of implementing the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and accompanying guidance, which replaced the National Minimum Standards. The study was undertaken by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre and commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in autumn 2015.

## Background

The new regulations and accompanying guidance came into force on 1 April 2015. Together they set out requirements that must be met by everyone providing residential child care. They include Quality Standards which incorporate aspirational, child-focused outcome statements, and underpinning, measurable requirements for homes.

This qualitative study involved carrying out 21 interviews with a sample of home managers and other stakeholders from the sector between October 2015 and December 2015. It was designed to explore:

- Examples of new emerging practice and positive learning
- Barriers and facilitators affecting implementation
- Perceptions of further support or changes required.

The sample included managers from 15 homes of different sizes across seven UK regions. Participants came from private, voluntary sector and local authority homes, with different Ofsted ratings and different types of provision (ranging from those providing emotional and behavioural difficulties to those supporting children with disabilities to other more specialist homes including secure accommodation). In addition interviews were carried out with three local authority managers and three stakeholders, from associations supporting residential child care. Emerging findings were shared, tested and extended at a workshop hosted by DfE with managers from other homes in January 2016.

The sample was purposively selected to ensure the inclusion of managers from a cross section of children's homes in order to capture a range of views and experiences. This approach to selecting the sample, as well as the small sample size, however, means that the study cannot draw any numerical conclusions about the prevalence of these views and experiences.

## Initial reactions to the standards and preparations for their implementation

Initial reactions to the new standards and regulations were, overall, quite positive. It was felt that the standards were clear and well written. Where concerns were raised, these related to the impact that the standards would have on workloads within the home, the need to make substantive changes to policies and practice and uncertainty about how they would be inspected. Managers were sometimes simultaneously excited about the

aspirational nature of the standards, with their focus on achieving positive outcomes, and anxious about whether their interpretation of the regulations would be the same as an Ofsted inspector's.

Managers used senior management and new or existing networks, either formally through regional meetings or informally, to understand the regulations and changes required, as well as sharing practice. Additional support and guidance was provided by Action for Children and membership associations. Residential staff learnt about the standards through training and through team meetings, supervision and away days. They - and young people - were involved in interpreting and reviewing the implications of the standards in various ways.

### **Implementing the standards within homes**

The implementation of the standards resulted in changes being made either to written policies and ways of recording 'only' or to both care home practice and written information and records. Written policies, forms, templates and information were introduced or revised in response to the standards. Homes also introduced new practice and recording procedures, such as location assessments, to meet new requirements and responsibilities.

The standards also resulted in a greater focus on how outcomes for young people were evidenced and the need to consult young people. Behaviour management practice also had to be altered and more training for staff was required. It was not, however, always clear whether the introduction of the standards resulted in these changes, or whether they reinforced a change the home was already looking to implement.

### **Challenges encountered and sources of support**

Managers reported encountering a number of challenges when implementing the standards. Challenges around implementing the regulations included: measuring progress and outcomes; enabling staff to record effectively without sacrificing time with children; applying the standards to particular types of specialist provision; concern that managers' own judgements could conflict with inspectors'; completing unfamiliar location assessment reviews; and engaging the wider system. There were also challenges in the wider context in which homes were operating. These included the increasingly complex needs of young people, funding constraints and perceptions about the poor status of residential childcare in comparison with other aspects of children's services.

Managers and stakeholders benefitted from support in meeting the standards from both within and outside of their organisation. The key sources of support included external managers, placing local authorities, regulation 44 visitors, the Quality Standards Partnership and Ofsted. Managers were also grateful for the support of local, regional or specialist fora, networks and associations, such as ICHA (Independent Children's Homes Association) and NASS (The National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools).

## **Perceived impact of the standards to date**

There were early indications that the changes within homes (and the sector) in response to the standards were making a difference, but it was considered too early to fully assess the impact of the Quality Standards. Where impacts were identified they included: increased workloads for home managers; better recording of activities and behaviour, more effective monitoring of care; greater engagement of staff in their work and greater innovation in practice. These developments were considered to have positive effects on the atmosphere and outcomes within homes. There was also a feeling that the way in which the standards were introduced had enabled the development of new networks and encouraged a more open culture with greater collaboration between homes.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Continue to monitor implementation of the standards and regulations**

There is a need for further research and evaluation once the Quality Standards have been in operation for longer to more fully understand how they are operating and any impacts they are having.

### **2. Maintain support for implementation across the sector**

Managers urged DfE and its sector partners to continue to provide support for homes and to share emerging good practice. This could take the form of regular regional events, maintaining the Quality Standards website, funding for development or identification of standard progress and outcome measurement tools, development of action learning sets and provision of targeted support for more isolated, small providers.

### **3. Facilitate engagement with and by Ofsted**

Given anxiety around inspection amongst participants, it appears vital to address issues around relationships with Ofsted. A number of suggestions were made as to how to achieve this, including: workshops, greater engagement by Ofsted with homes in between inspections, developing a shared understanding of how care for the most challenging young people should be judged through the inspection framework, and ensuring Ofsted is equipped to deal with differences in innovative practice and provision.

### **4. Engage the wider system**

Engagement of the wider system enabled managers to advocate and demand better care for their young people, but a common issue reported was around the lack of ability of the wider system to respond. To address this, managers and other stakeholders were keen to see a concerted, cross-departmental effort from government to encourage other children's services to play their part in supporting the Quality Standards.

### **5. Support investment in training**

Although training was not a key focus of this study managers were keen to emphasise the need to support workforce development in the context of the Quality Standards.

However they were conscious of resource constraints and the risk of alienating talented, but less academically-minded staff. Suggestions were made around reviewing the content of Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications to ensure they fully reflect the expectations of the Quality Standards, offering online training, disseminating guidance on good training programmes and collaboration with those working on plans for a residential childcare academy.

## **6. Require a strategic approach to commissioning and supporting providers**

In the context of serious concerns about difficulties surrounding placements, there were calls for a national strategy for residential childcare with a more strategic approach to commissioning at local and regional levels. In addition, there may be scope for more guidance, or sharing of good practice, around monitoring of commissioned places.

## **7. Improve the status of the sector**

It is important to note that the standards themselves were seen to have boosted the status of the sector. However, it was argued that DfE, and government as a whole, should be more positive about achievements of residential child care, and the skills and dedication of their staff. Suggestions included publications on achievements for the press, greater promotion of (and learning) from research, and collaborating to share and use the rich evidence being collected in homes across the country to demonstrate and build on the good work of homes.

# 1. Introduction

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in autumn 2015 to carry out a small-scale study exploring early experiences of implementing the new regulations and Quality Standards for children's homes, which replaced the National Minimum Standards. This chapter sets out the background to the study, followed by its aims and methodology.

## 1.1 Background

On 1 April 2015, new regulations and accompanying guidance governing children's homes came into force<sup>2</sup>. Together they provided a new regulatory framework for the sector - focused less on 'minimum standards' and prescribed processes and more on a clear and aspirational set of Quality Standards and outcomes for children.

The aim of the new regulations is to drive up the quality of care across all children's homes and to challenge professionals working in the sector to apply their skills and judgement, tailoring support to individual needs so they deliver the best possible outcomes for each and every child. To support this, each of the new Quality Standards incorporates an aspirational, child-focused outcome statement, followed by a clear set of underpinning, measurable requirements. In addition, the new regulations were designed to streamline and modernise requirements regarding management and administrative processes (e.g. allowing the use of electronic records), and to remove unnecessary prescription. It was intended that the approach be reinforced by a new Ofsted inspection framework, also introduced on 1 April.

It was anticipated that, for many homes, the new regulations would require a significant shift in approach, and that embedding the standards fully would take time. It will soon be a year since their introduction and DfE are keen to ensure positive and sustained progress continues and is consolidated.

DfE supported the introduction of the regulations by providing funding, in 2015/16, for Action for Children (AfC) and the Who Cares? Trust to deliver a programme of training and support for the sector to help it to adapt to the changes. To complement this, the Department was keen to gather some early insights into how the changes were 'bedding in' and the sector's initial response.

## 1.2 Aims

This qualitative study aimed to explore early experiences of implementing the new regulations and Quality Standards among a sample of children's home managers and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-regulations-including-quality-standards-guide>

other stakeholders. The research was not designed to evaluate or assess the impact of the changes across the country, but to explore:

- Examples of new emerging practice and positive learning
- Barriers and facilitators affecting implementation
- Perceptions of further support or changes required.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Interviews

The main stage of the study involved carrying out 21 interviews with a sample of home managers and other stakeholders from the sector. To minimise burdens on those taking part, interviews were carried out by telephone. All took place between October and December 2015.

The interviews were based on topic guides outlining the main areas to be addressed. These were developed in collaboration with Action for Children and the Department for Education. While the content was tailored to participants' roles, interviews with home managers and other stakeholders covered the same broad areas. These included:

- Initial reactions to the new standards
- Changes made as a result of the new standards
- Challenges and facilitators affecting implementation
- Perceptions of any early impacts the standards have had
- Views about further support required.

Interviewees were recruited in two ways. Firstly, information about the study was posted on the Children's Homes Quality Standards Partnership website<sup>3</sup> and managers interested in taking part were provided with contact details for the NCB research team. Secondly, additional home managers, local authorities and sector stakeholders were approached directly in order to supplement the volunteer sample with: registered managers from different types of homes and areas of the country; senior local authority managers; and representatives from relevant networks or associations.

As intended, the final interview sample was diverse and included managers from 15 homes of different sizes across seven UK regions. Participants came from private, voluntary sector and local authority homes, with different Ofsted ratings, and provided:

- care for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- care for children with disabilities/ special educational needs
- short breaks
- secure accommodation.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.childrenshomesqualitystandards.org.uk/>

In addition, the sample included three local authority managers and three further stakeholders, from associations supporting groups of homes within the sector.

### **1.3.2 Workshop**

In January 2016, emerging findings were shared, tested and extended through consultation with a second group of managers at a DfE-hosted workshop.

The ten managers<sup>4</sup> involved in this stage were recruited through the Quality Standards Partnership website and, as before, included those from different sectors, caring for children with different needs.

For a table summarising the spread of participants from across both stages of the study, see Appendix A.

### **1.3.3 Analysis and reporting**

The interviews and workshop discussions were recorded (with consent), transcribed and then analysed using the 'Framework' approach. This involves producing a series of worksheets addressing particular themes from the research and allows for participants' views and experiences to be summarised, compared and contrasted in a systematic way. Findings from both stages of the study were combined to address the aims set out in Section 1.2.

The remainder of this report is divided into five further chapters:

- Chapter 2 sets out initial reactions to and preparation for the standards
- Chapter 3 presents findings relating to implementation in practice
- Chapter 4 describes contextual challenges and supportive factors
- Chapter 5 summarises perceptions of the impact of the standards to date
- Chapter 6 draws together key messages from the study, along with recommendations for the future.

Throughout, findings are illustrated using quotations and examples, drawn from across the interview and workshop samples. In order to preserve participants' anonymity, neither individuals nor organisations are identified in the report.

The nature of the qualitative sample design and the small sample size means that the study cannot draw any conclusions about the prevalence of the views and experiences described. This is the case despite the fact that findings from interviews were largely reinforced in discussions with the separate group of workshop participants.

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<sup>4</sup> Seven attended on the day and three were unable to attend, but contributed via telephone and email.

## 2. Preparing for the Standards

Managers were asked to retrospectively consider their initial reactions to the Standards and how they planned for their implementation prior to the regulations coming into force. In order to set the research findings in context, this chapter briefly reports how homes prepared for the Standards.

### 2.1 Initial reactions to the Standards

On the whole, managers and stakeholders involved in the study felt that the Standards were clear and very well written, and easy to understand and work with. This was despite the less prescriptive approach of the regulations which, in some cases, was perceived as creating a degree of ambiguity about what was required (for example, around recording outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 4). Managers' initial reactions to the Standards were mixed, encompassing a range of different emotions but typically anxiety, uncertainty, enthusiasm and excitement. These reactions were not mutually exclusive.

Anxiety and trepidation typically centred on a concern about the work needed to review and comply with the Quality Standards, and to demonstrate this to Ofsted. Some of this anxiety was alleviated once managers were more familiar with the Standards. In contrast, where managers concluded that the Standards required more substantive changes, even if 'only' changes to the *recording* of practice, rather than significant changes to the care provided for young people, anxieties tended to remain, at least to some extent.

The regulations were seen to give more autonomy to home managers to exercise professional judgement, which was generally welcomed. However, there were concerns that – even if managers were confident in their own decisions – this would lead to greater difficulty predicting how to satisfy inspectors. This stemmed from the fact that inspectors would be exercising their own professional judgement in each case, which might clash with the ways in which managers had interpreted the requirements upon them.

Where managers had been excited and enthused, this related to the perceived freedom to innovate and potential to engage staff in their work. This potential stemmed from the new emphasis on quality rather than minimum standards, pursuit of positive outcomes, and that children in children's homes need to be loved, which one stakeholder described as a "*very bold statement*".

### 2.2 Activity in preparation for the Standards

Across the sample, managers spoke of having input from networks, events, senior colleagues, staff and young people in preparing to implement the Standards. The nature and scale of activity undertaken to prepare for the Standards was described as influenced by various contextual factors. For example, those currently rated outstanding

tended to feel they had less to do in order to comply with the regulations. Where organisations made more use of bank/ relief staff, new requirements around their training had greater implications. Homes caring for children with complex needs, or attending short breaks, faced particular challenges in terms of deciding how to measure progress – as discussed in Chapter 4. Another variable influencing managers' preparation for the Standards was the nature of support from senior management. There were instances in which managers from large organisations reported benefitting from direction and support from external managers at an early stage, such as encouragement to be involved in consultation on the Standards, or provision of training or outline action plans, but this was not always the case.

Activities undertaken could be broadly divided into external activity outside of the home and internal activity within the home. Among managers interviewed for this study, a typical response to planning for implementation was to attend external events, review the Quality Standards themselves and at least draft an action plan, before cascading information within the home.

### **2.2.1 External activity**

While not all managers undertook external activity, for those who did it was an important source of information, networking and preparation. External activity included:

- Consultation events and seminars run by DfE, Action for Children and Ofsted.
- Regional meetings with other care home managers (within or across organisations)
- Meetings with other care home managers, both within and outside their organisation, through new and established networks
- Training provided by their organisations

Those who were unable to attend (or unaware of) consultation events and who may have additionally lacked support of peers or senior management tended to struggle, at least initially, to prepare for the Standards. For some of these homes, online resources (e.g. from the Quality Standards website), and those supplied by organisations such as the Independent Children's Home Association (ICHA) were considered particularly valuable.

### **2.2.2 Internal activity**

With regard to internal activity mentioned by managers and stakeholders, staff were involved in interpreting and implementing the Standards to different degrees and at different stages. Managers ran training sessions within homes, but also used team meetings, supervision, working groups and away days to engage staff in reviewing the implications of various standards and familiarising them with their content.

Managers generally felt that staff needed a good grasp of the Standards before they were introduced to the young people. However, one approach taken was to involve the

young people in implementing the Standards at a very early stage, so that it was something they were part of, not something that was happening to them.

In another home, staff asked recent care leavers to design feedback forms and another manager asked young people in their care to define what each standard meant to them. These definitions were then made into posters and hung on the wall of the home. For example, positive relationships were defined by the young people as '*Staff having a positive mind towards young people to make us happy and save our lives*'. Young people's levels of engagement in preparing for the Standards varied. As one manager recalled, the Standards were cascaded down from staff to young people, but the young people weren't "*particularly bothered because that's not what's on their radar as important*" (Home manager).

Finally, one further strategy employed to prepare for the Standards was to invite professionals in from other services to explain their respective roles, and discuss ways in which they could work together to improve outcomes. This was intended to help the home prepare to meet Regulation 5 on engaging with the wider system.

## **2.3 Summary: preparing for the Standards**

- Managers and stakeholders expressed a range of reactions to the Standards, from excitement and enthusiasm to anxiety and uncertainty. These reactions were not mutually exclusive and often managers were excited about the Standards and their focus on quality, while also being anxious about interpreting some of the requirements and about how they would be inspected going forward.
- Managers used senior management and new or existing networks, either formally through regional meetings or informally, to understand the regulations and changes required, as well as sharing practice.
- Additional support and guidance was provided by Action for Children and membership associations.
- Residential staff learnt about the Standards through training and through team meetings, supervision and away days. They - and young people - were involved in interpreting and reviewing the implications of the Standards in various ways.

### 3. Implementing the Standards

The implementation of the Quality Standards resulted in new responsibilities and requirements for homes, with changes to policy and practice and underpinning written information and records. The extent of these changes appeared to differ across the sample of study participants. Managers variously described what they considered genuine changes to policy and practice, or making changes 'on paper' and adopting a different way of recording practice that itself remained essentially unchanged. The key factor was the extent to which managers (or to some extent, organisations) viewed the Standards as reflecting existing practice within their homes.

#### 3.1 Changes to written policies and information

Consistently, home managers reported making at least some changes to written policies and other documents following the regulations coming into force. Changes ranged from the fairly superficial (for example, amending any written material to reference the correct regulation) to much more substantive rewriting of policies and Statements of Purpose (and any related changes to practice to then achieve them, which will be discussed further in Section 3.3).

Managers reported that changes in response to the Standards were led by their senior management within their organisation or by themselves with support from others, such as Action for Children. Typically, managers from larger organisations were supplied with at least some revised written policies, information, forms and templates from senior management within their local authority or company. Managers in smaller independent homes or homes that lacked support of senior management assumed more or all of the responsibility for revisions. Action for Children and networks of other managers were reported to have provided valuable support to these managers where needed.

Managers sought to ensure that revised written policies, records, reports and forms referenced relevant standards. One local authority stakeholder also described creating an index showing which standard and regulation each written policy or record applied to, which helped to show staff how tasks met multiple objectives.

Invariably, managers revised their home's Statement of Purpose. They described changes to not only reference the Standards, but making sure the statement was accessible to staff and parents. Child-friendly versions were also produced. These were shorter and simpler, enabling the young people *'to have an understanding of their home'* (Home manager).

When and where used, changes to templates and forms included alterations to daily recording forms, reflective practice templates and missing from care forms. Substantial changes were also reported to templates for regulation 45 reports – although in some cases these were becoming longer, and in others shorter, depending on how managers and their organisations decided to capture and present information.

Where written policies were changed or revised, this could not always be solely attributed to the new Quality Standards; other agendas and pressures played a part; for example, in decisions to incorporate a focus on radicalisation within policies on safeguarding. New missing from care written policies and procedures were also reported; one home had created a Mind Map to record information about the family and friends of children and young people in their care whom they could contact in the event of a child going missing. Another manager described how their home had supplemented their overall missing from care policy with individual protocols for each young person, reflecting requirements in the Standards to protect children and put individual children at the centre of care planning.

## **3.2 New responsibilities and requirements**

Managers also reported that the regulations resulted in an increase in their responsibilities – although there were examples where burdens had decreased. One stakeholder, for example, reported that the local authority had 'softened' on monthly reporting since monthly scheduled fixed monitoring was no longer a requirement under the new Standards.

The new requirement mentioned most frequently by managers and stakeholders was the regulation 46 location assessments. Homes wrote to different local agencies and organisations to gather the necessary information to assess the appropriateness and suitability of the location and premises of the home.

Regulation 5 on engaging with the wider system had also led to changes in care home practice and written recording. Managers felt it gave them the ability to challenge other professionals, particularly social workers, teachers and local authority placement officers. One manager described how staff now challenge more and follow up with other professionals, such as social workers and teachers, because they feel more responsible for making sure the young person's needs are met.

A further requirement, mentioned in relation to preparing for implementation, was the now mandatory training of relief and bank staff, as discussed in Section 3.2.6.

## **3.3 Changes to care home practice**

Where changes in practice were mentioned, they revolved around every aspect of practice in the home from evidencing outcomes to involving children and young people in the management of the home.

### **3.2.1 Greater focus on evidencing outcomes**

Managers and stakeholders reported a greater focus on evidencing outcomes for young people following the introduction of the Standards. Better evidencing was felt to help the home achieve continuous improvement in the quality of care they provided, as well as address any weaknesses or improvement required in this care, in accordance with the leadership and management standard (regulation 13) and care planning standard

(regulation 14). Better recording of progress and 'the journey of the child' was felt to support more individualised care planning for young people.

Recording practice and care plans were changed to capture the true outcomes for young people, including how their needs were being met. One manager said that they missed this prior to the Standards, as they were focused on tracking targets and long-term goals. Better recording allowed staff to chart what was happening in the home and evidence achievements, with one manager speaking of introducing an 'achievement book' to record this. Managers also mentioned creating journey logs for each child from point of placement to leaving care, which aimed to make these journeys meaningful and purposeful. The logs allowed homes to reflect back on any issues in the care of that young person and see what they could do differently next time.

By having and reviewing information on each child's experiences, managers felt their homes could plan better in the next month, know the child better and readily see their progress within care. One manager said that key workers now went through daily records to check for any patterns and then adapted their care as a result. There was also more of a focus on individual goal-setting and recording progress towards these. Reflecting how different types of provision responded to the Standards, homes where children had complex needs, including communication difficulties, felt they had to think of creative ways to record outcomes, such as through pictures, videos of activity sessions or recording of facial expressions and behaviour.

Another change in recording mentioned by managers involved moving to electronic records (regulation 38). One manager said this move was partly in response to the new emphasis in the Standards on recording and partly to avoid duplicate recording in different places.

### **Case study of evidencing outcomes**

One manager of a generalist home in an urban area mentioned how weekly reporting practices had changed to fully embed the Standards across the home's practice and management.

Weekly reports of the young person's progress now covered all aspects of the Quality Standards (for example, positive relationships, enjoyment and achievement). The reports include pictures and are sent to the social worker to evidence progress. There are also weekly reports completed for the home as a whole, which evidence how the home has met the nine Quality Standards. The staff fill this in every week between them, which allows the home to see gaps, areas where they are doing well and areas for improvement.

Finally, there is a reflective practice diary for staff to complete. This asks them to consider what they are doing in their care practice to meet the Quality Standards.

### 3.2.2 Improved care planning and placements

Changes to care home practice in relation to the Quality Standards (not just *recording* of care home practice) were also reported by managers and stakeholders. One stakeholder thought that staff had been given permission to 'think more aspirationally' about what would 'hook' young people in and help them take steps towards positive outcomes. While changes of this nature were in line with what the organisation wanted to do anyway, the Standards helped to 'solidify' their intentions.

#### Case study of care planning

One manager said their home had "*completely overhauled their approach to care planning and working towards and monitoring outcomes*". They used to produce a 20-page-long plan for young people, which was effectively a "*massive risk assessment*". Since the Quality Standards, staff now identify desired outcomes after considering the aspirations of the child, their family and others involved with the child, including their school, occupational health and social workers. The aspirations of the child could be expressed verbally or otherwise. These goals are then broken down into outcomes with steps towards each. These details then go into the shift planning folder so that shift leaders can see at a glance what they are working towards when a child is with them. Outcomes are then recorded on daily logs, which form the evidence for 60-day reports for each child, which are structured around the Quality Standards.

Changes in care planning were also mentioned in relation to impact assessments and placements of young people. The impact assessments reportedly led to greater consideration of the mix and dynamics of young people within the home, when considering whether to accept a placement. Taking these impact assessments to their provider panel was described by one stakeholder as a 'big change', while managers reported that they felt empowered to refuse placements they considered to be inappropriate (see also Section 4.1.7).

### 3.2.3 Increased emphasis on consulting young people

Managers and stakeholders who mentioned a greater emphasis on consulting young people within the home described making a range of changes to facilitate this. It was not always clear whether a move towards greater consultation was a direct result of the Standards, or if the Standards reinforced changes homes were already looking to make. The changes in this area included:

- reviewing feedback forms or other ways of gathering written feedback from young people on their care
- introducing or expanding consultation groups (including advocacy for young people from external organisations)
- greater involvement of young people in the appearance and running of the home.

In terms of capturing young people's feedback, one manager mentioned that they seek the views of young people on their performance as a manager through a 360 degree appraisal process. Another manager said that, in response to the Standards, the incident book for completing following any physical intervention has been revised so that young people now write their thoughts (alongside the thoughts of staff) and record how they were supported following any intervention.

Managers who mentioned increasing the opportunities for consulting young people described introducing feedback sessions, for example, 'Well and Whinge' sessions. Another home described greater consultation and engagement with young people, their families and external agencies through sample questionnaires, advocacy from Barnardo's, exit questionnaires from the home and routine screening of parents and external agencies, such as social workers and Youth Offender teams.

In terms of greater involvement of young people in the running of the home, one manager said that because of the Standards they now have an agreement with the young people for the use of door alarms and to only use them when the young person was at risk. Prior to the Standards they '*didn't think to do that*' as it was '*just part of the home*'.

### **3.2.4 Changed behaviour management approach**

Managers and stakeholders reported three ways in which the Standards resulted in changes to their behaviour management practice covering:

- physical interventions policy and practice
- recording of restraint
- moving away from the use of sanctions for negative behaviour towards a system that placed greater emphasis on rewarding positive behaviour.

In relation to physical intervention practice, managers reported moving to different systems that they felt better reflected the regulations, though in certain cases it was not always clear whether this was a direct response to the Standards or a change the manager was making anyway. One manager described how the move from one approach for positive behaviour management intervention (and, where necessary, restraint) to another led to staff having a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of anxiety and behaviour in young people. This helped them to identify and manage behaviour earlier to avoid escalation of situations that required a physical intervention. Changes were also mentioned in terms of recording physical intervention (as discussed in Section 3.2.3) and new practice around debriefs after an intervention.

Changes to the recording of restraint was something that managers of secure homes who were interviewed raised in particular. Due to the regulations including restriction of liberty of movement within the definition of restraint, secure homes felt that they now had to consider, on a case by case basis, whether this applied to managing a young person away from a group and working with them in isolation. (See also Section 4.1.6.)

Another change to behaviour management practice mentioned by managers was a move away from sanctioning poor behaviour to rewarding positive behaviour. One manager of a generalist home described this change, which sat alongside greater goal setting with the young people, as a 'huge move forward'.

*"We moved away from sanctions...there's only been one sanction recorded in the last eight months, which is a huge move forward for us as a team because we are focused on the positives rather than the negatives."*

(Home manager)

Managers in generalist homes also reported rewarding residents for good behaviour and achieving goals via incentives chosen by residents themselves (for example, a radio for the home's car) or organising trips for young people and staff, as a bonding experience.

One final change mentioned by one manager in response to the Standards was to always have a member of staff on the floor to provide activities and stop incidents from happening. This had led to a reduction in incidents as the young people had activities to do every evening, which sat alongside extracurricular activities they were involved in.

### **3.2.5 Encouraged positive relationships, enjoyment and achievement**

There were a number of new initiatives reported within the home, family and community that helped to develop positive relationships (regulation 11) and focused on the enjoyment and achievement standard (regulation 9).

Managers interviewed spoke of a variety of activities being pursued by young people within their homes, including lawn bowling, Scouts and Cadets. One manager said that the drive within the Standards for young people to access the community and have their own hobbies led to staff being tasked with researching different activities for young people to do in the area.

Another response to the Standards reported by managers during interviews was about ensuring all the young people in their home went on trips; regular visits to the theatre or to restaurants were used by one home to broaden young people's horizons. This same home had also increased the level of involvement their young people had with the local community through litter picks and introducing themselves to neighbours. One young person from the home was working with the neighbourhood Open Spaces Committee to get an outdoor gym.

Managers also talked about working with families to develop positive relationships for the young people. Reports of young people's progress were sent to their family. The reports were so families had something (positive) to talk about during contact and to help support parent-child relationships. Family's aspirations were also taken into account in care planning. One short break manager also said they had started to provide therapy to families, though it was not clear if this was in direct response to the Standards. This was because they had recognised that a key influence on young people was their family home environment, which meant that working with the young person alone was not enough to bring about progress. The Manager had changed their practice so that when

a young person was with them a therapeutic team was simultaneously developing strategies with their family.

*"So we do the work with the young person when they come here [to the short break home], the therapeutic team will go out and do the work with the family, and then we'll join up."*

(Home manager)

In relation to achievement and education, managers reported working hard and challenging providers to ensure individual residents' needs were met in terms of education and getting the right placements for their young people. For example, one manager mentioned that staff now help young people within the home to complete AQA awards to ensure they have recognised qualifications when they leave care. The manager registered the home and trained staff to help the young people complete the awards, with one young person recently leaving with a qualification in Food Technology. This manager reported that while they have always worked with schools on the education of their young people, they now have more direction, with the AQA awards providing a new 'tool' to use within the home.

Another manager gave an example that cut across working with the wider system (regulation 5), education (regulation 8) and care planning (regulation 14). While reviewing the young person's care plan, the manager had seen that, while the young person was in part-time education at an alternative provider, there was an opportunity to set a clear goal with the resident of moving to full-time education. The manager met with the keyworker to discuss this and the keyworker then met with the young person to set targets and liaised with the school as to how to meet these. The young person initially started school for two mornings, moving to three days a week, and – at time of interview - was aiming to be full-time within a few weeks.

### **3.2.6 Changes to staff training and supervision**

All new 'systems', changes to policy, practice and record keeping within homes led to a need to train staff in these changes. Staff received specific training on bereavement, missing from care, behaviour management, and physical interventions. As with other changes, it was not clear whether the increase in training for homes was always a direct result of the Standards or a response to Ofsted requirements from a previous inspection – either way, managers described the changes as helping them to achieve the Standards. Mandatory training of relief and bank staff to a minimum of Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or to ensure they already held an equivalent) was also reported as something stemming directly from the new regulations.

In one case, a manager said they had been judged adequate by Ofsted under the old regulations in relation to training for physical interventions, then told their behaviour management was not adequate two months later under the new system. This manager felt the Quality Standards meant a significant 'up-skilling' of their staff was required in relation to physical intervention. While this interviewee felt the Standards had shifted the

goal posts, they did feel the new training was necessary to equip staff to intervene more effectively.

The Standards were also reinforced in team meetings and through supervision, including adapting the supervision process to discuss the regulations and how staff were meeting them. For example, one manager highlighted how supervision meetings now included a focus on what the staff member has done to empower a child, a parent, themselves or a member of their team. In another case, the agenda for staff meetings had been changed so that each item on the agenda referenced a particular standard. Another strategy was to physically embed the Standards in the home by putting up posters of the Standards on the walls. The intention behind this was to constantly remind staff of their content, so they became intrinsic to the work of the home.

### **3.4 Summary: implementation of the Quality Standards in practice**

- Changes made by managers and stakeholders broadly fell into two categories: changes to care home policy and practice and changes to amend written policies, record keeping and information. There were differences across the experiences of managers as to whether the new regulations had led to a change in care home practice or *just* changes to recording and updated information.
- Written changes included ensuring all policies, documents, recording, care planning and templates referenced and met the regulations. Frequently mentioned changes to written records and information concerned Statements of Purpose (including creating child-friendly versions), new templates and forms (particularly regulation 45 reports) and new and revised policies.
- New responsibilities and requirements also became part of the work of the home, such as regulation 46 location assessments, challenging the wider system under regulation 5 and the training of bank and relief staff to a minimum of Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (or needing to already hold an equivalent).
- Better evidencing of outcomes and the journey of the child as a result of the Standards was also mentioned by managers and stakeholders. This recording allowed managers to review information for each child and use this to plan care better for the following month.
- It was also felt that the Standards gave managers the confidence to refuse placements that they thought would be inappropriate.
- Managers and stakeholders reported greater consultation of young people in the management and practice of the home through seeking their views and feedback and regular consultation sessions. This was not always a direct response to the Standards, but where homes had already been planning such changes, the Standards were felt to provide helpful reinforcement and validation.
- Across the study sample, there were changes reported in behaviour management in terms of physical intervention policy, recording of restraint, and moves away from sanctions to punish negative behaviour to rewarding positive behaviour.

- Managers described new initiatives to encourage positive relationships for young people, including with staff, families and the local community, as well as a greater emphasis on enjoyment through activities and trips outside of the home.
- Training plans, supervision and team meetings were used to ensure staff were up-to-date with the standards and any changes in procedures and practice.

## 4. Challenges and sources of support

This chapter describes a range of challenges faced by home managers, and the sources of support they found most helpful, when implementing the Standards.

### 4.1 Challenges

Managers reported encountering a number of challenges. Some related to specific standards, while others were more generic or related to the wider context for their work. Issues concerning the Standards included: measuring progress; effective recording; applying the Standards in specialist provision; preparing for inspection under the new framework; completing location assessment reviews, and engaging the wider system. Broader issues felt to affect homes included the complex needs of young people, the challenges of placement matching, funding constraints and the lowly status of the sector.

#### 4.1.1 Measuring progress and outcomes

The Standards' emphasis on measuring progress and outcomes for young people, while welcomed, did present difficulties. Deciding what to measure, and how, had been an issue. This was in the context of a lack of consensus around standardised measures and experience of tensions with Ofsted over defining acceptable progress in areas such as emotional wellbeing and education. For example, one local authority manager described an inspector being critical of the lack of improvement in a child's emotional resilience – something which, from their perspective, was challenging to measure and might not stabilise for years. Issues relating to inspection are discussed further in Section 4.1.3.

Measuring progress was also described as challenging for some types of specialist provision, particularly those caring for young people with disabilities and special educational needs. For instance, for children with autistic spectrum disorders, evidence of developing relationships could look very different from the progress expected of other young people: making eye contact for ten seconds could represent a substantive step forward. Likewise, consulting children with complex communication difficulties was described as requiring alternative approaches and as taking longer than talking to those who can verbalise their feelings. For short breaks services, the fact that children spent only brief periods in the home made achieving as well as recording progress a challenge.

*“For us, the most difficult thing when you are a short break service is how to measure outcomes, because they come for two nights a month, and ... if you are teaching a particular thing or activity, next time they come you start from the beginning again. So it takes a long time. But still, having that evidence really shows and provides the consistency in the approach so everybody knows what is happening with the child.”*

(Home manager)

More generally, it was highlighted that the Standards require giving children more than a 'break', even in a short breaks setting. This could represent quite a departure from the way homes used to operate, and could lead to misgivings for staff around 'pushing' a child, rather than just making them happy.

*"The way things were set up years ago, it was very much around, we offer children fun, they come for a short stay, and that was it, whereas now we're saying, 'Well, let's try and do something more meaningful, more purposeful....' And some of these tasks these children don't want to do, clearly. So you're getting them to do things they don't want, and it feels like, they're only here for one night, isn't that a shame?"*

(Home manager)

Across different types of homes, where changes to gathering and recording evidence were more substantive, managers described some staff resistance to additional, or simply different, records of practice. There were long-serving care staff who simply found it difficult to think and write more analytically about their practice. Other objections stemmed from the time it took, and seeking to protect direct work with children so that they weren't neglected and the level of service didn't reduce.

Managers were conscious of the need to encourage staff to record evidence of their own good work, without inhibiting their interaction with young people. They also described having to be creative in balancing recording requirements and maintaining a 'homely' environment, in response to young people voicing complaints.

*"Some of the young people here say 'In a normal house you wouldn't have to write down what we eat. ... Mum, wouldn't do that.' ... And so they find that difficult, and say 'Why have we got to have a young persons' meeting? I don't want a young persons' meeting.' Well, I say, 'I've got to make sure that your views are heard....' But there are ways round it. We go off to a family pub, and we have a dinner and talk about everything, and they don't know I'm doing it."*

(Home manager)

#### **4.1.2 The content and format of management reports**

Views were mixed about managers' newfound 'freedom' to structure and determine the content of their reports, particularly their six-monthly (regulation 45) evaluation reports, and location assessment reviews (regulation 46). One view was that a template which worked well in one home might transfer badly to another. Conversely, it was argued that, while managers could rightly be expected to use their judgement in running their home, time was being wasted re-inventing the wheel and second guessing what was required – or sought by Ofsted – around reporting.

*"What they're saying is that it's not actually how the report is written, it's what's in it. But if they just provided us all with templates, there would be less for them to pick us up on ... Because the amount of time it's taken us to decipher the template, I could have done the report, and the amount of stress it's caused..."*

(Home manager)

Those keen for more guidance on location assessments wanted to know what information to include and how to obtain it. As with other reporting requirements, there was a view that, while managers did not expect anyone to do the work for them, it would be helpful to avoid wasting time on areas DfE and Ofsted did not expect them to cover.

*"There's just no guidance on what had to be in the location risk assessment, and other providers seem to have put all sorts in - about highways and pavements and waterworks.... We've stuck to the nitty gritty - sexual exploitation and the level of crime, and it would just be good to know exactly what's got to be in it."*

(Home manager)

This view was reinforced by network stakeholders who described members coming to them for help, and emphasised that it was not just home managers who were unclear about the required content – agencies providing material were also in the dark.

*"The location and suitability assessments are stressful. There are thirteen different agencies to contact. Many of them are not aware of what the Quality Standards require, so with the police, or health, or schools, there's been no guidance, no support, no directive from their ministries to support children's homes in doing this job."*

(Network stakeholder)

### **4.1.3 Inconsistency in inspections and support from Ofsted**

At time of interview, not all managers had experience of inspection under the new framework. Among those awaiting a visit from Ofsted, there was considerable anxiety about inspectors' judgements. Actual experiences of inspection against the new Standards were very mixed. Those who described having a positive experience had felt able to use newly-amassed evidence to present a convincing case and had found Ofsted receptive to this. They tended to describe longstanding relationships with responsive inspectors who knew their homes (as outlined more fully in Section 4.2.5). However, there were also managers who felt extremely frustrated and unfairly judged. They described a variety of issues concerning rigidity, inconsistency and inaccessibility.

Despite the Quality Standards' emphasis on demonstrating progress towards outcomes, there were complaints about black and white judgements on narrowly defined outcomes.

*"The regulations are very clear to follow and... I think they're being inspected in a very clear, precise way... The leeway and imaginative responses... aren't being valued."*

(Local authority stakeholder)

*"We're getting blamed a lot for the kids not being in education, when we've done everything we possibly can... that's been picked up in quite a lot of the inspections."*

(Home manager)

Managers elsewhere had similar complaints, describing how:

- Staff morale had been badly hit by a damning judgement on safeguarding, based on the home lacking a gate – which the manager deemed unhelpful for wheelchair access, and unjustified, given that they had security checks at reception and had been operating (and highly rated) for decades without this being an issue.
- Restraints had risen overnight after a change in medication drastically altered a young person's behaviour, but the inspector had not been interested in the reasons and had judged them on the numbers alone.
- A placing local authority had been 'ecstatic' about a girl's educational progress, but the inspector had marked the home down for not involving the virtual head – something the manager felt would have made no difference, as the home already had a very strong, direct relationship with staff at the school.

Managers also described inconsistency in what inspectors looked for around records, information and reporting – both over time, and between different homes.

*"Depending on what inspector you get, you get totally different things... Under my last inspection that was part of my requirement, to improve my Reg. 45 report.... We had one inspector go out and thought that... report was amazing, so we all did it like that, and then we had another inspector go out and say, 'Well I really don't like this'."*

(Home manager)

Finally, there was frustration that not all inspectors were equally approachable and supportive. Managers genuinely wanted to understand what was considered good practice, from the perspectives of those who would be judging their efforts.

*"A lot of the time we go to Ofsted and ask questions, and they'll go, 'Refer to the Quality Standards!', when actually we're coming to them because we don't understand how we can evidence something."*

*"I'm just asking him to verify what I'm doing. Rather than just wait 'til an inspection and say, 'Nah, that's not good enough'."*

(Home managers)

#### **4.1.5 Engaging the wider system**

The new emphasis on engaging the wider system, while empowering, was also described as challenging. Interviewees and workshop participants expressed frustration at the wider system not operating as it should. Managers reported variously that:

- access to CAMHS was extremely poor
- social work practice was highly variable
- police criminalise young people in children's homes for behaviour which would not be criminalised elsewhere
- schools were ill-equipped to cope with, far less address, children's emotional and behavioural difficulties.

*"When you're working with especially mainstream schools that's when it's difficult... There are more and more children going into schools now with emotional issues and mental health issues and issues from family backgrounds, and I think it's having more of an emphasis on picking those out and being able to manage them within classrooms because often we get a phone call saying they need to come home."*

(Home manager)

It was suggested that engagement might be facilitated by making it clearer to partner agencies that *they* had a responsibility to support children in residential care, rather than it being left to individual homes to 'educate' the relevant professionals.

*"I think if Ofsted had written to schools, the health authority, and said, 'These are the changes that have taken place within the children's homes, and this is your role in ensuring that these Standards are adhered to'.....it would be better."*

(Home manager)

Managers understood that they were responsible for evidencing their attempts in this area, rather than being solely accountable for the quality of relationships with, or input from, other professionals. However, in the context of known resource constraints, there was also some concern expressed about the risk of damaging relationships, if homes were too critical of already-stretched partner agencies.

*"It can have the potential to hinder the relationship that we have with social workers... if you have to take them to task. Because we understand that social workers are very busy, they've got 25 to 30 children upwards on their caseload. It's not easy for them. And things do sometimes take time... And we're a private children's home, so especially for the private sector, you don't want to bite the hand that feeds you, so to speak... but I've got to be seen to be escalating and... challenging local authorities."*

(Home manager)

#### **4.1.6 Other challenges relating to specific standards or regulations**

Measuring progress, reporting requirements, perceived inconsistency from Ofsted and engaging with the wider system appeared to be key issues within our sample. However, a number of other challenges or concerns were mentioned at least once during interviews or workshop discussions. These are outlined briefly below.

- The new requirement that relief / bank staff, as well as permanent staff, attain the Level 3 qualification (or already hold an equivalent). One local authority manager described having to stop what was normally an ongoing recruitment process and rely on managers to cover staff absences, because they did not have the resources to put all recruits through Level 3. The LA was exploring cheaper alternatives such as apprenticeships, which would provide an equivalence, but in the meantime it was adding to the pressures on managers.
- The requirement that all appropriate areas of a home be accessible to children, with limits on privacy and access permissible only for safeguarding purposes. This was highlighted as problematic in that it was interpreted as ruling out keeping a

lounge (with TV or Xbox) off limits while a young person was meant to be in school – making it more difficult to achieve the (already challenging) education standard.

- Revised recording of restraints, to include working young people away from the group where this involves deprivation of liberty. There were some concerns about the impact of this change on restraint figures, and perceptions of behaviour management as a result. It was also noted that secure homes had to deal with different definitions of restraint for Ofsted and the Youth Justice Board (YJB).
- The requirement to check staff references back as far as possible. This raised questions about what was reasonable, or worth doing, given that employers typically refuse to give detailed references.
- Finding time to access, sift and absorb research findings, despite there being a wealth of material 'out there' on the internet. For example, one manager stressed that, while the Standards had encouraged her 'professional curiosity', it was incredibly difficult to protect time to pursue this.

#### **4.1.7 Challenges relating to the wider context for implementation**

Managers and other stakeholders identified a number of issues in the wider context which made it more difficult for homes to fully achieve the Quality Standards.

##### **Implementation did not occur in a vacuum**

The first such challenge related to the need to absorb and address the standards while continuing to deal with the daily challenges of caring for young people, running a home and – in some cases – preparing for inspection or other organisational change.

The consultation on the new regulations ran for almost two months, between 19th September and 14th November 2014, and there was further discussion with the sector prior to publication of the revised Standards in March 2014, a year in advance of implementation – which suggests that competing pressures on homes, rather than lack of notice, was the main issue. Nevertheless, in this context, one view was that a phased implementation, over a longer timeframe, would have been preferable, particularly for more isolated homes in smaller organisations.

*"There doesn't seem to be a bridge in time so that... 'OK, Ofsted is going to come in and they're going to expect you to have got this far – milestones'... It would be much better than expecting that on 1st April everybody has done it, and I know we can have action plans but when you're action planning for every single thing it feels like... a fire that's blazing and you've only got this tiny, little extinguisher."*

(Home manager)

##### **Lack of support from a broader organisation**

Being isolated, without a group of fellow managers to work with, was described as a challenge in itself – although independence could also allow for innovation.

*"I think for me it's just being isolated really - being the only local authority home in the area, and my supervisor has no residential experience. But on the flip side of that, actually, you can think outside the box and be creative."*

(Home manager)

### **Risk aversion / cherry picking of placements**

There was a perception that homes, particularly private homes, were becoming increasingly risk averse and accepting fewer of the most challenging young people. It was felt that the new Standards had exacerbated this situation, with (other) managers fearing that admitting the most disruptive children, for whom achieving progress was most difficult, would threaten their Ofsted ratings, and in turn, other funded placements. None of the managers in this study described refusing placements for this reason. However, there were those who reported being conscious that if a young person was moved on, this would make it easier to achieve a better rating. In addition, there were those who welcomed more autonomy around placement matching as this was making it easier for them to refuse young people who they believed would have an adverse effect on others in the home.

*"At one time senior managers would just say, 'You're having this child' and in they go and the next thing the home has changed within a week because the dynamics have completely changed when you've introduced a young person that's completely off the wall and needs different care that that home really couldn't provide, whereas now because you've got the impact assessments you can relate to that and say, 'You're right. This child doesn't fit this jigsaw. It needs to fit in another, it's not the right piece'.*

(Home manager)

This tendency was described as having a knock-on effect on local authority homes, which in some cases had to accommodate particularly challenging young people who they believed would have been better suited to other (private) placements.

*"What we're finding is that those hard to place young people aren't being accepted now by private providers, or if already placed, the placement appears to be ending much quicker... And what we believe is, because the regulations are so clear and the Ofsted guidance so clear, they aren't being inspected in an understanding sort of way. Therefore some private providers are risking losing their higher ratings, because a lot of their ratings have gone down, and because of that they've become risk averse. So we're having difficulty in finding placements, and also our in-house homes are getting a bigger proportion of the more difficult young people. So there has been a ripple effect over the last few months...The current climate doesn't allow private providers to allow themselves to be 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' because they won't get placements. So the best way for them is to get rid of - discharge - the young person that's causing them a problem."*

(Local authority stakeholder)

Where local authorities were themselves unable to accommodate some of these young people, it was feared that they were ending up in (private) provision which was much less able to meet their needs. In this context, there were interviewees who called for a more strategic approach to commissioning at local and regional levels. For example, it was suggested by one stakeholder that all LAs be required to conduct a needs analysis, using methodology agreed centrally, and with input from providers from all sectors. The data could then be aggregated regionally and, over time, support development and delivery of (relatively) local provision, better tailored to the range of needs within the region.

*"I think they need to...really change commissioning, from purchase your own provider - make it a verb, not a noun, not a role. Commissioning involving providers and local authorities working on data, working on the response to the data, a sufficiency standard, the audits as a planned provision of residential care... None of these high level needs are being planned for... There needs to be an evidence-led national strategy....The market will not respond. This requires management. "*

(Network stakeholder)

## **Funding constraints**

Resource constraints were raised as affecting homes directly, as well as indirectly, via problems in the wider system. It was feared that these problems would get worse in the foreseeable future, given that further cuts were anticipated in local authorities, while the introduction of the living wage could increase core costs. As one manager of a voluntary sector short breaks service pointed out, the burden of recording and reporting was perceived to have increased, but fees have not – indeed some LAs were reportedly attempting to reduce these further. Resource constraints were also highlighted by managers of local authority homes, who were not immune to the cuts, and found it difficult to obtain additional funding when seeking to improve.

Funding constraints were also seen to adversely affect training. For example, one manager felt strongly that an emphasis on (cheaper) online learning meant that staff miss out on the discussions, conversations and debates which happen when training is delivered in groups, face to face. Whereas managers benefitted from opportunities to spend time with their peers from other homes, at Action for Children workshops and other fora (as detailed further below), it was felt that it would be 'healthier' if staff had equivalent opportunities to step away from the service and reflect with others on their practice.

## **Status of the sector**

Finally, there was frustration that, despite the aspirational tone of the Quality Standards, children's homes were still not seen as an equal placement choice with foster care (and homes were treated differently, for instance in relation to Staying Put arrangements). Further, a residential placement was only ever considered as a last resort, when all other options had failed, and further damage had been done. Relatedly, managers and other stakeholders identified what they saw as a pervasive attitude that young people in

children's homes are the least deserving of support, which translated into the professionals who care for them being treated as lesser professionals within the system.

## 4.2 Sources of support

In the context of the challenges described above, managers described benefitting from a range of support to implement the Standards, from within and outside their organisations.

### 4.2.1 External managers and the broader organisation

Local authority respondents described how home managers were supported by LA staff to review and amend written policies, information and procedures (to ensure consistency and alignment with LA policies as well as the Standards).

*"My manager's really good. He works closely with me and has been to the conferences and things with me to help him understand it and to know what we need and what we should be doing. And then, our higher managers are always there. They come out to visit the unit and have tea with the kids; they work quite well with us."*

(Home manager)

Managers of private and voluntary sector homes owned by larger organisations described receiving similar support from them, although to varying degrees. This support came in the form of training, sharing good practice or templates and responses to queries – all of which made their lives easier and imbued them with confidence.

*"They teach us, then we come back and teach the team... They've done some regulation training, and through management meetings we continually share good practice... Once an inspection happens we fill out a feedback form of what the inspector looked for and we share that with all the managers."*

*"We have a HR department, a health and safety department, a policy department ... a research department. And I think that within a big, established organisation, if there isn't help there, there is someone that will phone someone else."*

(Home managers)

Managers were also encouraged to share ownership (and tasks) with staff, by involving them in implementing changes in the home. Where staff had been engaged in the process, this was felt to have been very helpful in alleviating burdens on managers, but also in supporting staff to understand what was required, and develop their practice.

### 4.2.2 Placing local authorities

Local authority managers who took part in interviews described running seminars for *all* homes in their area to introduce the Standards and regulations before they came into force. They had also been in regular contact with them since (individually and through managers meetings) to explore whether they were facing issues or difficulties.

The degree and type of support which other homes received from their placing LAs appeared to vary, but one manager of an isolated private home described the 'mini inspections' he received as very helpful.

*"There's two local authorities. One of them sends two people from the commissioning department and they pretty much spend a full day here, and then a few weeks later you get quite a comprehensive report ... and an action plan of what you need to do. And then the other one, they just send somebody ad hoc with a notepad and a pen, and just specifically look at safeguarding issues in regards to the young person that you're looking after... I find them both useful... We got picked up on some policies and procedures that we didn't have last time, and weren't aware that we needed."*

(Home manager)

### **4.2.3 The Quality Standards partnership**

The workshops led by Action for Children were consistently praised by managers, as were the resources made available online through the Quality Standards Partnership. Managers described being inspired, informed and making valuable links with their peers in different sectors at the workshops, and making good use of the website since.

*"Doing those 'Action for Children' workshops helped... They covered some of the topics that link to the Standards and also gave the opportunity to hear from other services - and also they brought in good speakers."*

*"The Children's Homes Quality partnership has been very supportive, both the workshops and online support."*

*"There are plenty of papers on the website. That's also great - it helps to share that with the staff and to get good practice that's on there."*

*"We managed to get some really good paperwork that other people had spent a lot of time on and [they were] quite happy to share it and vice versa."*

(Home managers)

### **4.2.4 Regulation 44 visitors**

Monthly visits from their independent (regulation 44) visitors sometimes played a significant supportive role, complementing advice and supervision provided by external managers.

*"We had a new regulation 44 inspector who came with a wealth of experience and he really helped me. I know he's there to inspect but he feels more like a mentor."*

(Home manager)

Regulation 44 visitors were sometimes described as less 'friendly' than the one described above, but this did not mean they were less helpful. For example, one manager highlighted how their own regulation 44 visitor, who was previously an Ofsted inspector, had provided them with immensely challenging, but useful input.

## 4.2.5 Ofsted inspectors

Managers' levels of anxiety about Ofsted, while influenced to some extent by hearsay, seemed more closely linked to their own relationships with inspectors. Where inspectors entered into a positive and open dialogue, managers tended to report feeling fairly confident about their ability to meet the Standards to inspectors' satisfaction.

*"He was just very honest.... He said, 'I know you've had a really busy, difficult time' - and he does see it as a process, it's not about trying to trip you up... If you want advice he'll give you that advice. He will say, 'You can ring me at any time, if you're wondering about something.' I'm sure that he will address it. He does still obviously come in, inspects you on Monday, but doesn't see that as the end of the process."*

(Home manager)

Secure homes within the sample reported similarly positive interaction with Ofsted, and appeared to benefit from having a small, dedicated team of inspectors.

*"For secure children's homes... we only have a select inspection team within Ofsted... so we get really good consistency - it's not like you get an inspector that comes in and goes off on one tangent and next year it's completely different."*

(Home manager)

Notwithstanding the problems highlighted in Section 4.1.3, it was clearly possible for inspection under the new framework to be a constructive and encouraging process.

*"The uncertainty of [the minimum requirements] being removed led to some anxiety about what would be expected, but on being inspected I found this to be a much more holistic and positive process, with the views of the manager - and explanations for why we were doing what we were doing - more important and more convincing, because we had consciously made those decisions and were able to evidence why."*

(Home manager)

## 4.2.6 Fora, networks and associations

Managers – particularly those who were otherwise quite isolated – described benefitting hugely from meeting up and sharing experiences with their peers in local, regional or specialist fora, or at conferences.

Likewise, they reported being very grateful for support from membership organisations such as ICHA (Independent Children's Homes Association) and NASS (The National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools). For example, one manager from a small independent home recalled struggling to juggle other responsibilities with scoping what was required by the Standards, and appreciated that ICHA had '*put the work in*' to interpret the Standards and help people in his position get to grips with them, through events, practice guidance and responding to queries.

Managers also described linking up with professionals in other services within the local area, and benefitting from sharing information with them.

*"We are part of the area's safeguarding hub. So we get regular updates, case reviews and that sort of thing to feed in regularly to updating our staff and making sure they're on the ball with that."*

(Home manager)

### **4.3 Summary**

- Respondents described facing a number of challenges while implementing the Standards, relating to the requirements themselves and other contextual factors.
- Challenges relating to the Standards concerned: measuring progress and outcomes; enabling staff to record effectively without sacrificing time with children; applying the Standards to particular types of specialist provision; concern that managers' own judgements could conflict with inspectors'; completing unfamiliar location assessment reviews; and engaging the wider system.
- Wider, interrelated, challenges affecting homes included: the increasingly complex needs of young people; tensions around placement matching and 'cherry picking', where accepting the most challenging children is seen as too risky for 'good' or 'outstanding' homes; funding constraints; and the lowly status of the sector.
- Respondents described being supported by: other managers; their organisations and networks; and responsive, knowledgeable inspectors and Reg. 44 visitors.
- Consultation events, Action for Children workshops and the Quality Standards Partnership website were said to have facilitated information-sharing and supported greater collaboration within the sector.

## 5. Perceived impact

Home managers and other stakeholders believed it was too early to assess the real impact of the Quality Standards. It was suggested that the issue be revisited in a year's time, once changes had bedded in, and once managers - and Ofsted - were more used to the new inspection framework. However, managers highlighted some early indications that changes within homes (and the sector as a whole) were making a difference.

### 5.2 Impact on home managers

There was a broad consensus that, at least in the short term, the changes had increased managers' workloads, in various ways. For example, one manager of a private, specialist home, who was otherwise very enthusiastic about the Standards, did feel that the burden of recording had increased – on them as well as on staff.

*"So much now has to be recorded as evidence that I really feel it does take us away from what we're doing with young people sometimes, especially in my role as a manager - I'm just a legal secretary, really - I have to be constantly in the office."*

(Home manager)

However, the extent of the extra work and/ or stress appeared to have varied greatly, depending on the support available, whether managers felt they had already been delivering 'Standards-compliant' care, and on their confidence in their ability to satisfy Ofsted. In some cases, the time required to adjust to the Standards quickly paid off. For example, one manager (well-supported by her organisation and inspector) professed to feel much more confident, going forward, about her ability to evidence good work.

*"Until you get your first inspection you're not really sure, but... I feel that it made my life a bit easier, because I was able to create documents from easily explained Quality Standards ... Because I think we've always had trouble, we do all this good work, but actually when Ofsted come out there's nothing to evidence it."*

(Home manager)

Local and network stakeholders also felt that managers were having to 'step up' in terms of demonstrating leadership and 'selling the vision' to staff. This was seen as more of a challenge for some than others, but there were certainly instances where managers portrayed themselves, as well as staff, as galvanised by the Standards. For example, managers described themselves as feeling empowered to act on the Standards' mandate to demand change from the wider system, and being more persistent in demanding progress.

*"The leadership and management standard encourages me to be more forthright in, well, not demanding things, but me being the change agent. So I'm firing off emails, well why isn't this happening? And being a bit more insistent...I think that's what it causes me to be, far more persistent."*

(Home manager)

There were also indications that, at this early stage, managers were feeling freer to use their judgement in relation to planning care for young people.

*"I think that it's far easier for us to make a decision. I prefer that - they're understanding more that we are more corporate parents for young people."*

(Home manager)

As one stakeholder pointed out, the Standards were having an effect partly through stimulating changes in thinking by - and increasing support from - external management.

*"People are talking about being able to implement more local decisions, but others will say, well yes, but we've always been able to do that. Where people have felt more able to make their own decisions, it rather means that a local situation had been occurring which had inhibited them in the past. So if the Standards can help loosen up some of those external constraints, that's good."*

(Network stakeholder)

Despite this welcoming of newfound freedom, there was still some frustration about a lack of guidance, or limited awareness about guidance, in some areas of reporting (for example, as discussed previously, around location assessments, or around notifications). This was seen to create unnecessary and distracting uncertainty.

*"There's more onus on the registered manager, and that can have its positives and negatives. It gives me more room to argue to inspectors 'Actually I do this because of this'. But on the other side, when you have to do notifications to Ofsted and stuff, whereas before we had a guide, now it's more down to us. So if we haven't done something they think we should have done, or if we then over inform... then they'll pick us up on that too... I think until you've had your first inspection under the new Standards you don't actually know if you're doing it right or wrong."*

(Home manager)

## **5.2 Impact on residential staff**

Managers described the Standards and resulting changes as having mixed effects on staff. As outlined in Section 4.1.1, a shift to more demanding recording had met with some resistance. However, the Standards were also felt to be resulting in greater staff engagement in their work. This stemmed partly from them being very accessible, but also from the (welcome or unwelcome) need for more analytical thinking whilst monitoring outcomes, which in turn produced evidence which boosted confidence in their own work.

*"For the staff this has made them feel that the work we ask them to do and record is meaningful, both to young people and to them and is not just prescriptive or 'paper exercises' ... There is clear direction that the staff and not just managers are responsible for the implementation of the Standards and this for me makes them more personal for the staff and relevant to them in their roles. They are not as far removed from legislation / standards as they might have felt in the past."*

*"Staff struggled to understand the Minimum Standards and there were so many of them... It's also easier for them to reflect the Quality Standards in their own home life."*

(Home managers)

As discussed further in the next section, staff engagement with the Standards was felt to be resulting not only in better recording, but in improved care for young people.

*"I've got somebody who was very boundaried...with the kids but they've now reflected on their practice through the Standards, and they've had to change their approach. And that's worked really, really well."*

(Home manager)

### **5.3 Impact on care for young people**

As discussed in Chapter 3, while changes in *recording* were reported across our sample, there was more variation in the extent of changes to *care*. Indeed, one group of managers – confident that their care had been excellent *before* implementing the Standards – was keen to stress that young people would not notice any difference; for their homes, only their reporting framework had changed.

Another view was that, at least over *time*, the Standards' greater emphasis on monitoring progress would have a positive impact in individual homes and across the sector, through encouraging a focus on psychological, therapeutic or 'precision-based' care. Indeed, in some cases, managers appeared confident that better recording and monitoring were already making them more aware of what young people were and were not achieving – and better able to act accordingly.

*"I feel we've got much more of a hands on approach now to the child's journey and some of the difficulties that we may have found that we didn't challenge early enough. So we're able to respond to that much effectively."*

(Home manager)

Managers also felt that some of the other changes described in Chapter 3 were beginning to have a positive impact. They described staff playing a more active role as advocates for young people, and this being recognised and appreciated. One manager described how, backed by regulation 5, they had successfully challenged moves to have a young person transferred from the placement in which he was thriving.

*"We had him for just coming up to a year and he's doing really well, great outcomes, meeting all his targets, so the local authority now want to take him out and put him somewhere that is adequate back in county and through using regulation five we've been able to fight and push and gather evidence and push back and we've had his placement confirmed for another year. So I don't feel the Standards would have backed us up to that point previously."*

(Home Manager)

Other examples provided by managers included the following:

- Where improved target setting and working with education had paid off, in terms of a young person's progress from part-time towards full-time education.
- Where young people responded positively to doors being unlocked, seeing the new 'openness' as a privilege and not abusing it.
- How changes around wishes and feelings, positive relationships and extra-curricular activities had led to behaviour improving and fewer children going missing.

As one, particularly enthusiastic manager enthused:

*"The stability of the home is just, it's just ... a marked improvement .... And it's a testament to the fact that we've taken on board everything that's being said in these Quality Standards, in as far as you can, particularly the wishes and feelings, enjoying and achieving and positive relationships... Once you've got those... it's a recipe for success, because you're listening to the children, you're acting on what they're saying, you're making sure that there's so many opportunities for them to enjoy and achieve.... It's just developing an aspirational culture. And I think that again is what's helping the young people to be happy in the home and not run off and be missing, and things like that.... Those things that are, I guess, synonymous with residential care in times gone by have really changed in our home, for sure. Like missing episodes, like involvement with the police, police callouts and things like that, use of restraint, all those things... It's seldom that those things happen. Seldom... Our Ofsted inspector said he was really, really happy, really impressed. "*

(Home manager)

However, in contrast, as discussed in Section 4.1.7, there was concern that some of the most troubled and vulnerable young people might be adversely affected by the Quality Standards, if homes were inspected in such a way as to deter good providers from accepting challenging placements.

In addition, one very concrete example of an adverse effect on young people was highlighted by a manager of a short breaks service: in order to allow staff time to complete new forms and records, without reducing their time with children on short breaks, the home has had to cut back on the day care offered for those living at home.

*"I don't take staff away from the children to do admin.... So now... I keep two days a week where I don't have any day care. So if you're on an AM shift, you know you can use that time. But we used to be full, used more by the community."*

(Home manager)

## 5.4 Impact on the sector

As discussed above, in relation to managers and residential staff, the aspirational nature of the Standards and the responsibilities they accorded homes were seen to boost the status of residential care – at least insofar as the sector saw itself.

*"Residential has always been seen as the poor relation of social care really, well you're just the one that looks after the children, we're the actual ones that make the decisions around social care and things like that. That has changed, that has dramatically changed and the Standards have played a part in that.... I think we feel that they are progressive, that they give us more scope to work as professionals, and as managers, and deputies, and shift leaders, it gives you more scope to play a more prominent part in the young people's lives that we look after."*

(Home manager)

Moreover, interviewees and workshop participants commented that the way in which the Standards were introduced - following consultation with DfE and with support through the Quality Standards Partnership – appeared to have facilitated networking and encouraged greater collaboration and unity within the sector.

*"It was a very interesting journey from the first consultation paper... I can see how it's developed into where we're at, and I think it's been a very effective way to do it because I think it's brought everybody, well, it should have brought everybody along on the journey... Often you're just like, there's just a change in legislation. They might do an online consultation and that's it. But this... I feel like we have been part of the process, I do, all the way along."*

(Local authority stakeholder)

*"When I came to the conference there were some people there from independent children's homes, and I now link up with them. Because actually why shouldn't we support other people? ... So we're working together with private organisations as well, whereas... I think it's always been like a competition, it's us and them."*

(Home managers)

However, there were more cautious comments from those who highlighted that the sector still faced enormous challenges (including those listed in Section 4.1); that commercial pressures were still important; and that not all companies were willing to share material.

*"It's difficult because in fairness if Ofsted rates certain documentation, care plans, things like that, Reg. 45 templates, as outstanding, they sell on the open market, you see... and that will never change because the market is a big market."*

(Home managers)

## 5.5 Summary

- It was considered too early to fully assess the impact of the Quality Standards.
- However, there were some early indications that changes within homes (and the sector as a whole) were making a difference.
- Experiences varied, but among the effects described by respondents were: increased workloads for home managers; better recording, leading to more effective monitoring of care; greater engagement of staff in their work and greater innovation in practice.
- In turn, these developments were seen to have positive effects on the atmosphere and outcomes within homes, for example, with better behaviour management, less placement disruption or fewer children going missing from care.
- The way in which the Standards were introduced - following consultation and with extensive support through the Quality Standards Partnership – appeared to have facilitated networking and encouraged greater collaboration within the sector.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has presented findings from interviews and workshop discussions involving children's home managers and other key stakeholders between October 2015 and January 2016. These were designed to explore experiences of implementing the new regulations and Quality Standards; to highlight examples of changes in homes as a result; to identify challenges or barriers for managers; and to consider facilitators to date, in order to inform decisions about future support for the sector.

### 6.1 Key findings

The study involved a range of homes across the country, from organisations of different sizes, with different Ofsted ratings, and offering different forms of provision. Their varied circumstances and the needs of the children they cared for affected their responses to the Standards. Nevertheless, common themes emerged from conversations with those managing distinct types of provision. Key findings from the research are set out below.

#### Initial reactions

Broadly speaking, reaction to the new Standards and regulations was very positive. It was felt that the Standards were clear and well written. Managers welcomed their aspirational tone, and the emphasis on quality, evidence and pursuit of positive outcomes. However, there was also anxiety about what implementation would mean for the workloads of managers and their staff, and about how the Standards would be interpreted by Ofsted.

#### Changes introduced in response to the Standards

The extent of change within children's homes in response to the new Standards varied, ranging from fairly superficial changes to written policies or recording (including in homes already rated as Outstanding) to more substantive changes in aspects of practice.

Consistently, managers described adapting records and information to ensure all policies and reporting templates referenced and were in line with the regulations. They briefed and engaged their staff, and familiarised young people with the changes, in various ways. New responsibilities were taken on board, including around location assessments, and ensuring all staff (including bank and relief staff) achieved a minimum of Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare or already held an equivalent qualification. Among other changes described as significant, managers reported:

- Better evidencing of progress and outcomes
- More active efforts to engage professionals in the wider system
- Use of impact assessments to avoid inappropriate placements in the home
- More, and new approaches to, consultation with young people
- Revised approaches to behaviour management, with moves away from restraints and sanctions in favour of rewarding positive behaviour
- Providing more opportunities for young people to engage with local communities.

## Perceived impact

It was generally considered too early to assess the *impact* of the Standards, either within homes or across the sector. However, it was argued that, particularly among homes where more substantive changes had been made, these were beginning to make a difference, for managers, staff and / or young people.

Perceived impacts for managers were mixed. The extent to which workloads and / or stress had increased depended on the support available, whether managers felt they had already been delivering 'Standards-compliant' care, and on their experiences with Ofsted. More positive impacts included managers feeling galvanised and empowered to make decisions and advocate for young people.

Managers also described differing impacts on staff. Introducing more rigorous or demanding monitoring of progress had met with some resistance, especially where it meant more time recording and less time with young people. However, this focus on outcomes – along with the accessible nature of the Standards themselves – was also felt to be resulting in greater staff engagement in their work, and greater understanding of the difference they could make.

Particularly where changes in *care practice* had been made – for example, around advocacy, consultation, behaviour management or activities, managers were able to point to some positive effects on the atmosphere and outcomes within homes, for example, with greater progress in education, fewer instances of children going missing, or dramatic reductions in use of physical restraint (particularly in secure homes).

It was also suggested that the aspirational nature of the Standards and the responsibilities they accorded homes provided something of a vote of confidence in the sector as a whole. The way in which the Standards were introduced – following consultation with DfE and with support through the Quality Standards Partnership – also appeared to have facilitated networking and encouraged greater collaboration and unity within the sector. However, significant challenges remained.

## Challenges within homes and across the sector

Just as the scale and nature of change varied across homes, so did the challenges facing managers. Key areas which were highlighted as presenting issues included:

- evidencing progress in areas such as emotional wellbeing
- enabling staff to record more effectively, without sacrificing time with children
- applying the Standards to particular types of specialist provision
- determining the format and focus of management reports
- engaging the wider system.

Another challenge which troubled managers to varying degrees, but which cut across all of the above was concern that managers' own judgements could conflict with those of individual inspectors - in the context of ambiguity about what constituted good practice in reporting, or progress for a particular young person. Experiences of inspection

against the new Standards were very mixed. At one extreme, there were managers who described confidently presenting evidence of progress and having this validated by Ofsted. Conversely, there were others who reported feeling extremely frustrated and unfairly judged. They described instances of inflexibility, inconsistency and inaccessibility which were felt to conflict with the spirit of the Standards.

Given the breadth of the standards' coverage, managers facing other pressures stressed how challenging it had been to review what was required, let alone *action* this, while continuing to manage the day-to-day running of their homes.

Challenges arising from the broader context for homes' work included: the complex needs of young people placed in children's homes; tensions around placement matching or 'cherry picking', where accepting the most challenging children is seen as too risky for 'good' or 'outstanding' homes in a competitive market; (worsening) funding constraints; and the (still) lowly status of the sector.

### **Sources of support for implementation**

Managers described being supported by: others within their organisations; their peers working in other homes; specialist fora, networks or associations (including ICHA and NASS); and inspectors and Reg. 44 visitors with whom they had good relationships.

DfE and Ofsted consultation events, Action for Children workshops and the Quality Standards Partnership website were said to have increased understanding of what was required. They had also facilitated collaboration and sharing of expertise and resources within the sector – something managers were very keen should continue.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

This final section considers some of the specific recommendations made by managers and other stakeholders, to facilitate the ongoing implementation of the Quality Standards.

### **1. Continue to monitor implementation of the standards and regulations**

Managers and other stakeholders stressed that it was too early to evaluate the impact of the Quality Standards, but that doing so was vital. It was argued that changes to policies, practice and culture, and their effects, should be monitored over the next few years – and must take into account the perspectives of providers, local authority commissioners and Ofsted. An independent evaluation might realistically be undertaken 18 months after the Quality Standards came into force.

Participants in this study were keen that the Quality Standards should have at least a few years to 'bed in' before any major change, but they urged that, in the meantime, DfE and its sector partners should act to address problems highlighted in this, or subsequent, research.

## 2. Maintain support for implementation across the sector

Managers urged DfE and its sector partners to maintain at least some form of help for homes to adapt, improve and learn from emerging good practice. There was a strong consensus that it would be a mistake to lose momentum at this stage, when there was an opportunity to capitalise on a spirit of unity and collaboration in the sector. This sense of shared purpose was thought to have been facilitated by the way in which the Standards had been developed and shared with the sector, and it was felt that *continuing* to listen, and respond, was the way forward.

The following suggestions were made about the shape this support should take:

- Regular regional events and fora, focused on emerging good practice
- Maintaining the Quality Standards website and / or newsletters, as vehicles for wider dissemination
- Funding for development / identification of standardised tools to better measure progress and outcomes (and to support the sector to use these where relevant)
- Action learning sets – to bring managers and other senior staff together to work on key practice challenges over the course of several months
- Targeted support to more isolated, small providers.

## 3. Facilitate engagement with and by Ofsted

Given the extent to which anxiety around inspection was affecting managers, it appears vital to address issues around relationships with Ofsted. The following were all suggested by interviewees and/or workshop participants as potential ways to do so:

- Hold regional workshops / webinars focusing on case studies of excellent and improved homes, and on lessons learned from inspections under the new system
- Provide a firmer mandate (or 'quality standard') for Ofsted around engaging with homes in between inspections, so as to support them to improve and address problems *before* an inspection judgement is made. (One option might be to provide 'support and challenge' visits, in between annual inspections.)
- Address concerns that the new inspection framework is exacerbating risk aversion in the independent sector, by developing a shared understanding of how care (and progress) for the most challenging young people should be judged.
- Similarly, ensure Ofsted is equipped to 'fairly' inspect the most innovative services, such as those providing short breaks for young people on the edge of care.

## 4. Engage the wider system

This report has highlighted how the Quality Standards have galvanised managers to advocate and demand better for their young people in the wider system. However, it was a common complaint that the wider system was less keen – or less able – to respond.

To address this, managers and other stakeholders were keen to see a concerted, cross-departmental effort from government to encourage other children's services – schools, CAMHS and the police - to play their part in supporting the Quality Standards. It was suggested that good practice examples of engagement from *both* sides be collected, and disseminated widely.

## **5. Support investment in training**

Although training was not a key focus of this study, its findings reinforced those from NCB's previous research for DfE (White *et al.* 2015). Managers were keen to support workforce development, in the context of the Quality Standards. However, they were conscious of resource constraints and the need to avoid alienating less academically minded, but otherwise talented, valued staff. A number of suggestions were made by managers and other stakeholders for developing training in the sector:

- Review the content of the Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications to ensure they – or additional, extra training courses - fully reflect the expectations of the Quality Standards in terms of leadership, reflective practice and critical analysis.
- Consider offering less expensive, online training if need be – although it was stressed that face to face, group-based learning was the 'gold standard'.
- Disseminate guidance on what constitutes a good training programme. This could be informed by evidence from homes about the impact of particular provision.
- Collaborate with those working on plans for a residential childcare academy (ICHA, with university partners) and learn from initiatives in other countries.

## **6. Require a strategic approach to commissioning and supporting providers**

In the context of serious concerns about difficulties finding places for the most challenging children, and dilemmas about placements far from home authorities, there were calls for a national strategy for residential childcare with a more strategic approach to commissioning at local and regional levels. It was suggested that, as a first step, all LAs be required to conduct a needs analysis, using the same methodology, and that the data be aggregated regionally. This could inform moves over the course of a few years to ensure provision was delivered where it was needed most.

In addition, given the apparent variation in support provided by LAs to independent providers (and how beneficial this support could be), there may be scope for more guidance, or sharing of good practice, around monitoring of commissioned places.

## **7. Improve the status of the sector**

This last recommendation is undoubtedly challenging, especially in the context of further cuts to public services. It is important to note that the Standards themselves were seen to have boosted the status of the sector – or at least its self-esteem, and that managers were keen to support further staff development. However, it was argued that the DfE, and government as a whole, should be more positive about what homes can achieve, and the skills and dedication of their staff.

One suggestion from a participant in this study was to encourage home managers to shout louder in the press about their achievements. It would also be helpful if they were supported not only to *learn* from research (in line with Recommendation 1), but to *contribute* to collaborative efforts to fully utilise the richer evidence now being collected in homes across the country. This could play a key part in demonstrating – and building on - the good work carried out in residential care.

*“Part of leadership and management should be professional activism... and trying to elevate residential care to where it needs to be as a profession... You need to be reporting all the fantastic work that we're doing, as professionals, as leaders, as home managers, to places like Community Care... Because we need to get out there that actually residential care is a first choice placement for a lot of young people, particularly those who have siblings, where they can come together and that they can stay, because there's more chance of a home being able to cater for two or three siblings, rather than... a foster family.... We've seen the Panorama on residential care and how negative, it was... But why can't we have documentaries on the positive things? ... Because there is fantastic work that's going on, but you never hear about it... Because it will elevate the sector. It will have a huge bearing on what the public think of residential care, and what they think of looked after children as well.”*

(Home manager)

## Appendix A. Sample characteristics

The table below provides an overview of the spread of home managers who contributed to the study at either the interview or workshop stages. Additional stakeholders who took part included representatives from three local authorities and one private organisation (with responsibility for residential services), as well as three stakeholders running networks or associations of homes.

Sample		Managers
Main focus of home	Emotional and behavioural difficulties	13
	Children with disabilities (including short breaks and long-term care for children with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders)	7
	Other specialist homes (secure homes, homes addressing sexualised behaviour, and providing short breaks for young people on the edge of care)	3
Size of home	One/ two place homes	2
	Three/ four place homes	7
	Five or more place homes	14
Provider sector	Private / independent	9
	Local authority	12
	Voluntary	2
Regions	London	6
	North West	5
	East Midlands	4
	South East	3
	West Midlands	3
	North East	1
	South West	1