



# Registered Manager & Head of Care – Vacancy Analysis

A study of the factors underpinning the vacancy rate in England for  
Registered Managers and Heads of Care for Children's Homes and  
Residential Special Schools

dialogue

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## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction: what is the issue? .....	5
Research steering group .....	5
dialogue.....	6
Sponsors.....	6
Acknowledgements .....	6
Methodology .....	7
About the survey respondents.....	8
Findings.....	10
Rising numbers of children in care and reducing choice in where they live .....	10
Smaller homes could mean more managers.....	10
Registered Manager vacancy rates .....	12
Retention of Registered managers.....	16
Recruiting new managers.....	19
Delays in the appointment of a manager.....	22
Fit person interview .....	25
Regulation 28 .....	28
The impact of inspection.....	29
Registration across more than one home.....	34
Demanding role and responsibilities .....	36
Hours worked .....	39
Stress .....	42
Support.....	44
Supervision, training and CPD (continuous professional development) .....	47
Feeling valued in role .....	49
Remuneration for the role .....	50
Barriers to becoming a Registered manager or Head of care role .....	51
Conclusions .....	54
Recommendations .....	54
Appendix 1 – Residential Special Schools (RSS) .....	58
Appendix 2 – Survey .....	60

# Executive Summary

This report explores the factors contributing to the vacancy rates for **Registered Managers (RMs)** and **Heads of Care in Children's Homes** and **Residential Special Schools (RSS)** across England. It responds to growing concern amongst commissioners, providers, regulators and policymakers about the availability of qualified leadership in residential settings for children and young people.

The research, led by **dialogue** and supported by a broad coalition of sector stakeholders, draws on survey responses from 378 professionals and a review of national data. It seeks to understand why some managers are leaving, what may be discouraging others from stepping into the role, and what helps sustain those who remain.

The findings show that while the sector has made progress in reducing vacancy rates since 2022, challenges remain. In March 2025, 19% of children's homes had no Registered Manager and almost half of these (46%) had no manager in post at all. Ofsted data on unregistered children's homes in the year from April 2024 shows there were at least 920 potential cases of unregistered children's homes or supported accommodation settings (of which 78% should have been registered)<sup>1</sup>.

The number of children's homes has grown significantly – almost 50% since 2021 – driven by a rise in the numbers of children in care, the increase in the number of smaller homes, the difficulty in recruiting and retaining foster carers and the introduction of regulation for supported accommodation. While the number of registered managers has also increased, it has not kept pace with the expansion of provision. During this period guidance was changed to allow managers to register for two homes – this may have ensured a reduction rather than a growth in vacancies and interim arrangements. It is, however, very possible the number of registered managers will fail to keep up with the number of children's homes now being opened.

The Residential Special School sector is reducing in size. Heads of Care are more likely to be part of a close team than Registered Managers which aids resilience, but many of the same issues apply and this report will be relevant to those running or placing children in these settings. We have considered any differences in the findings for Residential Special Schools separately in Appendix 1.

Retention is a key issue. While registered managers tend to commit to their roles for a comparatively long period, this research finds that managers intending to leave their posts are generally not planning to move to another registered manager role, resulting in the loss of vital experience from the sector. The reasons cited include the range of responsibilities placed on this single role, the pressure of inspection, a loss of work-life balance, stress, and failings in support. Managers also speak positively about their work, describing a strong sense of purpose, pride in supporting young people, and satisfaction in seeing positive outcomes.

Recruitment into the Registered Manager role is affected by several factors. The fit person interview with Ofsted, required by regulation, is seen by some as a barrier due to its perceived intensity and inconsistency. Similarly, Regulation 28, which sets experience and qualification requirements, may limit the pool of eligible candidates, although most managers surveyed had well above the minimum experience threshold when appointed. In our research most managers

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Regulatory activity in all types of children's homes and supported accommodation providers between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025](#)

comment extensively on the demands of the role and the pressures of inspection as being the most significant inhibitor to people applying to become a Registered Manager of a children's home.

The report also highlights the importance of organisational culture. Managers benefit from organisations where they feel supported by senior leaders, have access to high quality supervision and training, and lead environments that value their wellbeing. Conversely, where support is lacking or expectations are unclear, managers' report feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

Rather than presenting a crisis, the report offers a constructive view of a sector in transition. It identifies areas where improvements can be made – such as streamlining registration processes, enhancing support structures, and promoting the Registered Manager role more positively while recognising the dedication and resilience of those currently in post.

The findings suggest that the pressures are likely to increase with more children's homes opening over the next year. Ultimately, to reduce reliance on residential care we need fewer children in care and more foster carers. In the meantime, we need to better support and value the passionate individuals who care deeply for children and young people in their Registered Manager role.

The report concludes with a broad range of Recommendations for Government, the regulator and providers with suggestions to effect significant cultural change to halt unreasonable expectations placed on these crucial roles which diverts their attention away from children and young people. This will require a shift in how accountability is held, a significant move in workplace ethos to more child-centred and sustainable working hours, and reconsideration of the 'high stakes' inspection model.

**dialogue** and partners will work to equip organisations with the tools to support this change with a range of interventions to help develop supportive leadership structures, new training for Registered Managers and workshops to build confidence in key aspects of regulation activity. More information on our response to support the sector can be found [on our website](#).

## Introduction: what is the issue?

Commissioners, providers, Ofsted and Government are concerned at the difficulties in recruiting Registered Managers in children's homes and Heads of Care in residential special schools. Too many posts are vacant, and providers comment they are unable to expand their provision due to recruitment issues.

By law, all children's homes must have a manager who is registered with Ofsted. Registered Managers need "*the appropriate experience, qualification and skills to manage the home effectively and lead the care of children*"<sup>2</sup>.

Currently some homes do not have a manager, and others operate with a manager who is not registered. Of even greater concern, some children's homes do not register with Ofsted at all. Data suggests at least 775 young people were placed in unregistered homes on 1st September 2024<sup>3</sup>. Often these are the young people with particularly high needs and there are then limited safeguards to ensure their welfare is promoted. The cost of these settings is often more than regulated provision<sup>4</sup>.

Insufficient availability of registered managers is a problem across England. This is a longstanding issue. Variation in Registered Manager vacancy rate fluctuates both over time and by region. Ofsted report a consistently high vacancy rate for Registered Managers of Children's homes nationally. Latest figures<sup>5</sup> show 740 (19%) children's homes in England do not have a registered manager in post. Of the children's homes without a registered manager in post, 46% had no manager in post and 54% had a manager in post who was unregistered or not yet registered.

A high vacancy rate of Registered managers is problematic, especially at a time when the number of children in care is high and Ofsted report record registrations of children's homes<sup>6</sup>. Increased demand for residential provision outstrips the availability of places. Local authorities and others are looking to expand their residential provision, but a key limiter will be the availability of registered managers. Prior to this research there was a limited understanding about the reasons for the high registered manager vacancy rate.

## Research steering group

The work aimed to enhance understanding and provide recommendations for improvement so that commissioners and providers can appropriately focus their recruitment, retention and growth strategies to meet the very high need for placements for young people in residential care. An independent steering group was brought together to inform and steer the project. The group was made up of representatives from:

- The Department for Education
- Ofsted
- The South West Sufficiency Programme
- The National Association of Special Schools

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<sup>2</sup> [The Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015 28\(1\)\(b\)\(i\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Children's Commissioner (2024) [Illegal Children's Homes](#)

<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Unregistered children's homes: too many vulnerable children are placed at risk](#)

<sup>5</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Regulatory activity in all types of children's homes and supported accommodation providers between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Why your registration application may be taking longer than usual](#)

- The Children’s Homes Association
- Responsible Individual representatives from the South West
- A local authority commissioner
- Academics
- dialogue

The steering group’s role was to inform and advise – the findings are very much built on the voices of the leaders who contributed to the survey. **dialogue** has summarised these into recommendations for the sector.

## dialogue

Commissioners and Responsible Individuals in the South West asked **dialogue** to undertake this research. **dialogue** works closely with both providers and commissioners in the children’s homes sector to facilitate the cycle between learning and practice, helping network leaders in the residential sector and commissioners across the country, developing [safeguarding and leadership training](#) in response to the needs of the sector and through the development of impactful research. Previously **dialogue** examined the impact of Regulation 44 Independent Persons who visit Children’s Homes<sup>7</sup>.

## Sponsors

The project was funded by local authorities, charities and private limited companies that provide support to the sector:

- The [South West sufficiency programme](#), comprising South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset, Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole, Bristol, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Plymouth, Somerset, Swindon, Wiltshire, Torbay and the Isles of Scilly.
- [RWK Goodman](#), a specialist law firm which supports children’s services and specialist schools.
- [Hazlewoods](#), a specialist accountancy and business advisory firm. With offices across Cheltenham, Bristol, and Cardiff, its dedicated Healthcare team of over 100 experts support UK-wide providers across multiple areas of care, including children’s homes and SEND schools, in operating, growing, acquiring, and selling.
- The [Caretech Charitable Foundation](#), an independent grant making corporate foundation aimed at meaningful change in the social care sector
- the [National Association of Special Schools](#), and
- [dialogue](#), an organisation delivering safeguarding and leadership training and consultancy to the sector.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the 378 individuals who completed an in-depth survey and to Registered Managers and Responsible Individuals in the South West who additionally contributed to the development of the survey through focus group activity. We are indebted to steering group members and the sponsors of the project. Thanks also to Dr. Claire Baker, independent researcher who provided research advice and support to the dialogue team.

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<sup>7</sup> dialogue (2023) [Regulation 44 Impact Analysis](#)

## Methodology

In consultation with the steering group, three core questions for the project were formed, these guided the work:

1. Why are Registered Managers & Heads of Care leaving (and what could be done to reduce this);
2. What is preventing sufficient people stepping up into the Registered manager role; and
3. What supports the Registered Managers who are staying in role?

To explore these areas, we:

- Reviewed the available research and data.
  - In response to some of the gaps identified Ofsted published additional transparency data
- Developed an England wide national survey of Residential Special Schools and Children's Homes.
  - The survey development was informed by the data review, focus group discussions and advice from the steering group.
  - The survey was circulated to Responsible Persons in every children's home by Ofsted and to all Special schools via the National Association of Special Schools.
  - The survey was open for eight weeks. A reminder email was sent out via the Ofsted bulletin with a specific request for the survey to be shared with Responsible Individuals and deputies or non-registered managers to ensure a range of views were received.
  - A copy of the survey is available at Appendix 2.

In total, 378 survey responses were received.

- 351 of these related to children's homes (representing approximately 9% of children's homes on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024), although it is noted that there may be more than one entry from any individual children's home and that some leaders and managers are responsible for multiple homes.
- 23 related to Residential Special Schools (18% of RSS by the same calculation)
- 4 participants did not specify their setting.

Overall, participants contributed more than 125,000 words to the survey, an average of more than 300 words per contributor creating a rich and varied range of perspectives on the sector. To support analysis the dialogue survey team read every comment. In addition, Microsoft Co-pilot was used to develop thematic summaries.

NB: During the work we identified broad similarity with a small number of differences between the Children's Home and Residential Special Schools sectors. For ease of reading we have separated out those differences into Appendix 1.

## About the survey respondents

Most responses (85%) were from children's homes providing 'long term care'.

**TABLE 1 - Which of the following best describes your setting in your statement of purpose?**

A children's home which provides long term care	319	85%
A children's home which provides short term care	15	4%
A residential special school NOT registered as a children's home (295 days a year or LESS)	8	2%
A short break children's home	15	4%
A secure children's home	2	1%
A residential special school registered as a children's home (for MORE than 295 days a year)	7	2%
A residential special school NOT registered as a children's home (295 days a year or LESS)	8	2%
Don't know	0	0%
Other	1	0%

Around four-fifths (81%) of responses were from individuals in the private sector and 14% were from Local Authority settings (the remainder voluntary (3%) or other types of ownership). This is comparable to national data<sup>8</sup> (84% private and 12% local authority). Settings were located across England and broadly represent the distribution of children's homes nationally, with higher survey responses from the West Midlands and South West regions (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2 - Where is your setting located? (you can select more than one option)**

	<u>National</u>	Survey
East Midlands	12%	12%
East of England	8%	7%
North East, Yorkshire and Humber	15%	13%
North West	26%	23%
South East	10%	10%
South West	7%	14%
West Midlands	16%	12%
London	6%	8%

Respondents occupied a range of job roles. Over three-quarters (78%) were either Registered Managers (43%) or Responsible individuals (35%).

**TABLE 3 - What is your job role?**

Head of Care	17	5%
Responsible Individual	126	35%
Registered Manager	156	43%
Other senior leadership role	30	8%
Principal	1	0%
Deputy Manager or similar	23	6%
Manager covering a Registered role	12	3%

<sup>8</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2025](#)



During survey development consideration was given to linking participants to specific children's homes to verify information about home type, purpose, size, inspection judgements and similar. It was decided this may undermine participants' faith in the confidentiality of the survey. We also considered exploring whether there is sufficient diversity across Registered Manager roles and whether we were missing the benefit of people from particular backgrounds, ethnicity, gender and ages. For similar reasons we decided against the intrusive nature of some of these questions. We also considered the sensitive nature of some of this information and recognised collecting such information would significantly extend the length of the survey which we felt was already a big ask of the sector.

We **recommend** future research focused on diversity of the individuals registered as managers of children's homes is needed, perhaps by the regulator who routinely collates some of this data for specified and lawful purposes.

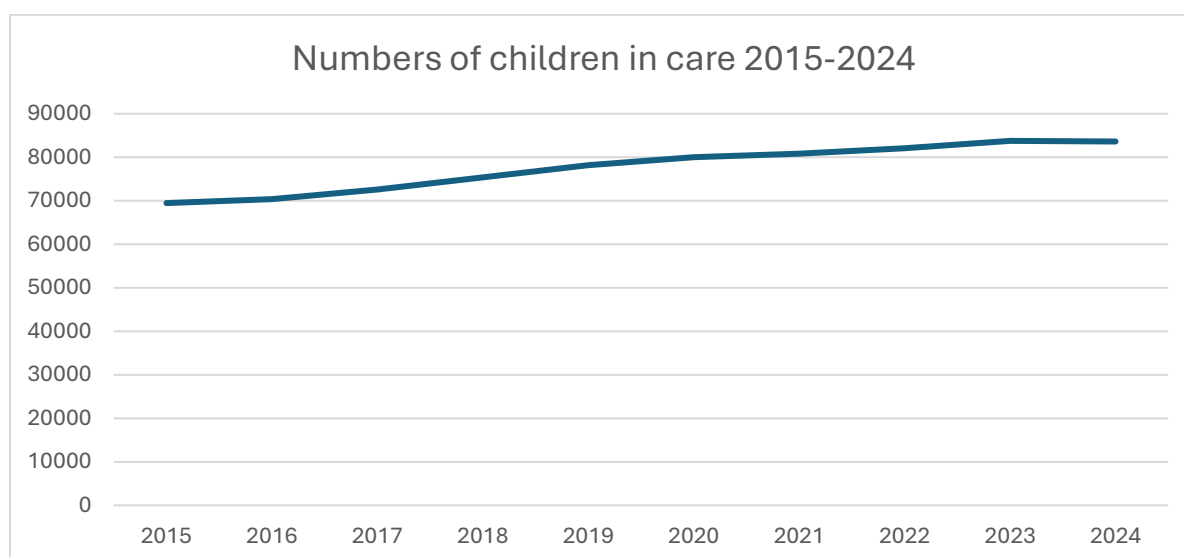
## Findings

### Rising numbers of children in care and reducing choice in where they live

The numbers of children in care have risen more than 20% (see Figure 1) in the last decade to 83,630<sup>9</sup>. In the last 5 years the number of mainstream foster households has declined from 37,230 to 33,750 (9.2%)<sup>10</sup> although some of this has been compensated for with a rise in kinship carers.

Demand on residential care has been very significant, and the capacity of the children's homes sector has risen by a quarter in the last decade (Ofsted, 2025) with a 10% rise in the number of children in care from 2020 to 2024<sup>11</sup>. Sufficiency is still thought to be "*the main problem facing children's residential provisions*"<sup>12</sup> (p10).

**Figure 1** Chart showing the rise in number of children in care in England



While the focus of this report is on the residential sector, the key dependencies that will ultimately shift the numbers of Registered Managers required remain the numbers of children in care and foster placements available for them.

### Smaller homes could mean more managers

Despite the high demand, children's homes struggle to maintain full occupancy: while children's homes have an average of 3.8 registered places the average number of occupied places per home was 2.9. These figures represent an approximate 10% drop on 2024 (4.2 and 3.2 respectively)<sup>13</sup>. The reasons for the low numbers include "*waiting for a child referral (54%, up from 32%), an intentional vacancy to enable child stability (29% [in 2024]) or insufficient staff*

<sup>9</sup> DfE (2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#)

<sup>10</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024](#)

<sup>11</sup> NAO (2025) [Managing Children's Residential Care](#)

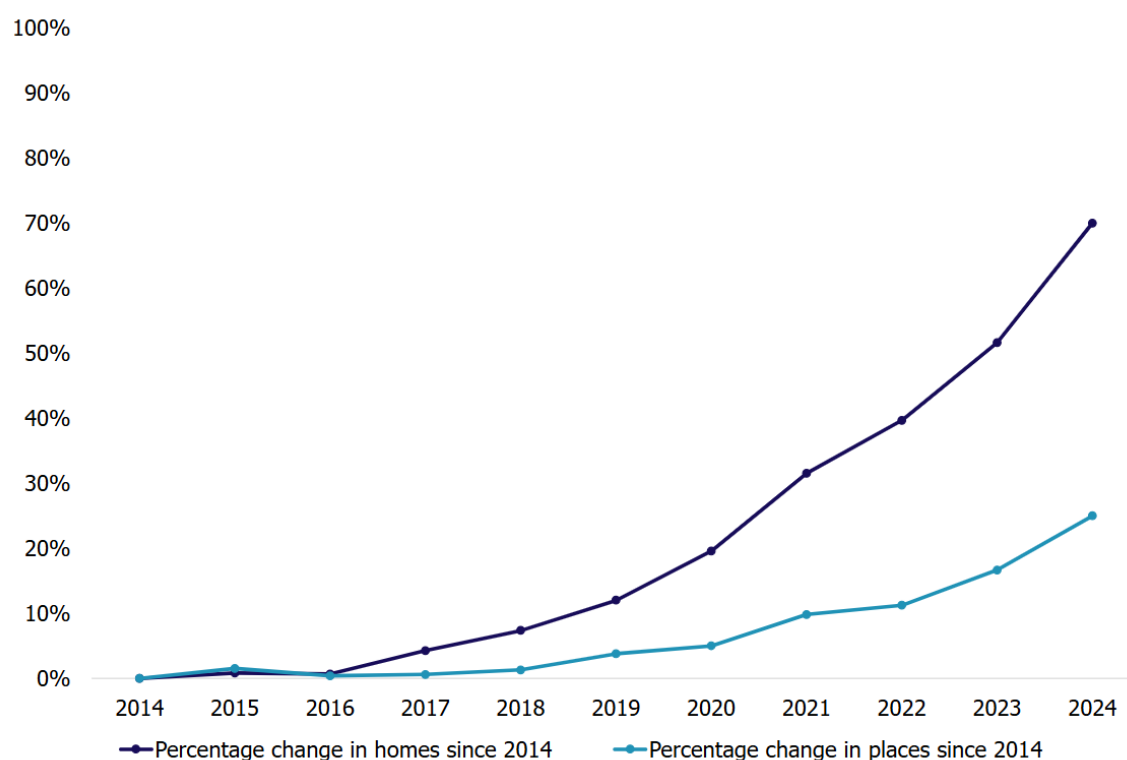
<sup>12</sup> LGA (2025) [Costs and complexity in care: The real drivers of high-cost placements for children in care](#)

<sup>13</sup> DfE (2025) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

due to recruitment/retention issues (28% [in 2024]). Around three in ten (29% [in 2024]) said there were other reasons for unoccupied beds, and responses given were for a variety of reasons including the children's home being refurbished, redecorated or closing down [and] the home being used for solo placements only"<sup>14</sup>.

Building on this pattern, the average number of children that providers register for has dropped from 4 to 3 for new registrations<sup>15</sup>. The number of children's home places has risen by 25% in the last decade, the number of children's homes rising by 70%<sup>16</sup> over the same period, meaning a need for a greater number of Registered Managers. Offset against this is the potential for managers to be registered for more than one home (these homes are often smaller) [we discuss this in more detail below].

**Figure 2** Percentage change in the number of children's homes of all types and their potential capacity since 2014<sup>17</sup>



More children's homes means more staff will be required. Management responsibilities have extended over this same period with the sector workforce more than doubling from 20,000 in

<sup>14</sup> DfE (2024) [Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#) pp22-3

<sup>15</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2025](#)

<sup>16</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2024](#)

<sup>17</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2024](#)

2014 to 46,000 in 2024 with a continuing rise in high staff to young people ratios<sup>18</sup>. There was a very significant rise of 18% in the estimated workforce size from 2023<sup>19</sup> to 2024<sup>20</sup>.

The reasons for the increase in smaller homes are not clearly understood. The sector is caring for more complex children<sup>21</sup> which may mean the sector is responding to need, but there are also hypotheses that risk of poor inspection outcomes, or the size of children's homes is driven by providers' needs in the costs of setting up a home.

We **recommend** there is urgent research into the optimal size of children's homes as the trend appears to be escalating and underpins much of the valuable work underway around local authority sufficiency.

## Registered Manager vacancy rates

In the last four years the number of children's homes has risen by 48% from 2,706 in 2021 to 4,010 in 2025. The number of homes with Registered Managers has grown by 45% over this period.

**Table 4**      **Number of children's homes, proportion of children's home with no Registered manager and proportion with no manager in post**

Year (as at 31 March)	Number of Children's Homes <sup>22</sup>	Registered Manager Vacancy Rate <sup>23</sup>	No manager in post (registered or otherwise)
2017	2145	No data	No data
2018	2209	No data	No data
2019	2304	No data	9%
2020	2460	No data	12%
2021	2706	17%	10%
2022	2873	24%	14%
2023	3119	23%	13%
2024	3491	22%	12%
2025 <sup>24</sup>	4010	19%	9%

From April 2021 to March 2022 (following the Covid pandemic) Ofsted statistics show a significant dip in the number of Registered Managers (while the number of homes rose by 6%), with a 23% fall in the numbers of new Registered Managers over this period, combined with a 13% rise in the number of managers whose registration was cancelled<sup>25</sup>. As a result, the Registered Manager vacancy rate rose from 17% to 24% (marked in pink and red in Figure 3).

Since then, the sector has made ground, and this gap has dropped by 1% each year until 2025 when it dropped from 22% to 19%. There are enough Registered Managers today to cover all the homes that were registered two years ago, but the total number of homes is escalating, rising

<sup>18</sup> NAO (2025) [Managing Children's Residential Care](#)

<sup>19</sup> DfE (2024) [Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#)

<sup>20</sup> DfE (2025) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

<sup>21</sup> NAO (2025) [Managing Children's Residential Care](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Children's social care in England 2024](#)

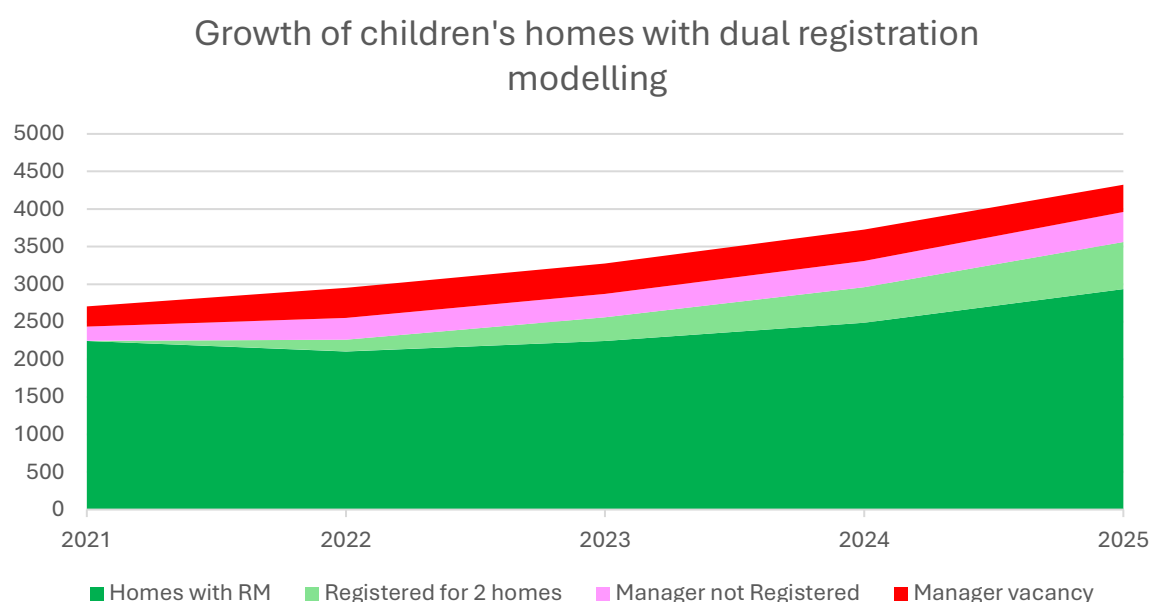
<sup>23</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Data on children's homes managers](#)

<sup>24</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Regulatory activity in all types of children's homes/supported accommodation providers](#)

<sup>25</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Data on children's homes managers](#)

6% from 2021 to 2022, 9% in 2023, 12% in 2024 and by 15% to March 2025. It is set to rise further with Ofsted reporting record numbers of applications in June 2025<sup>26</sup>. This correlates with our survey finding that 294 of the 357 children's homes' leaders (82%) who responded in the survey indicated their organisation was planning to grow in the next two years.

**Figure 3**      **Growth of children's homes, number of vacant posts, number of Registered Managers, number of homes with managers registered for two children's homes**



It is positive that the appointment of Registered Managers has been able to almost match this growth. In part this is likely to have resulted from the decision in 2021 to allow managers to register for two homes. Despite this development it's likely that the sector will continue to face challenges in ensuring there are enough experienced managers to support this on-going growth. This research contributes to our understanding on what may help this situation.

### Managers who are not registered

There is a steady 10% of children's homes nationally since 2021 which have managers in post that are not registered (showing in pink on Figure 3). Managers of children's homes appointed by providers need to register with Ofsted. For a new manager in an existing children's home Ofsted aim to complete this in 30 working days and for a new home the target is 40 working days (both following all required checks being received). There are delays to both, for example at present there are warnings registration may take several months while Ofsted are "*experiencing the highest ever level of applications to register a children's home*"<sup>27</sup> with new registrations currently taking up to 18 months<sup>28</sup>.

It is difficult to establish concrete data, but it is clear most managers who are not registered are recently appointed and/or in the process of registering. While registered providers are required

<sup>26</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Why your registration may be taking longer than usual](#)

<sup>27</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Why your registration may be taking longer than usual](#)

<sup>28</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Prioritising social care registration applications: putting the needs of children and young people first](#)

to address vacancies in the Registered Manager role urgently<sup>29</sup>, managers may not immediately register (for example, giving a manager a month or two to settle in) which would add to these numbers. Sometimes registration decisions are delayed by errors in applications meaning managers will not be registered for this period and may either be replaced by a new (initially unregistered) applicant or are subsequently registered once the errors are corrected. Sometimes checks with local authorities, the Disclosure & Barring Service and local authorities take some time to come back. Normally, Ofsted aim to reach a decision within 30 to 40 working days of receiving back the checks they undertake (for current or new homes), but at present the 'fit person' process is under some strain and decisions to register managers are taking considerably longer. These factors all combine to the vacancy rate for Registered Managers, while there may well be a suitable candidate in post.

In September 2025 Ofsted introduced priority applications for new applicants for children's homes and published minimum timeframes of 2 to 6 months for a priority application and 6 to 18 months for other new applications<sup>30</sup>. Registered Providers must appoint a manager before they apply to open a children's home<sup>31</sup>, so this is likely to further impact the number of managers available to carry on a children's home even in applications that are prioritised.

Only 12 respondents to the survey indicated they were a manager covering a registered role (3%). Of these, all but one planned to register.

It is recognised that the pressures on Ofsted are significant in operating a broader inspection remit on a budget "29% lower in real terms compared with 2009-10"<sup>32</sup> and they are in the process of transition to full cost recovery. It is also noteworthy that inspectors are in part drawn from the same pool as registered managers – our survey in fact finds that participants prefer inspectors with a background in residential care – so additional inspectors will draw some leaders away from Registered Manager jobs. Even so, the impact on a sector where there are insufficient places for children is significant and will impact on progress to ensuring all young people are in a registered setting.

Some respondents suggested transferrable registration allowing managers to move between children's homes without a further Fit Person Interview would remove barriers to vacancy rates, and this would certainly reduce the Registered Manager vacancy rate. This would also significantly reduce the burden on Ofsted.

#### **We recommend**

- Providers support managers to reduce errors in Fit Person applications
- The DfE and Ofsted explore ways to create a timely pathway to registration (for example, increased resourcing of Ofsted)
- Continue to review the Ofsted administrative processes to remove any avoidable delay

<sup>29</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\): children's homes](#)

<sup>30</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Registering children's homes in an emergency: priority applications](#)

<sup>31</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Introduction to children's homes](#)

<sup>32</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Ofsted's response to the Education Select Committee](#)

## Multi-Building Registration

In 2021 Ofsted issued guidance for Multi-Building Registration<sup>33</sup> allowing accommodation of up to 6 young people across up to 4 buildings within one single registration. Take up has been slow for this registration. In 2023 only 11 applications had been received of which 6 had been approved<sup>34</sup> and by September 2025 Ofsted advised there were 36 multi-building registrations.

## Managers registering for two homes

Figures provided by Ofsted for 31 March 2025 on managers registering for more than one home show that Registered Managers with more than one registration were supporting 689 homes. There is no published data for the period 2021 to 2025. Using straight line growth modelling on Figure 3 we have illustrated the possible growth over four years of Registered Managers having an additional setting to manage (in light green). This shows a much slower growth of the number of registered managers over the period 2021 to 2025 from 2,246 to 2,935 (just over 30% while the number of children's homes grew by almost 50% over the same period). The remaining approximately 20% of growth was covered by those managers registering for additional homes.

Registration for two homes has allowed more growth than would otherwise have occurred. It would suggest there will need to be a further growth in managers managing multiple settings to sustain the escalating pace of new children's homes opening. We explore this practice in more detail below.

## Regional variation

There was significant regional variation in managerial vacancies, and these variations were not consistent over time. Table 5 tracks children's homes with no manager (registered or otherwise).

**Table 5**      **Percentage of children's homes with no manager in post, by year and region<sup>35</sup>**

Region	31-Mar-22	31-Mar-23	31-Dec-23
<b>England</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>
East Midlands	16%	14%	11%
East of England	13%	11%	12%
London	13%	17%	17%
North East, Yorkshire & Humber	11%	9%	11%
North West	15%	15%	14%
South East	12%	14%	11%
South West	19%	14%	9%
West Midlands	16%	10%	14%

The South West, from being the area of greatest concern with 19% of homes with no manager in March 2022 improved to being the area of least concern by December 2023 with only 9% of homes without a manager. Other regions also fluctuate over time (1-6% difference). It was not possible to determine reasons for these fluctuations – they did not appear to correlate to areas of greatest growth in children's homes.

<sup>33</sup> Ofsted (2022) [Registering a multi-building children's home](#)

<sup>34</sup> Ofsted (2023) [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#)

<sup>35</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Data on children's homes managers](#)

## Do the Registered Managers vacancies limit growth in children's homes?

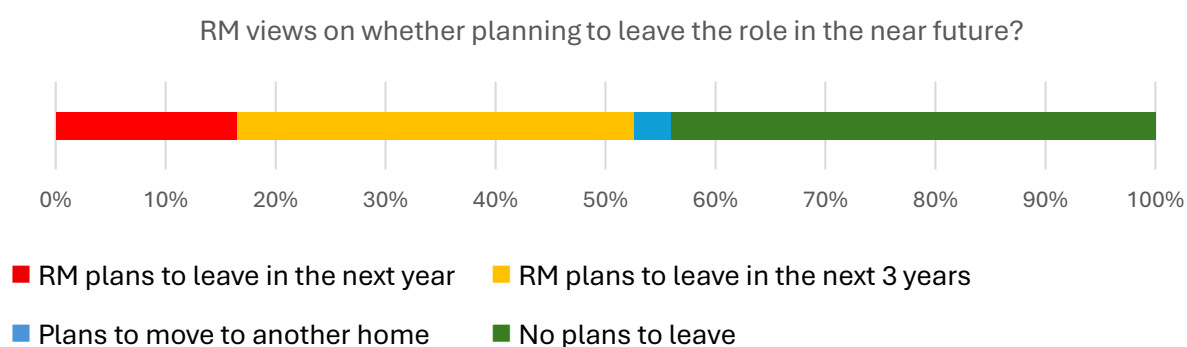
We have set out that the number of Registered Managers has grown only 31% from 2021 to 2025, yet over the same period the number of homes has increased by 48%, we are in a period of record growth for registrations of new homes and most children's homes leaders anticipate growth in the next two years. There are, however, many more young people in need of suitable registered accommodation. At present the regulator is not able to keep to timelines due to the volume of new children's homes applications with processing periods of up to 18 months.

It is difficult to argue that the sector has been limited by the vacancies due to the increase in managers registered for two settings. There will, however, be a point where the number of managers sufficiently experienced to manage two homes will be reached, or where the number of homes suitable for a manager with two registrations is reached. Without effective work to develop and retain Registered Managers this will limit the growth of the sector.

## Retention of Registered managers

Research has shown the churn in Registered Managers is lower than in the wider residential care workforce – in the last children's homes census 19% of managers were planning a change in the coming year against 29% change in wider children's homes staff<sup>36</sup>. In our survey 16% of Registered Managers stated that they plan to leave their role in the coming year, and 54% do not plan to be a Registered Manager in three years' time (n=152). Our survey findings align with figures from Social Care Wales which found 58% of managers changed to a new role in the three years between 2018 and 2021<sup>37</sup>.

**Figure 4** Survey findings: Registered manager views on whether they are planning to leave the role in the near future



It is of greater concern that only 5 of the 85 managers planning to change role were looking for another Registered Manager role (marked blue on Figure 4). While we did not find specific comparative data on managers, in the past 44% of staff leaving a children's home did so to join another children's home<sup>38</sup>. This finding is reinforced by the Children's Homes census over the last two years which shows a significant drop in the proportion of Registered Managers with at least 10 years' experience dropping from 64% to 57% (with a compensatory rise in those with 4-9 years experience) although this is a period of growth in numbers:

<sup>36</sup> DfE (2025) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

<sup>37</sup> Social Care Wales (2022) [Residential child care managers on the Register - 1 April 2021](#)

<sup>38</sup> DfE (2015) [A census of the children's homes workforce](#)

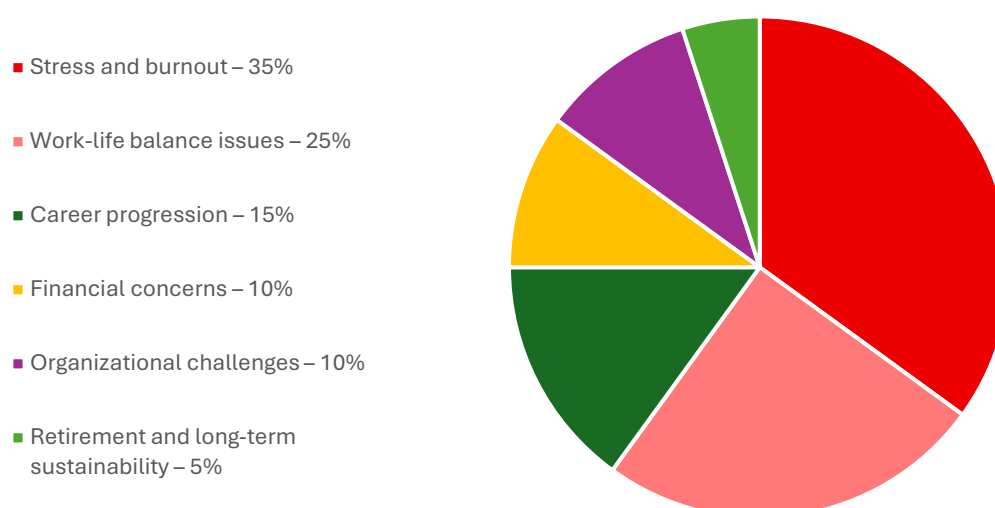


**Table 6 - Profile of Registered Managers – Years of experience in the children’s home sector by role**

Years of experience	Stage 1 Census (2023) n=800 <sup>39</sup>	Stages 2 & 3 Census (2024) n=683 <sup>40</sup>
1 year or less	1%	2%
2 or 3 years	6%	5%
4 or 5 years	8%	13%
6 to 9 years	21%	23%
10 years or more	64%	57%

Seventy-five managers in our survey who were planning to leave the Registered Manager role commented on their reasons. Microsoft co-pilot was used to thematically analyse the comments and determine the main reasons for intended leaving.

**Figure 5 Analysis of Registered Managers’ reasons for planning to leave the role**



The impact of stress, working hours and work-life balance are discussed below and together form 60% of the reasons Registered Managers gave for planning to leave their role.

It’s a thankless task. There is so much responsibility and expectation within the role, the nature of the work, the projection, transference and counter transference from the children, their vulnerability, the risks they take, the trauma, the staff. The regulatory standards, the safeguarding, the health and safety, risk management and it feels that it all hangs on the Registered Manager.

**Registered Manager**

We analysed 26 responses from Registered Managers who had no plans to leave their role which showed the biggest influence on retention was the passion for the role. The satisfaction gained from the impact Registered Managers have on the lives of young people was a contributory factor to staying in role for almost a third. A quarter wrote about the positive culture

<sup>39</sup> DfE (2024) [Children’s homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#) p36

<sup>40</sup> DfE (2025) [Children’s homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#) p35

within their organisation – they felt influential in the development of the organisation’s ethos and the Responsible Individual was identified as particularly important in supporting the retention of Registered Managers.

I love the children, I am thankful for my RI, [my local authority] is a great place to work and my senior leaders are very visible. There is a lot of support available to me. The hours are long, and the job is very stressful, but it is the children that are the priority, and I stay in touch with many children who leave us, long into their adulthood.

**Registered Manager**

We also explored what people liked about the Registered Manager role. From the 264 responses to this question the impact on young people was the most significant factor for the majority of participants (around 60%). Respondents wrote about the satisfaction of seeing children grow and develop, build their independence and overcome challenges. In addition, the importance of mentoring and developing a committed and passionate staff team, the pride in their role and undertaking a meaningful and rewarding role also contributed to positivity in the role.

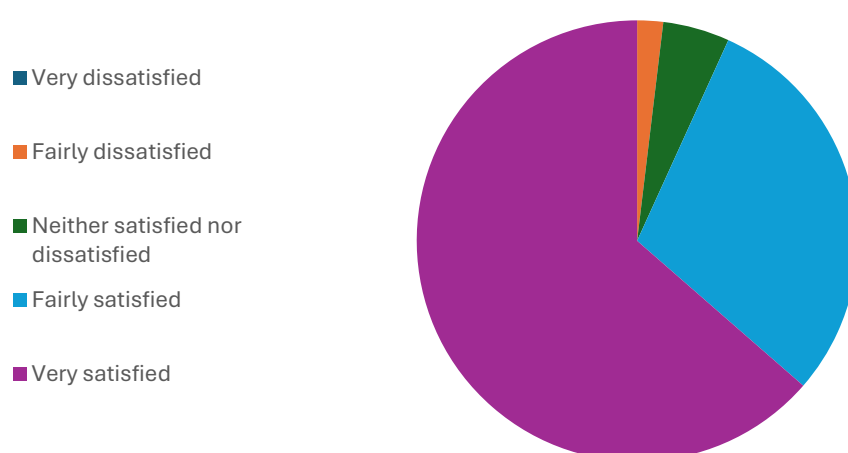
Some commented that they felt the focus on supporting children to thrive had been lost, or focus on this diluted; leading to disillusionment with the role.

Feel as though it is more pressure and responsibility these days. Feel that the purpose of me loving my role was to ensure the children in my care are loved, well cared for and prepared for life. Now it’s all about evidence, logs on logs, evidence on evidence, paperwork, paperwork.

**Registered Manager**

Importantly though, 94% (n=368) of respondents from all roles agreed they got a sense of achievement (either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘fairly’ satisfied) from their work.

**Figure 6**      **Sense of achievement from work**



I really like the company that I work for - they have the same ethos as me - children are always central to decisions made. We are a supportive organisation.

**Responsible Individual**

The sector is changing quickly with experienced managers leaving the sector at the same time as the number of children's homes is rising, the breadth of responsibility for staff is increasing and the young people being accommodated are becoming more complex<sup>41</sup>.

We **recommend** urgent further research to focus on the factors supporting the retention of Registered Managers in the sector including, for example, the nature of roles Registered Managers are leaving for. Lots of the managers submitting responses noted they would be willing to contribute further evidence. Many of the drivers and recommendations in this report are likely to be relevant to retention.

## Recruiting new managers

...unfortunately, people are not coming into our profession quick enough to backfill the roles.

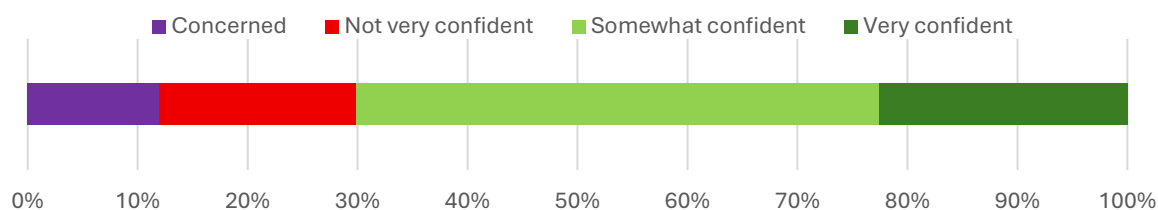
**Registered Manager**

... There does need to be changes as the number of homes are increasing and recruiting managers and staff is becoming very difficult. It does feel that we are interviewing staff every other week. We have a good salary and training offer, but we cannot seem to recruit the right people. Ofsted need to look at how they register and what they register as certain areas are saturated. The more homes, the more staff which reduces the pool of interviewees.

**Responsible individual**

We asked survey respondents about their confidence to recruit to new managerial roles; 29% of leaders had some misgivings, although 22% felt very confident they would find suitable people to meet their staffing needs. This contrasts with perceptions of wider staff recruitment in the workforce census where 54% said that it was 'difficult' to find staff with the appropriate level of skills and training when recruiting<sup>42</sup>.

**Figure 7** Confidence in recruitment to new/replacement leadership roles (all sectors)



<sup>41</sup> LGA (2025) [Costs and complexity in care: The real drivers of high-cost placements for children in care](#)

<sup>42</sup> DfE (2025) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#) pp35-6

**Table 7            Organisational confidence in recruiting to new/replacement leadership roles**

	<b>All sectors</b>	Local authority	Private only
Concerned	<b>12%</b>	10%	12%
Not very confident	<b>18%</b>	24%	17%
Somewhat confident	<b>48%</b>	48%	47%
Very confident	<b>23%</b>	18%	23%
	n=378	n=50	n=296
Voluntary/other sectors not broken down as n<11 for each			

As shown in Table 7 there was slightly more confidence in private sector homes, with 70% at least somewhat confident compared to 66% in local authority homes. This is surprising given feedback on wider workforce recruitment in the census:

Only around a third (37%) of managers in local authority run homes indicated that recruitment was difficult compared with 60% of those in privately run homes. One in five managers in local authority run homes described recruitment as easy (21%), four times the proportion who said this was the case in privately run homes (5%).

DfE (2025:36) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

The two questionnaires used different terminology: the census was retrospective asking how easy or difficult recruitment was, while the Registered Manager vacancy survey asked about confidence in recruitment and so was future oriented. It may be that improving levels of recruitment of Registered Managers since 2022 has built confidence while the growing size of the children's home sector combined with salary pressures due to the rise in the national living wage has made staff recruitment more challenging than Registered Manager recruitment (eased to a degree by managers registering for two settings).

This is supported to some extent by a regional analysis of progress in recruitment and confidence in recruitment – the South West made substantial progress in reducing management vacancies from 19% to 9% over 21 months to December 2023 and is the area of greatest confidence (78% compared to 71% nationally), but even areas close together (such as the West and East Midlands) have divergent findings – the East Midlands has the most people very confident in recruitment while the West Midlands has the least.

**Figure 8 Confidence in recruiting to new/replacement leadership roles by region**



Many leaders and managers (n=240) who contributed to the survey shared **suggestions and advice for colleagues thinking about applying to the Registered Manager role.**

Go for it - if this is something you are passionate about and want to do, go for it. It can be an incredibly rewarding role and the children and staff you meet along the way are memorable and will always be a part of your journey.

**Registered Manager**

Be prepared to put in what you want to get out of this role. At times your own life needs to come second and the care of the young people first. Don't always expect to change the world, the smallest changes are golden and to be treasured.

**Registered Manager**

Make sure you remember registration, fit persons, inspections and mistakes are just part of the processes that keep children safe and help you achieve your role effectively!

**Registered Manager**

In the survey respondents were asked to provide advice for colleagues thinking about the role. We drew on this for the following recommendations:

We **recommend** children's homes and applicants consider the advice provided by participants in the survey:

- Primarily, candidates should see the role as a vocation, rather than a job. Value Based Interviewing and other approaches that explore motivation are better suited to identifying candidates with the internal motivation to succeed.
- It is recommended applicants set firm work-life boundaries to resist some of the pressures of the role, examine the capacity to delegate to a capable team and learn from experienced professionals in the field. Children's homes must develop child-

focused cultures that still support Registered Managers to maintain a sustainable work-life balance.

- Respondents emphasised the deep satisfaction they got from making a difference in young people's lives, and how this was key in holding such a tough and challenging role.
- Candidates need a high level of resilience to cope with the stress of long hours with high levels of responsibility and significant emotional investment.
- Employers were reminded they must think about how they support their workforce. Respondents encouraged applicants to consider the right organisational fit and leadership, looking for supportive leaders rather than organisations driven by financial benefit.
- Respondents recommended prioritising professional development and training (including qualifications, as well as shadowing experienced professionals and seeking out peer support opportunities with other managers).

It's a very rewarding job in terms of watching children from all different backgrounds grow and develop and reach their potential, but it can also be a demanding job that can impact your personal life, and so you've got to have good boundaries, develop a good team, and have expectations explained from the start. Be friendly, but not a friend, have professional boundaries, and make sure you get a good balance with your time.

**Registered Manager**

Make sure that you have a good support network in your company, you fully understand the basics of the role and have worked in a home for a good period of time. Ensure that the company you work for has a child centred approach and this is evident throughout their work. Ask lots of questions and do lots of research.

**Registered Manager**

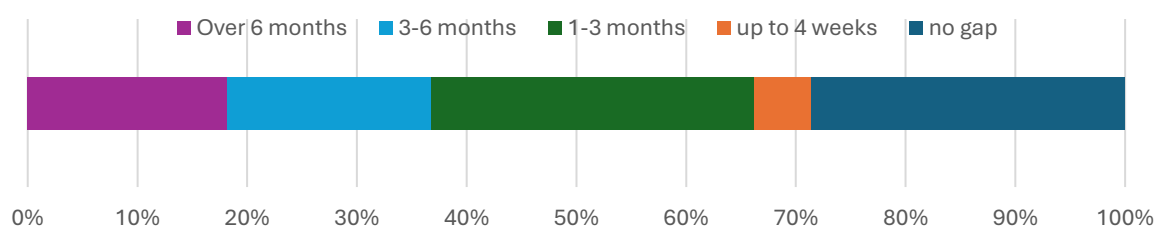
Remember when you apply for the role there are more roles than RM's so be selective, interview your company as well to make sure you align with their ethos. Prioritise job satisfaction. Delegate, double check and write to do lists. It's a great job with the right people around you.

**Responsible individual**

## Delays in the appointment of a manager

It is very common to have a gap before the appointment of a Registered Manager. Participants were asked to identify the length of gap to the appointment of a new registered manager where there had been a change of manager in the last 2 years.

**Figure 8** Gap in appointment of Registered Manager



While 29% of settings reported a seamless transition to a new manager, almost two thirds had a gap of a month or more, more than a third had a gap of at least 3 months and nearly 1 in 5 (18%) had a gap of 6 months or more.

Participants who identified there had been a gap were given options to identify a selection of factors that contributed to the gap, then to add further explanation.

- Almost half of the respondents noted that there was a manager in post, but they were not registered.
- Other respondents mentioned delays in the processing of their applications to be connected with a children's home (SC2 <sup>43</sup>) or the arranging of fit person interviews. Guidance suggests decisions should be notified to participants within 30 working days of an application without errors once the checks undertaken are returned<sup>44</sup>, although this is delayed by several weeks for applications that are unsuccessful<sup>45</sup> or with errors. This situation has deteriorated since the survey was undertaken, with Ofsted highlighting there are currently delays for new registrations of children's homes of up to 18 months<sup>46</sup>

<sup>47</sup> .

Registered manager left in July 2024, and I only officially became registered in April 2025. I was approached by the company's RI and CEO to offer me the position of manager of the home after I had completed my level 5 in August 2024. I believe they were struggling to find anyone suitable to fill the role. I thought about it long and hard before starting the process of becoming registered at the beginning of Oct. After the process of becoming registered was complete there was a delay in the paperwork being processed by Ofsted, which led to a delay in my interview being completed and then there was another delay from Ofsted in giving a decision in allowing me to become registered.

**Registered Manager**

Over this period, there has been multiple attempts to register, recruit and retain RM's. The main reason for potential RM's leaving was the time it took to register. Not only for new homes but for other RM's in already registered homes. One candidate attended their FPI in September 2024, however, was only notified of being unsuccessful in February 2025. As an RI, I was not informed of what was going on at all, even though I contacted multiple times.

**Responsible Individual**

The lengthy process of appointment to Registered Manager may sometimes mean managers are not able to fully commit to their new roles. Several survey respondents noted that managers had moved on from their organisations before being registered. Some Registered Manager candidates reported communication difficulties between the home and the regulator during this process which contributed to the length of the vacancy. It would seem sensible to take measures to remove these delays.

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<sup>43</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Apply to be connected with a children's social care service \(SC2\)](#)

<sup>44</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Registration guide for children's social care services](#)

<sup>45</sup> Ofsted (2021) [Applying to register a children's home: top tips](#)

<sup>46</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Registering children's homes in an emergency: priority applications](#)

<sup>47</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Why your registration may be taking longer than usual](#)

Based on the findings of this research, we **recommend**:

- Continue to review the Ofsted administrative processes to remove any avoidable delay
- Transparency in actual registration timescales regionally, particularly while there are known to be delays
- Amending regulations to allow transferrable registration so that managers' registration can be applied to similar homes without a further application or fit person interview. Such an approach would still have the safeguard of a regular inspection which could perhaps be brought forward where a manager is newly appointed.

**Table 8 Reason why there has/had not been a period of time with no Registered Manager**

Manager in post, but not registered	80	48%
Unexpected departure of RM	82	50%
Difficulty in recruiting new RM	73	44%
Failed induction / probation of new RM	20	12%
Unsuccessful at Fit Person's Interview	5	3%
More than one option selected	62	38%

The most common reason for a gap in the appointment of a new Registered Manager was that the home was not expecting the current Registered Manager to leave. Sometimes managers left without notice. This could be a decision by the Registered Manager, or it may be that some managers are asked to leave – a few respondents noted an appointed manager left during probation and the early stages of appointment may be a particularly risky period for unexpected departures.

We **recommend** further research into whether and why managers leave in the early stages of appointment.

Gaps in the appointment of a Registered manager may be exacerbated by the common reports of low numbers of applications, and candidates without the required experience, cultural fit, or leadership standards. Some responses noted that even when candidates applied, they lacked the necessary background in children's services or had experience from adult care settings that would not meet the regulatory requirements for the position (see Regulation 28 below).

In the absence of external candidates, several organisations described their reliance on deputy or interim managers to fill the gap temporarily. However, these arrangements were often not seen as a long-term solution, as many deputies felt unprepared or described they were not supported enough to make the transition to a full Registered Manager role. Many people reported reluctance from internal candidates, such as deputies, to step up into the Registered Manager role which contributed to prolonged vacancies.

Some responses from smaller providers noted their struggle to compete with larger organisations or new providers that offered substantially higher salaries and benefits. This



disparity could result in candidates accepting offers elsewhere, leaving gaps in the Registered Manager role.

Many responses noted that there is a sector-wide shortage of experienced RMs, amplified by competitive market conditions where headhunting and aggressive salary offers from other providers are common.

Over the years, the recruitment and retention of registered managers has been an area of concern. This has been due to various factors, not least because many experienced registered managers voluntarily deregister and move to other areas of practice due to the pressures of the role. Upcoming managers do not always have the experience and training to be confident; they do not always have the authority to take up the role. Some have had to step into the role prematurely due to the sudden departure of previous managers, creating a negative experience of the role and consequently burnout.

**Head of Care, Children's Home**

We have had a succession of young ambitious Heads of Care who we develop and then they move on and are looking for more sociable hours. The role does not easily fit with young families.

**Principal, RSS**

There is a new 'disruptor' to market in [my area] aggressively expanding homes and paying wages vastly in excess of market norms i.e. 65k for manager, £40k for a residential carer. These have taken managers from my services and staff.

**Responsible Individual**

Around two-fifths (38%) of respondents ticked more than one box and in the free text box around two thirds of respondents (n=122) suggested there were multifactorial reasons for the gap in appointment of a Registered Manager. The difficulties in recruitment are clear. This is impacting children's experiences in residential care. We will explore some of the barriers to the Registered Manager role in more detail below.

## Fit person interview

Ofsted *"assess whether each person connected with a registration is 'fit' to provide the service and/or manage it. Each person must: have the relevant skills, qualifications and experience for the position they hold [and] be able to meet the relevant requirements of fitness"*<sup>48</sup>. Registered Managers are interviewed by Ofsted in a 'fit person interview'.

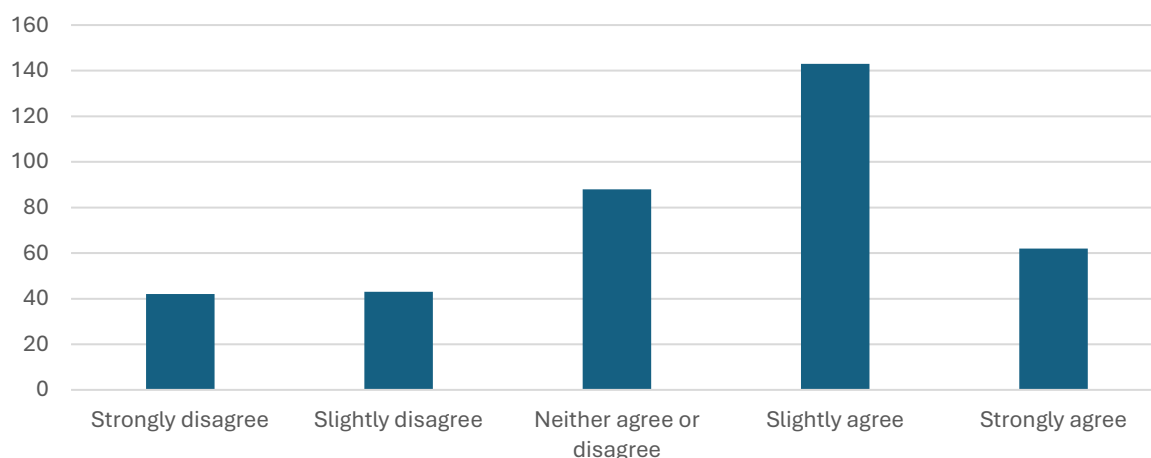
The scoping focus groups<sup>49</sup> for this research identified the fit person interview as a potential barrier to managers registering. Results from the survey showed 54% of respondents 'slightly or strongly agreed' the fit person interview process puts people off becoming a Registered Manager.

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<sup>48</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Registration guide for children's social care services](#)

<sup>49</sup> Established sector meetings were attended by dialogue (October/November 2024) and discussion groups held - Responsible individual (4 groups) and Registered managers (10 group discussions)

**Figure 9 Agreement with statement: fit person interview puts people off becoming a Registered Manager / Head of Care**



Many people commented on the fit person interview (n=147):

I have a suitability qualified deputy who is reluctant to apply for registration because of the perceived negative experience of fit person's interviews.

**Responsible Individual**

The 'fit person' interview process can be a significant deterrent for individuals considering the role of Registered Manager. While accountability is essential in safeguarding children, the level of personal risk and legal responsibility associated with the role can feel overwhelming. Knowing that as a registered manager [they] could lose their job or even face criminal consequences if something goes wrong, regardless of their intent or effort creates a climate of fear rather than empowerment. This perception makes the role appear not only high-pressure but also high-risk, which understandably puts off many otherwise capable and passionate professionals from stepping into leadership positions.

**Registered Manager**

I have no prior experience of this interview but the feedback from my colleagues has increased my anxiety about it. I am happy to go through it but nervous all the same.

**Manager covering a Registered role**

No one likes an interview, so to be interviewed by your company and then have to sit an Ofsted interview as well is painful. I very nearly did not attend my Ofsted interview.

**Registered Manager**

I think it's fair and realistic and required.

**Responsible Individual**

Respondents saw the fit person process as necessary to ensure safeguarding and competence, but while some felt their interview experience was positive, fair and professional there was also widespread anxiety about the process with many describing it as "*daunting*," "*intimidating*," "*stressful*," or "*nerve-wracking*". The significance of the process and fear of failure was described as a major deterrent for some.

Some of the fears described were misplaced or exaggerated in relation to reality, for example around the risk of criminal convictions when in role, or being barred from working with children from being found ‘not fit’. The likelihood of either outcome is extremely low and there is a need to prevent the most unsuitable candidates from registering, but the fear of these powers where candidates may be barred from working in any capacity with children is experienced as very real across the sector and deters some candidates from applying.

We **recommend** consideration is given to the repeal of the disqualification regulations with more appropriate measures put in place through the Disclosure & Barring Service.

Participants in the survey felt there would be benefit in producing additional guidance on the fit person process and interview preparation. Ofsted do have a questionnaire<sup>50</sup> to help prepare for the interview – it is no longer a requirement to complete this. People suggested a pre-interview booklet with sample questions would be helpful, although it is noted that Fit Person Interviews are tailored to individual candidates. Candidates would also value practice interviews and mentoring.

Ofsted have published revised guidance and blogs on this issue: Applying to register a children’s home: top tips<sup>51</sup>; Registering children’s homes – principles and hints and tips<sup>52</sup>; and Setting up provision for children with the most complex needs – tips, reassurance and a new advice form<sup>53</sup>.

We **recommend** further work is done to build applicants’ confidence in the fit person interview, such as through training, written guides and preparatory materials.

Some respondents noted variation in the tone and style of the interview, dependent on the inspector conducting the interview. In their survey replies some participants described how inspectors had raised the prospect of criminal convictions or prison during their interview. Several described the process as “*interrogation-like*” or “*overly formal*,” especially when held in unfamiliar or uncomfortable settings. There was criticism of inconsistency in how the interviews were conducted and assessed. It was suggested that Ofsted could improve consistency in the fit person process, particularly in relation to the tone adopted by inspectors during interviews. There was also a role for Ofsted (and others) to share and embed good practice, where applicants reported that inspectors were able to alleviate anxieties while still asking the challenging questions needed to assess whether someone is suitable to run a children’s home.

We **recommend** there is continued work undertaken with inspectors to improve both the consistency and approach of the ‘fit person interview’ to reduce the fear of this interview, while maintaining the integrity and importance of this important safeguarding process.

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<sup>50</sup> Ofsted (2018) [Register as a children's social care provider: ‘fit/suitable person’ assessment questionnaires](#)

<sup>51</sup> Ofsted (2021) [Applying to register a children’s home: top tips](#)

<sup>52</sup> Ofsted (2023) [Registering children’s homes – principles and hints and tips](#)

<sup>53</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Setting up provision for children with the most complex needs – tips, reassurance and a new advice form](#)

It was felt that the fit person interview was a barrier to progression for deputies and aspiring managers. Some respondents knew colleagues who had avoided applying for Registered Manager roles due to fear of the interview. There was additional comment on scheduling and outcome delays in the process which added to stress and uncertainty.

The potential for transferrable registration or a tiered/adapted version of the fit person process has been discussed for some time, and this would likely avoid the need to repeat the fit person interview unnecessarily. This would seem particularly sensible for experienced managers or those with recent successful inspections. We have made recommendations elsewhere in this report about transferrable registration.

We looked specifically at the 23 Deputy Managers responding to this question. Similar numbers (48%) agreed the fit person interview may deter applicants. More Deputy Managers said they neither agreed nor disagreed (43%). Two deputy managers specifically commented that the fit person interview had put them off applying to become a Registered Manager.

It can appear quite daunting when you are not entirely sure what to expect. Others' experiences can also inform opinions such as feeling that the interview is like an interrogation.

**Deputy Manager or similar**

This does put me off and have heard from others it does too.

**Deputy Manager or similar**

## Regulation 28

Regulation 28<sup>54</sup> sets out mandatory criteria for individuals managing a children's home. These include:

- Being of integrity and good character;
- Being physically and mentally fit to manage the home;
- Meeting safer recruitment requirements;
- Having the appropriate experience, qualification and skills to manage a home of the size and type being proposed, specifically:
  - working for at least 2 years within the last 5 years in a position relevant to the residential care of children
  - working for at least one year in a role requiring the supervision and management of staff working in a care role
  - having completed (or working towards within 3 years) the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Childcare.

In the scoping focus groups, there were mixed views about the time and experience limitations inhibiting the recruitment of Registered Managers. While some felt this prevented relevant candidates (such as those from a specialist education or adult care background) from being appointed, there was also a realisation that the Registered Manager role is complex and requires substantial experience.

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<sup>54</sup> [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015, Part 3, Regulation 28](#)

Participants in the survey were asked about the length of their experience *before* being appointed to their first Registered Manager role: over four-fifths (82%) of respondents had at least three years of experience prior to their first Registered Manager appointment, and more than half (52%) had six or more years of experience.

Twenty-eight respondents commented in the survey that, in their view, there was a need to loosen the interpretation around “*working for at least 2 years within the last 5 years in a position relevant to the residential care of children*”. A couple of participants noted that suitable candidates may have great leadership and safeguarding experience built on a history of residential care that predates 5 years. Others felt a wider range of positions could be considered relevant.

The requirement ... to have worked in a Children’s Home is excluding a lot of strong candidates who have exceptional leadership qualities in the care sector and safeguarding experience, but not having worked in a children’s home.

**Responsible Individual**

I appreciate someone coming entirely from adult health and social care may not have a direct transfer of skills, but so many 16-18 leaders are hesitant around reg28.

**Recruitment Manager**

More flexibility in qualifications/experience requirements (Reg 28) would help. But I also feel that the training we provide for seniors does not prepare them for the role of a manager.

**Responsible Individual**

It may be that some suitable candidates are prevented from applying for a Registered Manager role by the limitations of Regulation 28. Some participants also expressed concern that homes are being set up by leaders without sufficient experience.

Given the pressures on the sector, the risks that have been apparent in unregistered accommodation and the reality that most settings appoint managers with substantially more than 2 years' experience, we **recommend** there should be caution in any approach to diluting the requirements of Regulation 28 but that there may be room for greater clarity and perhaps flexibility in the application of this regulation.

## The impact of inspection

Almost half of those surveyed felt inspection was too stressful, a further third ‘slightly’ agreeing, a total of 80% (see Table 9). Respondents connected the experience of all staff in children’s homes undergoing inspection with the reluctance of many of their team to step into management roles. With the Registered Manager holding such clear accountability around the role for the home, the staff, the children’s experiences and the behaviour of other agencies many individuals reflected they feel the role is too exposed in the context of hyper-focus on compliance, although some wrote about building personal resilience over time.

**Table 9 Responses: degree to which agree with statement ‘inspection process is too stressful’**

**The inspection process is too stressful**

Strongly disagree	9	2%
Slightly disagree	25	7%
Neither agree nor disagree	44	12%
Slightly agree	122	33%
Strongly agree	175	47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	

In their comments some managers emphasised the importance of inspection and for a few it validated the work they undertook on behalf of young people. Alongside the general experience of inspection, managers also highlighted aspects of the approach, or different practice between inspectors, which may allow for improvements:

I used to think that inspections were highly stressful. It would impact my sleep on night one, I would be on pins throughout, but that has kind of passed with experience. It was not so much about the inspector's role and approach, it was more about what it meant for me within my organisation and the potential impacts negative inspections could have on my professional and financial development.

**Registered Manager**

It can be stressful, for instance on one inspection, all my young people had all gone to school all year with good results, their behaviour was fantastic on and off the home, no missings, and that year we all went to Spain for a holiday, in my inspection that year I was pulled on little things, I did feel deflated after the inspection, after all the good things we had achieved throughout that year with our young people, I have known managers call it a day after getting a result like that which is a great loss to the care system.

**Registered Manager**

What I can tell you is I would never be a Registered Manager again following this inspection, it brought me to tears. I was under the impression Ofsted were supposed to be taking a softer approach after Ruth Perry, we have passion but are not all hard faced.

**Other senior leadership role**

Some inspectors make you feel at ease, where others make you feel like you have failed before you have started...it should be collaborative and supportive as we are all in this for the children above anything else.

**Registered Manager**

Registered Managers of care homes do not get afforded protected time off. The last 3 inspections I have been called in from Annual Leave, away from my family despite sending dates of unavailability to Ofsted, this was seemingly ignored and the last visit, despite being informed I was on Annual Leave my Deputy was directed to contact me as I needed to be there. I asked about if this visit could be deferred due to my family responsibilities and was told no, this ended up being a 3-day inspection.

**Registered Manager**

It can be stressful, and each inspector focuses on differing areas, however if the standards are kept high all the time and the evidence is in place, utilising Reg 44, Reg 45, audits and monitoring systems, then there shouldn't be any big surprises. Ofsted is there to protect children and ensure they are given positive living conditions, experiences and are loved and cared for. They are our critical friend.

### Registered Manager

There is so [much] pressure on Ofsted gradings. I have attained three Outstanding gradings in a row, but the pressure is relentless. I don't know why they turn up unannounced as you can't possibly magic up a years' worth of work if they gave you a days' notice like they do in schools.

### Registered Manager

On more than one occasion I have had 2 inspectors present due to training, this in itself isn't a problem however, both inspectors actively completing the inspection increases pressure and feels more like a 4-day inspection rather than 2-day. I understand the need for Quality Assurance and shadowing when new inspectors are training, but it would be fairer for one inspector to conduct the inspection whilst the other observes. Additionally, I have had 5 inspectors since January 2022, the lack of continuity has led to added anxiety/pressure as all inspectors have had different opinions on paperwork formats which has subsequently needed to be changed/updated adding further pressure to an already stressful role.

### Registered Manager

Commissioners, employers, etc place too much emphasis on the single word judgement and can be too quick to make decisions just on this rather than the overall context of the home and its development.

### Responsible Individual

There were several comments throughout the survey about the impact of inspections during annual leave. Managers reported worrying about inspection before they go and when they are away. While it is important a home is able to function with or without the manager's presence and there should not be limits around when Ofsted visit due to their important role in safeguarding young people, there is perhaps a balance to be struck where holiday visits are more unusual and annual leave is taken into account in inspection planning.

The survey was undertaken during a period of reform for the regulator<sup>55</sup>. As such there have been periodic announcements of developments to reshape the approach to children's home inspection. However, despite these developments those responding to the survey highlighted additional areas and ideas for improvement.

We **recommend** Ofsted consider the views and ideas from those taking part in our survey on ways to further improve the experience of inspection, for example they suggested:

- Providing some notice of inspections – e.g. 24 hours ahead of a visit  
NB: young people had a very contrary view in the consultation ahead of supported accommodation inspection development<sup>56</sup>, wanting inspection to be unannounced
- Reducing perceived inconsistency between inspectors
- Ensuring inspectors have relevant residential experience
- Supportive and collaborative approaches rather than judgemental approaches
- Improved continuity of inspectors reducing the changes from year to year
- Greater weight given to manager pre-planned annual leave in deciding inspection dates

<sup>55</sup> Ofsted (2023) [How the children's social care reforms will affect inspection](#)

<sup>56</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Children and young people's consultation: Inspecting supported accommodation](#)



- Streamlined documentation and clarified expectations to reduce unnecessary workload
- Emphasis on children’s progress and wellbeing, rather than system compliance
- Space for constructive feedback on the experience of inspection. Providers are concerned perceived criticism of the regulator will reflect back on them and that the complaints process lacks independence.

We also **recommend** providers develop strategies to build confidence in Registered Managers, deputies and others in the team to developing inspection management skills.

Some of these areas are being worked on by the regulator – it is a requirement that inspectors have the same qualifications and experience as is expected of Registered Managers<sup>57</sup>, training for inspections emphasises the focus of inspection activity is to gather first hand evidence including discussions, observations etc and to review key records only as required and the first principle of the inspection framework requires a “*focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives*”<sup>58</sup>. However, there were still some strong views in the sector about their experience of inspection.

There was strong resonance in our survey with the findings of the *Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework*<sup>59</sup>, commissioned by Ofsted into the impact on education leaders’ wellbeing. This found “*that an inspection system with lower stakes accountability would not generate the extent of negative impact on wellbeing that is currently reported across the sector*” (p40).

In our survey, the impact of leaders’ perception of Ofsted extended beyond the inspections themselves. The above review also noted education leaders themselves call on Ofsted’s authority to underline key requirements that the inspectorate may or may not support, “*ranging from the use of, ‘Ofsted needs to see...[insert workload requirement of choice]’; through to using inspection outcomes as a performance management tool, up to and including sacking headteachers*” (p24). This heightened anxiety state of ‘Ofsted readiness’ deflects from the core focus towards children and is a view Ofsted themselves often seek to challenge. The report concludes:

[We recommend the Government] **Develop a sustainable, long-term approach to accountability in England.** This review highlighted how much time and energy is lost to inspection-related stress and workload. This significantly increases when the lens is widened to consider the whole accountability system. There is an enormous opportunity cost to the system, directly affecting outcomes for children and young people. A revised accountability approach could be informed by the wellbeing drivers that are proven to raise productivity, recruit and retain talent and improve overall performance of organisations across all industries. It is possible to have an effective accountability system at a much lower cost in terms of the health and energy of the workforce. The effects would be transformative for day-to-day relationships between educators and their learners.

Mc Brearty (2025:42)<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ofsted (undated) [Job specification: Social Care Regulatory Inspector](#)

<sup>58</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\): children’s homes](#)

<sup>59</sup> Mc Brearty (2025) [Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework](#)

<sup>60</sup> Mc Brearty (2025) [Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework](#)



We consulted with Ofsted during this research work and shared anonymised findings/material with them. Ofsted were keen to take on board the views of providers and advised there is a substantial work programme underway to reform the inspection approach. Individual inspectors have monthly reflective practice sessions and supervision, with twice yearly reviews that focus on Ofsted values and behaviours. There is also a substantial learning programme for inspectors including:

- training in mental health awareness
- training in understanding equality/diversity and inclusion
- 5 development days per year in addition to wide range of training
- 3 practice learning sessions per year
- A national Ofsted conference
- Cross remit reflective days working with EY and education colleagues to share learning
- Specific Children's Homes inspection framework training
- Mandatory SCCIF update sessions.

Ofsted advised the code of conduct is regularly discussed with inspectors and at each inspection, registration and fit person interview there is consideration of provider wellbeing and any reasonable adjustments required. In January 2025 Ofsted introduced an independent manager providers can contact when they are unhappy about an inspection and measures to pause an inspection where necessary.

We **recommend** there should be consideration of a similar review focusing on the impact of inspection on children's homes leaders. In the meantime, given the similarities in the feedback received in our survey and adapting the findings of the McBrearty report to this sector **we recommend**:

- The DfE continue work to resolve the negative wellbeing impacts of high stakes inspection
- The DfE, Ofsted, local authorities and employers should further explore and implement changes to reduce the isolation and individual responsibility felt by children's homes leaders
- Employers promote universal wellbeing interventions for the workforce as a key strategy to reduce stress
- Ofsted and employers evaluate the increase in the personal support available for leaders who receive a poor inspection outcome.

## Registration across more than one home

### Multi-Building Registration

In 2021 Ofsted issued guidance for Multi-Building Registration<sup>61</sup>. This allows for the accommodation of up to 6 young people across up to 4 buildings. Take up has been slow for this registration – in 2023 only 11 applications had been received of which 6 had been approved<sup>62</sup>. At the time of writing there are 36 multi-building children's homes nationally.

Where we have multiple homes within close proximity, it is easier and more effective to register one manager over multiple homes. Where a new manager search has taken place, especially for a new home, we have had a manager however the length of time it takes from SC2 to actually getting registered leaves a manager in limbo and they have left to go to already registered homes. In one instance, we are on the third manager for a home that is in the process of being registered. Both managers have left due to the time frames it has taken for the home and manager to be registered. Recruitment of good managers is very difficult and often fruitless. We are willing to pay agency cost in the 10's of thousands however this still does not attract good candidates.

**Responsible Individual**

### Registration for two homes

Guidance was also amended in 2021 to allow managers to register for two children's homes. There is no publicly available evaluation of the effectiveness of this measure. Currently, there are 721 such homes nationally.

In the survey leaders were asked why they had registered for more than one setting.

Dual registration has taken place for consistency in the vision and leadership of the homes and both homes are close enough by to ensure the Registered manager is a viable presence and they can respond quickly when needed. There is a capable structured team in place to manage the day-to-day operations of each home.

**Deputy Manager**

There have been several managers that have taken the post and left before I then took on the role as a dual registered manager to ensure that the young people who live there and are supported by our organisation receive continuity [and] the care they deserve. Having been a registered manager for 3 years in a 3-bed setting, I took on the challenge as both homes have deputy managers and shift leaders to support me.

**Registered Manager**

### Managers' perception of registration for two homes

Ninety people responded to the question about managers being registered for more than one home. Many felt it was necessary with a national shortage in experienced candidates. It was also seen as financially justified: organisations can offer higher salaries when a single, skilled

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<sup>61</sup> Ofsted (2022) [Registering a multi-building children's home](#)

<sup>62</sup> Ofsted (2023) [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#)

manager covers more than one setting. As the average size of homes reduces ‘dual registration’ was seen by some as a way to manage resources effectively, especially with solo settings. More managers registered for two homes were managers for solo homes (17% against 6% of all registered managers responding to our survey).

Respondents in their comments described managing more than one setting as an opportunity when homes were geographically close and where there was strong leadership to build trust with staff and young people to build consistency, oversight and high standards of care and operational continuity. Interestingly, more managers registered for more than one home disagreed with the statement *‘the Registered Manager role feels unachievable and there is too much work’* (26%) than the wider group (16%). This may be because they manage more settings registered for one or two young people: 39% of the 23 Registered Managers saying they managed more than one setting reported they were registered for one or two young people, while 23% of the other 118 managers reported the same. The sense the role feels more achievable may also be because Ofsted must be *“satisfied that the manager has the experience, qualifications and skills to manage each home”*<sup>63</sup> and so managers with more experience apply: although the sample size is small 64% of 25 managers registered for more than one setting had more than 6 years’ experience while 50% of the 131 Registered Managers of a single setting had more than 6 years’ experience.

Registered Managers for more than one setting had similar views to other leaders around whether the role carries too much responsibility and whether Registered Managers feel stressed by the job. During the research Ofsted shared that inspection judgements of dual registered homes are at least as good if not better than inspection judgements in other homes.

From their own personal perspective some managers commented that registering for more than one setting was an opportunity to expand their skill set and assume increased responsibility, building their experience and career towards progression to regional and Responsible Individual roles.

The growth of the practice to register for more than one setting has been an important change that has allowed more children’s home to open in a challenging recruitment environment.

There is a need for more public data to explore the impact of the practice of registering for two homes and what can be learned. We **recommend** Ofsted should publish information specifically about managers registered for more than one setting, and that there is a need for further research into the effectiveness of these settings for young people. Such research could also consider whether there is the potential to increase the number of settings beyond two, where this is within the capacity and experience of the Registered Manager, and may be important in the potential capacity of the children’s home sector.

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<sup>63</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Introduction to children’s homes](#), Applying to manage 2 children’s homes

## Demanding role and responsibilities

Evidence from this study shows the significant pressures on Registered Managers and the impact of stress and working hours:

You can't really talk about your role, you are a bit of an island. No one realises that you are not only working to one lot of regulations (Children's Homes Regulations 2015) but you are working to lots (health and safety, safeguarding, children's regs, care regs, employment law, etc) you have to be everything to everyone and seem to have to know every law. When you need support and advice you are on your own to work it out, there is no one looking out for you, you are responsible for it all.

**Registered Manager**

The role of the Registered Manager is broad in definition, and typically they are the person accountable for meeting the regulations in how the home is organised, run and managed and are responsible for the needs of each child in the home:

1.9 Most of the Regulations are drafted to make the “registered person” accountable – this means the registered provider or registered manager depending on how the home is organised, run and managed...

10.7 ...Any registered manager employed in the home should have sufficient capacity to ensure that the Quality Standards are met for each child in the home.

DfE, 2015<sup>64</sup>

Registered Managers commented they feel they have the accountability but not the responsibility and this can leave them feeling vulnerable and exposed. In explaining this further, this sometimes related to internal decision-making, and sometimes was in respect of the responsibilities of other agencies.

Inspections often fall on managers shoulders and decisions can be overridden by senior management. Senior leadership and managers shouldn't always be rated together.

**Registered Manager**

[Some] issues are due to lack of resources from multi agencies due to financial pressures or change of borough and this sits with the manager under regulation 5 which is an issue as they have no control and have to keep chasing and proving they're chasing. For example, virtual school change over, or health or CAMHS.

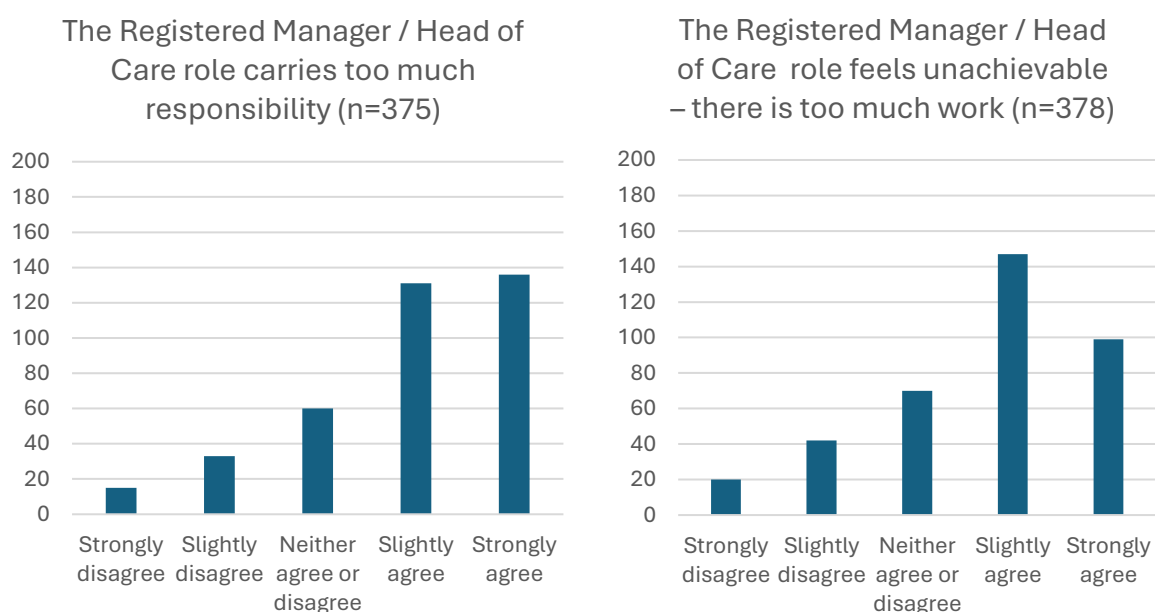
**Responsible Individual**

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents in the survey felt to some extent there was too much work for Registered Managers and that the role feels unachievable. Similarly, nearly three-quarters (71%) felt they carry too much responsibility. Deputy Managers had a similar view.

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<sup>64</sup> DfE (2015) [Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards](#)

**Figure 10 Agreement with statement on whether the Registered Manager role carries too much responsibility and agreement with statement whether the Registered Manager role feel unachievable**



There were 175 comments in relation to these two questions (whether role carries too much responsibility and whether it is unachievable). Commonly respondents outlined that the volume and intensity of responsibilities make the role feel unmanageable and this is the key driver in both team members' reluctance to step up and in people leaving the Registered Manager role.

Acknowledged in the responses was the breadth of responsibility for some Registered Managers including safeguarding, compliance, HR, recruitment, training, paperwork, inspections, staff management and supervision, rotas and, most importantly, work to support the progress of young people. There was, noted some respondents, a dissonance between many of the bureaucratic and people-management tasks and the motivational forces that drive Registered Managers into the role which are more focused on the young people. Later in the report, we discuss findings in relation to workload in terms of time and stress, but as seen in many comments, there is a real challenge in all roads leading to the Registered Manager and many respondents commented on a perception of "disproportionate accountability" dissuading their deputy managers or other team members from aspiring to the role.

Participants did point out differences between how providers work that can increase or decrease both the workload and sense of individual responsibility.

We **recommend** providers should:

- Develop a strong and supportive leadership culture
- Create a sense of shared accountability with Responsible Individuals and Directors
- Ensure the effectiveness of support systems such as deputies, team leaders, and Responsible Individuals
- Build robust management structures that allow for delegation, annual leave or sickness
- Train leaders in distributed/delegated leadership models
- Address excessive paperwork and auditing

- These areas of good practice should be considered within Leadership & Management self-assessments and through inspection.

Some issues around workload are systemic with roots in the way the regulations are framed and how Ofsted act in accordance with the regulations, holding the Registered Provider accountable accordingly creating a strong personal pressure in relation to meeting the regulatory requirements.

The legal responsibilities placed on Registered Managers and Heads of Care are significant. Many otherwise capable professionals are deterred by the weight of personal accountability embedded in the regulatory framework. In today's working environment, people are increasingly cautious about taking on roles that carry such high levels of scrutiny and liability.

**Other senior leadership role**

The public exposure through inspection and the 'high stakes' involved (discussed above) make the role unpalatable for some and stressful for others, especially new managers learning their craft:

I think negative Ofsted inspections and outcomes are largely blamed on the manager which leaves them vulnerable to career progression.

**Manager covering a Registered role**

For many new managers it can be over whelming.

**Registered Manager**

We mentioned above consideration of these matters by the Ofsted reform board and recommended further research into the experience of managers new to role.

Evidence from the survey suggests that larger and smaller organisations may experience different pressures. Some managers from smaller organisations felt they had to cover every area, but had significant autonomy. Autonomy was felt to be more limited in larger organisations who had HR and finance departments, for example, but in these settings some participants felt corporate and local authority expectations sometimes conflicted with regulatory priorities, adding to the pressures.

I have experience of Local Authority, small family provider and a larger corporate provider and the workload has been very different at all of them.

**Responsible Individual**

There was variation between smaller organisations with the level of administrative and management support available – some managers reported Directors did not always appreciate the breadth of the role of the Registered Manager or the task. In some organisations profit was prioritised over the resources the participant believed were required for the role. Sometimes Directors had significant influence, with comments made about making decisions to accept

referrals against the advice of the Registered Manager. Ofsted can interview directors where they consider it is required or beneficial.

I think sometimes as much as an RM wants to make change[s], this can be unachievable with directors who do not understand the care system and take too long to action.

**Registered Manager**

[Improve things by] ensuring that directors know the sector completely and not letting anyone be a director without knowledge and understanding of the sector. Directors should be interviewed by Ofsted.

**Other senior leadership role**

There were mixed views on the achievability of the Registered Manager role. A few respondents believed the role was achievable with the right team, structure, systems, delegation, and mindset. Others argued that the role needs redefining, or that expectations were unrealistic under current conditions and most believed the role was too demanding without significant support.

We **recommend** a review of the feasibility of the role of the Registered Manager, in particular in how much of the Registered Provider's role sits with the Registered Manager within the current framing of the regulations and what other models retain the importance of accountability for children's lives while ensuring the role is achievable and individuals are not unduly exposed.

## Hours worked

Pressures on the Registered Manager role were particularly apparent when considering number of working hours. While 94% of survey respondents said Registered Managers generally had a contract for between 36 and 40 hours per week, the modal and median average of hours actually worked indicated managers typically undertaking a 50 hour week (almost a 7 day week rather than the 5 day week they are contracted for).

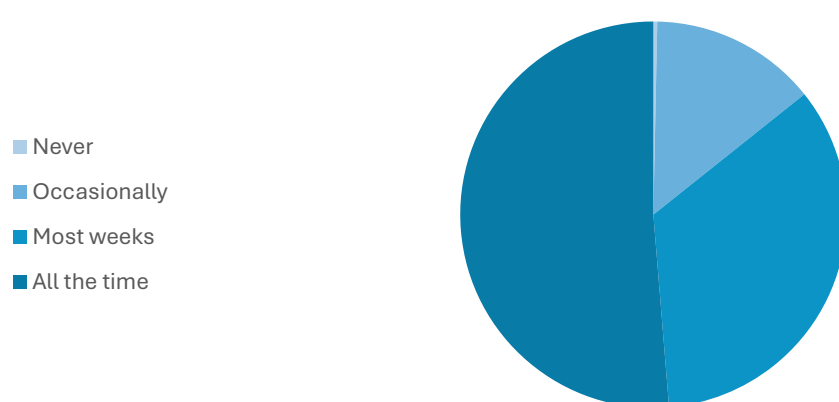
**Table 10**      **Hours worked**

	<b>Local authority homes</b>	<b>Private sector homes</b>
<i>Up to 35 hours</i>	0%	1%
<i>35 to 40 hours</i>	5%	9%
<i>40 to 45 hours</i>	27%	11%
<i>45 to 50 hours</i>	35%	30%
<i>50 to 55 hours</i>	8%	5%
<i>55 to 60 hours</i>	19%	26%
<i>60 to 65 hours</i>	3%	3%
<i>65 to 70 hours</i>	3%	6%
<i>Above 70 hours</i>	0%	10%
<b>Mean</b>	<b>68 hours</b>	<b>72.8 hours</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>50 hours</b>	<b>50 hours</b>
<b>Mode</b>	<b>45 hours</b>	<b>50 hours</b>
<i>n=</i>	37	199

This increase in number of hours worked per week is a significant shift over the last decade – in 2015 “staff with managerial responsibilities” reported a working week of 39 hours<sup>65</sup>. The current *average* hours constitute almost two days a week in addition to contracted hours – 38% of Registered Managers report working more than 50 hours per week. Although they worked slightly less excessive hours, around a third of Registered Managers in the Local Authority sector reported typically working above 50 hours a week.

We **recommend** in the review of the Registered Manager role (suggested above) there should be analysis of how and why the challenge of the role has risen in the last decade.

**Figure 11**      **How often would you say RMs & Heads of Care work over & above contracted hours**



Registered Managers unanimously had substantial additional on call hours (a median of 40 hours) which in the view of 85% of respondents was ‘most weeks’ or ‘all the time’. It is noteworthy that this differs from the experience of the wider children’s home staff team where 30% of staff are reported to work longer than their contracted hours in a typical week<sup>66</sup>. The figure for staff is also an increase on 2015 data indicating local authority staff worked 33 hours per week while those in private homes worked 38 hours per week<sup>67</sup>.

In our survey there was substantial variation in whether overtime (extra hours) were paid.

**Table 11**      **Degree to which extra hours worked are paid**

If overtime (extra hours) are worked, are these paid?		
Yes, all hours paid	45	15%
Yes, some hours paid	57	18%
Other arrangement e.g. Time off in lieu (TOIL)	94	30%
No, overtime hours not paid	89	29%
No arrangements	24	8%

<sup>65</sup> DfE (2015) [A census of the children’s homes workforce](#)

<sup>66</sup> DfE (2025) [Children’s homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

<sup>67</sup> DfE (2015) [A census of the children’s homes workforce](#)



Remuneration varied – on-call work was generally included in salaries. There was some dissatisfaction with the fairness of on-call pay rates, which vary significantly across organisations. Others felt their pay did not reflect the demands placed on them, especially compared to other industries with similar responsibilities.

In their survey responses managers described often feeling constantly responsible, even outside designated hours, leading to stress and burnout. Some managers were offered Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) but in reality struggled to take this due to workload pressures, staffing shortages and the demands of the role. The accountability tied to managers' registration was reported to create anxiety, as mistakes or poor inspections can have direct consequences for individuals. Managers described bureaucratic processes, record keeping burdens and staffing issues as some of the factors that contributed to excessive hours (similar to experiences reported by senior leaders in education<sup>68</sup>).

We **recommend** providers should create transparent processes to understand the hours their Registered Managers are actually working, understand the impact of high hours on quality of care and staff wellbeing, then consider ways to mitigate this.

Some employers were able to ameliorate the effects through strong support systems. As discussed above, particularly useful was input from the Responsible Individual and Deputy Managers. Without this many managers explained they could feel isolated and overwhelmed.

The Department for Education have been exploring ways in which Artificial Intelligence can reduce social workers' workload<sup>69</sup>. We **recommend** an extension of this work into how AI may be usefully applied to the recording and assessment requirements in residential services for children.

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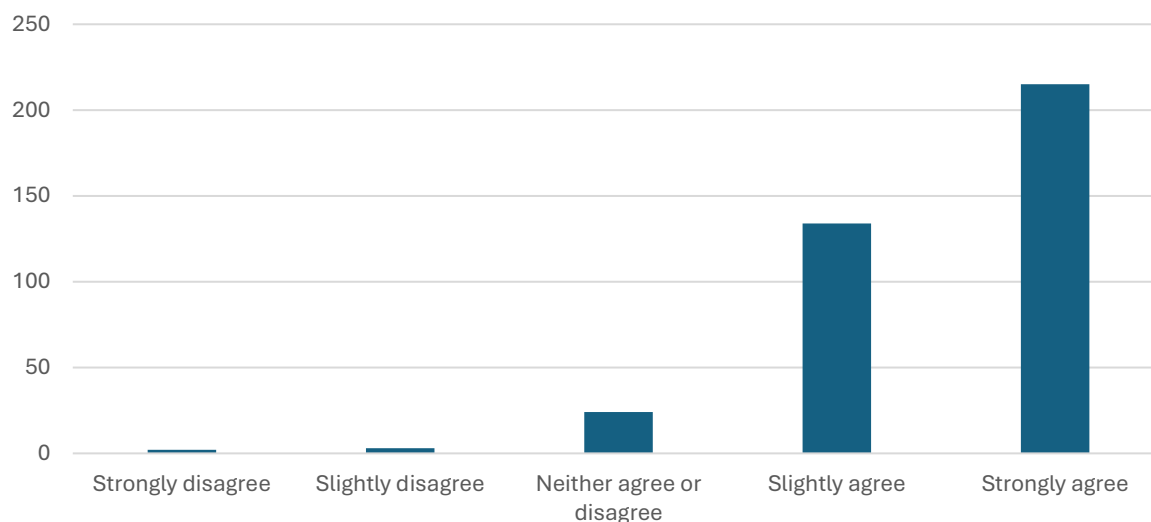
<sup>68</sup> McBrearty (2025) [Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework](#)

<sup>69</sup> DfE (2025) [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) in case recording National Workload Action Group – Reducing unnecessary social worker workload supplementary report](#)

## Stress

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the findings already described, nearly all respondents (92%, whether Registered Managers, Responsible Individuals, Deputy Managers or other roles) agreed that Registered Managers feel stressed by the role.

**Figure 12** Degree to which agree with statement: Registered managers / Heads of care feel stressed by the role



In their feedback, respondents widely acknowledged the role as inherently stressful, with many describing it as a lifestyle not a job. Worryingly stress was seen as constant or recurring, with some managers reporting burnout, mental health impacts, and lack of work-life balance. The situation was seen by several long-standing managers as deteriorating, echoing the finding above about the increase in hours worked in recent years.

I have a tendency to feel the weight of ongoing increased responsibility which has increased year on year. I have particularly felt that the care staff vacancies have had a dramatic impact on services across the sectors. This has since increased our workloads from financial requirements, recruitment and HR issues as departments are reducing but workload handed over to the ever increasing tasks.

**Registered Manager**

After 20yrs and Good and outstanding, I feel more stressed despite the inspection outcomes and the experience.

**Registered Manager**

Registered Managers and Heads of Care often experience significant stress due to the demanding nature of their roles. The job involves high levels of responsibility, complex decision-making, and constant pressure, all of which contribute to a stressful working environment.

**Registered Manager**

Residential care is a lifestyle not a job, unfortunately just like having children of your own you don't get to pick it up and put it down. It is continuous. Time away from the building is rarely time off.

**Responsible Individual**

As in the final quote above (which is representative of many), the focus on children's experiences and their responsibilities to young people was a prominent feature linked to the level of stress experienced. Several managers talked about being unable to switch off, thinking about their work (and children in the setting) during personal time. While only one respondent mentioned risks of physical aggression, many respondents talked about the emotional toll of caring for young people who have experienced trauma. Leading the home means managers are affected by the realities of young people's abuse and neglect, alongside absorbing the impact on staff.

Respondents generally saw managers as accountable when not at work – this feature was reflected in the survey responses whether a Registered Manager or Responsible Individual, and linked to retention of Registered Managers.

High levels of paperwork were also seen as contributing significantly to stress and linked to the accountability of managers where an "If it's not written, it didn't happen" culture was described as adding to the pressure experienced by managers.

This links to managers being responsible for decisions made by others and around a quarter of the respondents (n=101) who added details to the question on stress talked about staffing challenges impacting significantly on stress levels. Common features here related to recruitment difficulties (with managers working in the home to cover gaps), being responsible for others' decisions and changes in the quality of the children's workforce.

The Children's Workforce Census<sup>70</sup> indicates reducing levels of experience in the sector. Compared with 2023, there are fewer staff with 10 or more years of experience (20% in 2025 compared with 27% in 2023). On average, staff had 6 years of experience, a slight decrease from 7 years in 2023.

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

DfE (2024:36) [Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#)

Two in five staff in local authority run homes had at least 10 years' experience (40%) compared with 15% of staff in privately run homes. Conversely, staff in privately run homes were more likely to have one years of experience or less (26% compared with 12% of those in local authority homes). Since 2023, there has been a decrease in the proportion of staff who had at least 10 years' experience across both local authority run homes (from 52% to 40%) and in privately run homes (from 20% to 15%). These add to the sense of responsibility and work that Registered Managers must put in place to ensure safe and developmental care of children.

As noted earlier, some respondents commented about inspection processes and pressure impinging on their time away, including accounts of being called back to the home as an

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<sup>70</sup> DfE (2024) [Children's homes workforce census: Stage 1 findings](#)

inspection was underway. Inspection and Ofsted expectations were seen as a major source of anxiety, with managers feeling judged and under constant scrutiny.

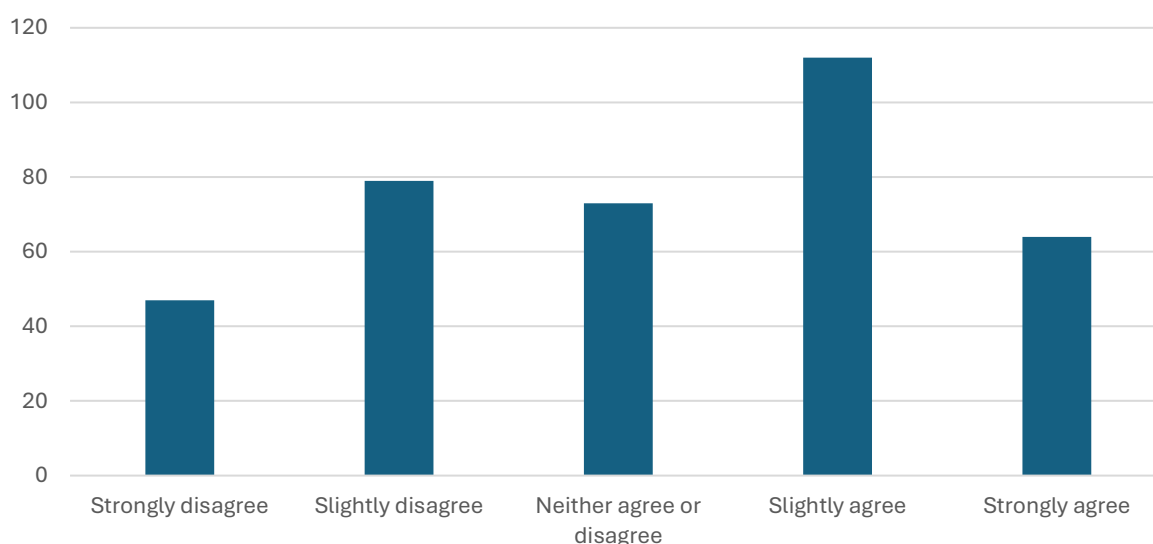
The presence, quality and efficacy of senior leadership support was a repeated theme through Registered Managers' experience, and many felt unsupported and isolated, especially in times of crisis. Conversely, Registered Managers particularly valued supportive Directors who enable decision-making, experienced and effective Responsible Individuals and strong deputy managers to share the load. Informal peer support options such as WhatsApp groups and Registered Manager forums also provided a valuable space to alleviate stress and feel less alone. The manager's own experience, resilience, dedication and emotional intelligence together with team stability were described as key to reducing stress over time.

To reduce the emotional toll (and referenced in the recommendations above) participants suggested better training and support systems, more realistic expectations from regulators, recognition of the emotional labour involved, delegation and middle management structures to share the burden arising from the role demands.

## Support

The presence or absence of support networks, particularly from senior leaders, is a key thread throughout this report. Those taking part were keen to emphasise that the job is "a lifestyle" and as result there may be few boundaries around their personal time. Sometimes this was seen as a necessity for the nature of the work. Managers had varied views around whether their organisations were considerate of their life outside work.

**Figure 13** Degree to which agree with statement: people's organisations are considerate of their life outside work



The variation in the above chart suggests there is an opportunity for organisations to better understand the lived experience of their managers and for some additional strategies to be put in place that would reduce stress and improve job retention.

I do not believe that the organisation ... functions in this way. The role of a registered manager occupies the mind of the post holder 24 hours a day 365 days a year due to the nature of the service.

**Head of Care**

I get calls at all hours, not just on call & starting at anything from 06.30 up to as late as 22.00 from the director or HR personell for unimportant things & they often stay on the phone for an excessive time despite trying to end the call. There is no work-life balance

**Other senior leadership role**

Managing a rota is challenging, children need carers at all times – bank holidays, weekends etc and unplanned absences can be difficult to cover – shortfalls in care lead to risks and therefore when all other options are exhausted, it falls on a manager to cover.

**Responsible individual**

I have experienced negative work-life balance in previous roles in previous companies, however with the company I chose to become a registered manager for, [they] respect your life outside of work and are very understanding.

**Registered manager**

There can be structures in place to lighten this burden, but managers describe an inability to shut down and certainly they remain responsible and accountable for their homes and everything that happens there even when they are out of work from a regulatory perspective.

**Head of Care**

In my case, I (or my deputy) were expected to cover shifts, if there were no staff. So that's doing our day-to-day work and covering overnight shifts. It's unrealistic and leads to apathy and withdrawal, emotional disconnect and gradually, in my case, leads to resignation.

**Registered manager**

Maybe 1 year ago I would have answered they are not considerate however, they are really fair. We also now have an on-call system in place, this enables all managers to have a good work-life balance.

**Registered manager**

Companies need to consider bonuses and rewards better as they are generally based on occupancy and Ofsted but there may be a new manager working countless shifts to get out of a poor grading and they get no reward until they get kids in the home or a better Ofsted .... The efforts it's takes to get there should be noticed and rewarded before they meet a 90% occupancy!!!

**Registered manager**

Not all companies that I have worked for have been. I had to leave my first post due to my mother becoming poorly and there not being any flexibility or support to help me stay in my role and care for my mum. My current company are very considerate. We are consistently exploring ways to improve to ensure all managers have a good work-life balance. They are also family orientated, and support is very good for all staff with things like their own child being poorly and needing to have time off or shift swaps.

**Registered manager**

The impact on family was often cited and was a key driver in both recruitment and retention of Registered Managers. Several managers mentioned missing important life events or feeling emotionally disconnected due to work demands. Where on-call rotas, regional support, or flexible working are in place, managers reported better work-life balance. However, staff shortages and high workloads often undermined these efforts.

Overall, most comments reflect that work-life balance is poor or inconsistent across the sector. Some expect 24/7 availability of Registered Managers (and often Responsible Individuals too) and not always due to a crisis or concern. Some organisations were praised for being family-oriented and flexible, while others are described as unsupportive and profit-driven. Registered Managers have different experiences in different organisational cultures.

**We recommend providers:**

- Consider the values underpinning their approach – it is right and proper that children come first, but all families create healthy compromise, stress can compromise judgement, and any underpinning model should be sustainable. Senior leaders may ask what values they model in their organisation and seek to create open conversations about the values held across their teams
- Review their leadership and workplace culture, including for example independent workforce surveys and other models that can provide evidence or challenge to senior leadership teams and boards
- Utilise supervision and appraisal mechanisms to understand what affects workload and approach. These structures are also helpful in providing challenge to the internal mechanisms that drive Registered Managers such as their own value base, sense of personal responsibility, how they carry organisational responsibility and their management and support needs
- Consider the impact of managers covering vacancies and sickness within the home and ensure a balanced approach is taken
- Consider the reality of hours worked and the effectiveness of TOIL systems which many managers feel unable to use, together with unwritten expectations that Registered Managers are always available
- Review their approach to family or caring commitments and flexible working<sup>71</sup>
- Consider the unintended consequences of some bonus approaches and seek to provide motivation and remuneration that does not detract from personal wellbeing.

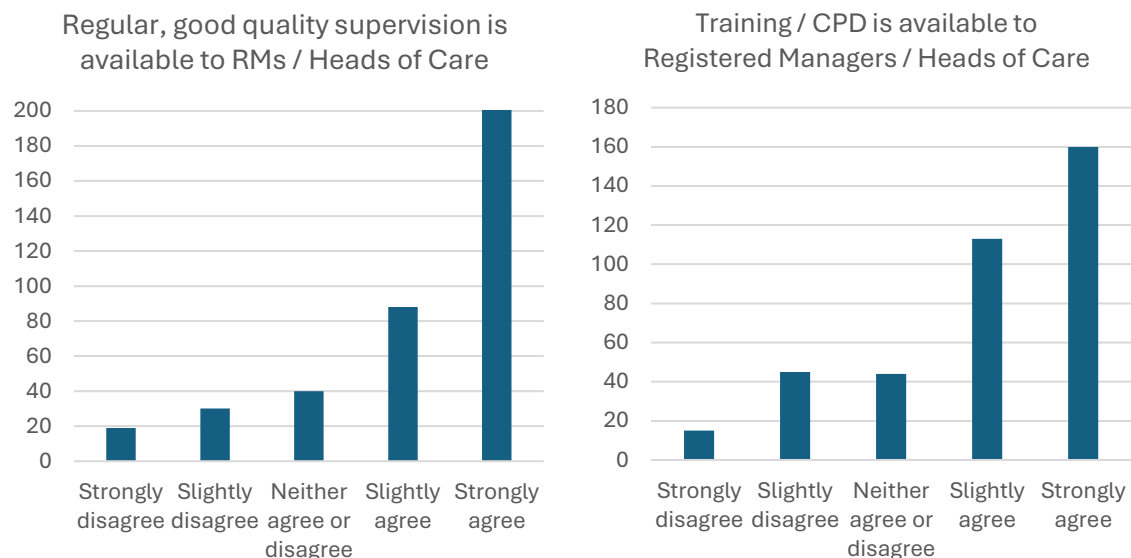
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<sup>71</sup> GOV.UK (2025) [Flexible working](#)

## Supervision, training and CPD (continuous professional development)

One of the most positive aspects of the survey was the difference a strong senior leadership team can make to a Registered Manager, particularly where there is an experienced and supportive Responsible Individual. Most (108, 70%) Registered Managers at least slightly agreed that regular, good quality supervision was in place, and a similar proportion (72%) reported Training or CPD was available.

**Figure 14 Degree to which agree with statement: supervision and training/CPD availability**



I agree that regular, good quality supervision is essential and should be available to all Registered Managers. Given the complexity and pressure of the role, supervision provides a vital space for reflection, support, accountability, and professional development. It allows managers to process challenges, maintain emotional resilience, and receive guidance, which in turn helps them lead more effectively and make informed decisions in the best interests of the young people in their care.

**Registered Manager**

My RI is incredible.

**Registered Manager**

I have only recently had good quality supervisors as most of my RIs have never worked in a children's home before, so they find it difficult to supervise and develop. This has massively hindered my progress as an RM.

**Registered Manager**

Many respondents agreed that regular, high-quality supervision is vital for RMs, especially given the emotional and operational demands of the role. However, experiences, as described in the survey comments, varied widely: some received excellent, reflective supervision, while others report infrequent, superficial, or KPI/tick box/compliance driven sessions. Sometimes time-constraints interfered with the provision of supervision, at times it was crisis-led or needed improvement (firmer boundaries, capacity and support).

The experience and understanding of the Responsible Individual or supervisor were critical. Registered Managers supervised by suitably trained and skilled individuals with residential care

experience reported more meaningful support. In contrast, supervision from directors or RIs without care experience was described as lacking depth or relevance. External or independent supervision was sometimes suggested as a way to ensure objectivity and quality.

Many respondents advocated for clinical or therapeutic supervision in addition to managerial oversight. This was seen as essential for emotional resilience, wellbeing, and retention. Some organisations had begun to implement this, with positive feedback described by survey respondents who had had this.

We **recommend** providers and the regulator carefully evaluate the quality of supervision being delivered to ensure it has the required impact on children, staff and managers. Organisations should carefully consider the framework of their supervision to ensure it is equally challenging and supportive across management, support, mediation and development domains (Morrison, 2005<sup>72</sup>) and may wish to include clinical, therapeutic or external supervision in addition to line management oversight.

## Training

Many respondents noted that training was available (see Figure 14), but its quality and accessibility depend heavily on the organisation. Some companies were perceived as offering excellent training packages, while others provided minimal or no structured CPD. In these cases, while training was technically available, access, quality, and uptake were inconsistent.

We **recommend** providers evaluate the scope and effectiveness of their Workforce Plan, considering in particular the needs of Registered Managers and through supervision and appraisal examine the uptake and impact of relevant training and CPD. Training for managers should include leadership development activity.

The pressures on managers around utilisation of training were a particular concern: crises or underpinning operational demands too often prevented managers from participating. Some managers were expected to source and fund their own training or prioritise staff training over their own development. In the comments some managers described taking personal responsibility for their development, seeking out courses and learning opportunities independently. However, this inevitably added to their workload. As a result, managers could feel unsupported by their organisation.

High costs of specialist or external training were described as a barrier, especially in smaller or budget-constrained organisations. There was a lack of structured CPD beyond Level 5, with few clear pathways for further development.

Respondents would welcome more leadership, HR, and legislation-focused training, and a nationally recognised qualification for Registered Managers.

We **recommend** consideration of a national leadership programme for Registered Managers.

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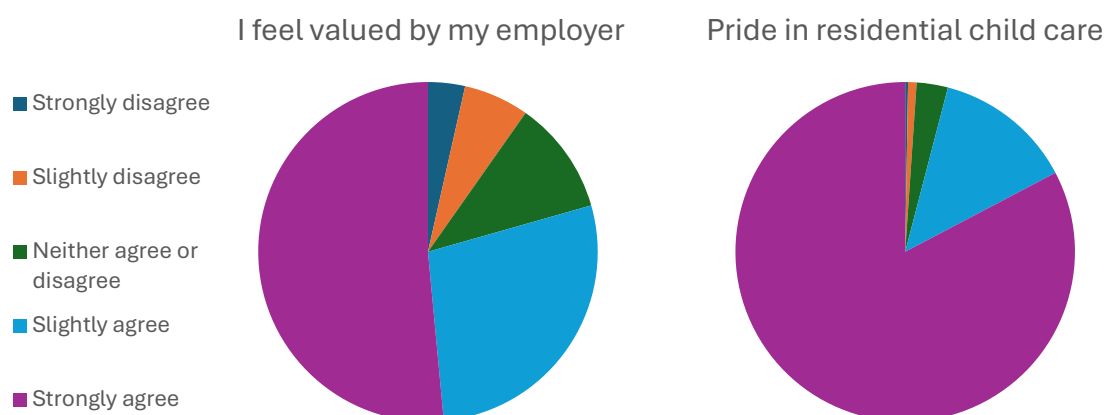
<sup>72</sup> Morrison, T. (2005) Staff Supervision in Social Care. Brighton: Pavilion



## Feeling valued in role

Overall, most of the respondents to the survey felt valued by their employer. One factor contributing to job satisfaction was around the public perception of the role, and encouragingly the vast majority of participants were proud to tell people they worked in residential childcare.

**Figure 15** Degree to which agree with statement: feel valued by employer and feel pride in residential child care



However, in the comments there was a sense that the public, other professionals and politicians did not fully understand the complexity of the RM role and negativity about children's residential social care sector could undermine recruitment. It would be valuable to build on the work of Children's Homes Association<sup>73</sup> to improve understanding of the experiences of young people in children's homes and the staff who care for them.

We **recommend** Government, local authorities and providers positively promote the role of children's homes, managers and employers in improving the lives of children.

I think there is very little public respect - we are viewed as babysitters and as people who get to take children out on activities all day, every day. They do not realise the depth of the difficulties our children have and the subsequent difficulties we go through in trying to support them.

**Registered manager**

There needs to be a shift in publicising the success & positive outcomes achieved by good providers.

**Responsible individual**

Private companies do not get a good name in the public - this can put off people applying for RM role.

**Responsible individual**

Working in the Residential sector is amazing. Ofsted are very helpful and supportive. Working for a local authority which is under section 114 is a nightmare when everything just becomes about saving money and being given an unsurmountable workload outside of your role within residential.

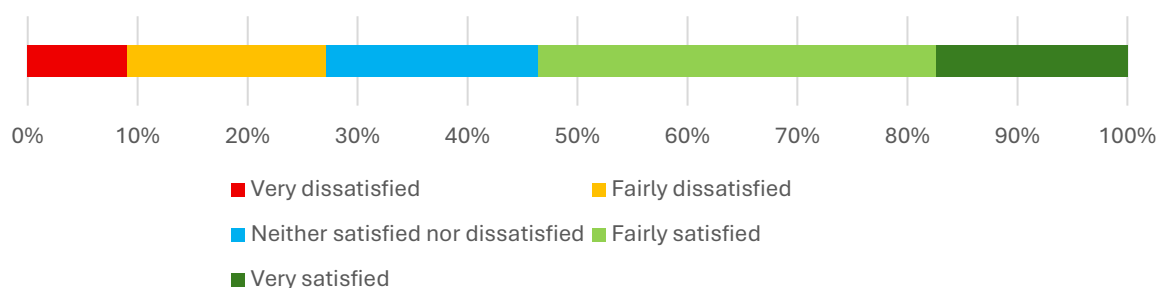
**Responsible individual**

<sup>73</sup> CHA (2024) [Watch our trailer for 'IN CARE', an original documentary series about children's homes](#)

## Remuneration for the role

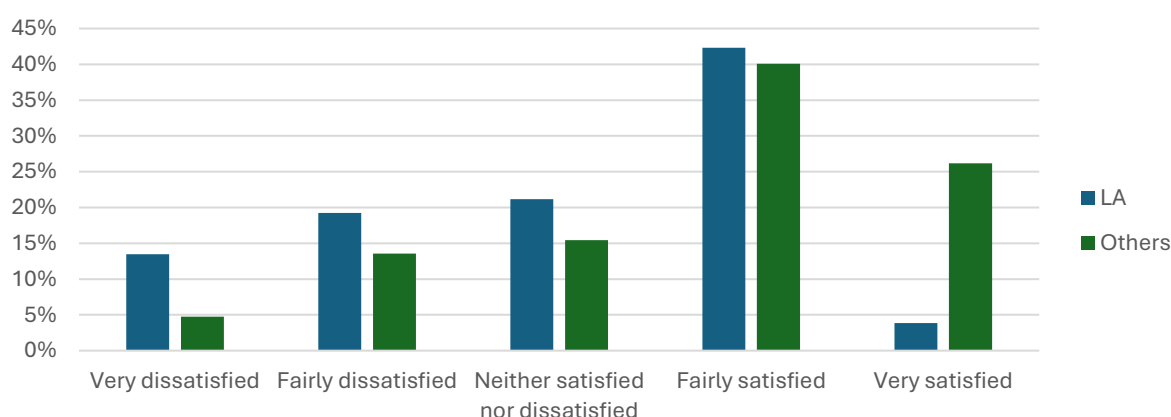
The Children's Home workforce census shows salaries for Registered Managers rising from £20.75 per hour in 2023 to £22.51 per hour in 2024<sup>74</sup>. In our study 63% of Registered Managers were satisfied with their pay and 27% of Registered Managers were dissatisfied. Almost half of the suggestions to improve the recruitment and retention of managers mentioned improving aspects of salaries aligned with the responsibilities carried by the role. Some suggested overtime pay rather than time off in lieu, others mentioned bonuses and or enhanced maternity/paternity pay and sick leave.

**Figure 16** Degree of satisfaction with salary



Levels of dissatisfaction were higher in local authority settings – 46% were fairly satisfied or more in local authority settings compared to 66% in other settings, while 32% were fairly dissatisfied or less in local authority settings compared with 19% in other settings. The survey did not ask about other benefits (such as pension or sickness policies).

**Figure 17** Comparative (LA and other settings) satisfaction levels with pay



<sup>74</sup> DfE (2025) [Children's homes workforce census: stages 2 and 3](#)

## Barriers to becoming a Registered manager or Head of care role

We took extra steps to encourage completion of the survey by Deputy Managers or similar but despite these efforts only 23 completed the survey. 21 of these respondents had 2 or more years' experience. We explored the barriers and strengths they saw in the RM role and compared them to the general group. There were greater levels of uncertainty where Deputy Managers or similar selected 'Neither agree nor disagree', with deputy managers explaining they had not, for example, undertaken a fit person interview, but in general their answers aligned to the views of the rest of the respondents.

We **recommend** further research through, for example, focus groups, to explore further the motivators and barriers to progressing to Registered Manager roles for Deputy Managers and senior care staff (and their employers).

Registered Managers are required to have prior management and supervision experience before taking up the role, so the role of senior care staff, team leaders and deputy managers is important. We **recommend** the development of training pathways to support aspiring and new managers to ease the progression into registered roles.

Participants were asked what they felt prevented people starting or completing the process of becoming a Registered Manager. They were allowed a free text field and 346 participants shared views totalling 11,000 words. Their views echoed the themes above – regulatory pressures and inspection were the most frequently cited concern, stress and mental health concerns are a major impediment, and the level of responsibility is also off-putting.

Several factors can prevent individuals from starting or completing the process of becoming a Registered Manager or Head of Care in a children's residential or special school setting.

Firstly, the intensity and responsibility of the role can feel overwhelming even before entering the position. Knowing that you will be accountable for the safety, wellbeing, and development of vulnerable children, while managing staff and compliance demands, can be intimidating.

Secondly, the complex and lengthy registration process, including the 'fit person' interview and regulatory checks, can deter candidates who fear the legal and professional risks involved such as losing their job or facing sanctions if something goes wrong.

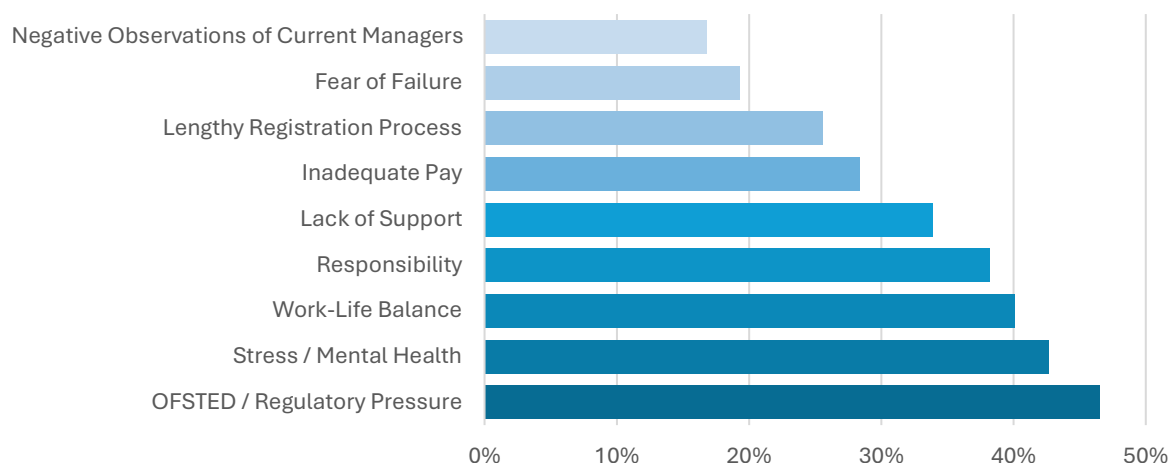
Thirdly, there is often a lack of clear support, mentorship, or structured training pathways to guide aspiring managers through the transition, making the process feel isolating and difficult to navigate.

Finally, the high stress, workload, and on-call demands

**Registered Manager**

Microsoft Copilot was used to help categorise the most common categories mentioned in people's answers:

**Figure 18      Thematic analysis of comments on what prevents people starting or completing the process of becoming a Registered Manager**



Participants were then asked what they thought would improve the process of becoming a manager. 316 people responded and the main themes are summarised below:

### **1. Streamline the Registration Process**

Survey respondents suggested work is undertaken to reduce delays in fit person interviews and children's home registration approvals. This could range from simplifying and shortening the application to be registered, the fit person questionnaire to making registration transferable between roles or homes to avoid repeating the process.

### **2. Improve OFSTED's Role and Approach**

Respondents comment on inconsistencies and subjectivity in inspection, but underpinning this is the different experiences managers report when inspectors take a more developmental and mentoring tone. There were repeated suggestions to clarify guidance, improve preparation materials and offer more helpful feedback.

### **3. Enhance Support and Mentorship**

Participants were keen to have Registered Manager career pathways and a national training programme. There was recognition of the value of leadership development and CPD, although participants noted some of the blocks and barriers to this. Structured mentorship, shadowing opportunities for aspiring managers and the use of peer networks are all seen as supportive.

### **4. Address Workload and Wellbeing**

There were comments on improving work-life balance with protected time off and reduced on-call demands. The provision of emotional support, clinical supervision and wellbeing resources all support emotional and mental wellbeing, while adequate staffing, structured management support and administrative time all lift workload pressures.

### **5. Increase Pay and Recognition**

There were strong feelings from some that remuneration did not align with the level of responsibility and there needed to be some re-alignment of salary and benefits with the level of responsibility. Other participants suggested incentives programmes for taking on the role and recognition for good performance.

## **6. Clarify Expectations and Qualifications**

We discuss the interpretation of Regulation 28 above. Several respondents commented on the need to provide more transparent criteria for eligibility, particularly around transferable skills and alternative qualifications.

## **7. Cultural and Structural Changes**

Underpinning many comments was the need to build a more positive perception of the role and sector and promote respect and understanding from regulators and senior leaders. The focus of responsibility is unhelpful and those surveyed wanted to encourage a sense of joint responsibility across leadership rather than this sitting with just the Registered Manager.

### **Concluding remarks from participants**

Finally, there are concerns about the future of the sector. There are growing struggles with staff shortages at the same time as respondents felt there were increasing expectations placed on Registered Managers. The sector is growing at an inexorable rate with a range in quality of providers and the current base of manager experience being stretched.

There has been work to improve inspection, including while this research was being undertaken. For example, Ofsted have removed the requirement for a Fit Person Questionnaire and have republished the registration guidance for children's homes to streamline the approach<sup>75</sup>. However, there remains a context of a rapidly growing sector and the challenges in ensuring a supply of suitable managers has never been greater.

It seems there are swathes of new providers and employers springing up all over the place and I am concerned that it is possibly diluting the talent pool, so to speak, and that people are moving around purely for financial reasons. This, I think, will be of net detriment to the children in the long term as I understand the skills and experience of many directors and RIs is just not up to scratch.

**Registered Manager**

Media and political portrayals of the private residential care sector often centre on profiteering while offering a poor quality of care, and this does not resonate with many participants' experiences of working in residential childcare. Participants believe stronger advocacy is needed to raise awareness of the valuable work done by Registered Managers.

Participants feel the Registered Manager role is deeply rewarding, yet incredibly demanding, with many systemic issues that need addressing. Better funding, recognition, and support would improve retention and quality of care.

This job can be both heartbreaking, demanding and stressful but most of all it is fun, rewarding and something to be proud of.

**Responsible Individual**

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<sup>75</sup> Ofsted (2025) [Register a children's home: guidance for applicants](#)

## Conclusions

This report has highlighted the complex and evolving landscape of leadership within children's residential care. While the sector continues to grow in response to increasing demand, the availability of experienced and qualified Registered Managers remains a key constraint. The findings suggest that although vacancy rates have improved in recent years, the pressures on those in role, and on those considering stepping up, are significant.

The role of the Registered Manager is both demanding and deeply rewarding. Managers are responsible for ensuring the safety, wellbeing and progress of children in care, while also navigating regulatory expectations, staffing challenges, and organisational pressures. Many respondents described the role as a vocation, driven by a commitment to children and young people, but also acknowledged the toll it can take on personal wellbeing and work-life balance.

Importantly, the report does not present a crisis, but rather a call to action. There are clear opportunities to strengthen recruitment and retention through improved support, clearer pathways into leadership, and more consistent regulatory processes. The sector benefits from passionate and skilled professionals—many of whom are committed to staying in role when they feel valued, supported, and able to make a difference.

As the sector continues to expand in the coming years, it will be essential to ensure that leadership capacity grows alongside it. This means not only attracting new managers, but also retaining experienced ones, and creating conditions in which they can thrive. The recommendations set out in this report aim to support that goal, recognising the central role Registered Managers play in delivering high-quality care and positive outcomes for children.

## Recommendations

### Recruitment and reward

1. Approach the role as a vocation, rather than a job. Respondents emphasised the deep satisfaction they got from making a difference in young people's lives, and how this was key in holding such a tough and challenging role. They need a high level of resilience to cope with the stress of long hours with high levels of responsibility and significant emotional investment. Value Based Interviewing and other approaches that explore motivation are better suited to identifying candidates with the internal motivation to succeed (aspiring RMs, providers)
2. Applicants should consider the right organisational fit and leadership, looking for supportive leaders rather than organisations driven by financial benefit (aspiring RMs, providers)
3. Consider the unintended consequences of some bonus approaches and seek to provide motivation and remuneration that does not detract from personal wellbeing (Providers)

### Culture

4. Positively promote the role of children's homes, managers and employees in improving the lives of children (DfE, local authorities, providers)
5. Children's homes must develop child-focused cultures that still support Registered Managers to maintain a sustainable work-life balance (RMs, providers). For example,

- Consider the values underpinning the approach of a children's home to reduce stress and improve sustainability (Providers)
- Set firm work-life boundaries to resist some of the pressures of the role (Providers/Registered Managers)
- 6. Review leadership and workplace culture, including for example independent workforce surveys and other models that can provide evidence or challenge to senior leadership teams and boards (Providers)
- 7. Create transparent processes to understand the hours their Registered Managers are actually working, understand the impact of high hours on quality of care and staff wellbeing, then consider ways to mitigate this (Providers)
  - Consider the impact of managers covering vacancies and sickness within the home and ensure a balanced approach is taken (Providers)
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of TOIL systems which many managers feel unable to use (Providers),
  - Expose any unwritten expectations that Registered Managers are always available (Providers)
  - Review the approach to family or caring commitments and flexible working (Providers)
- 8. Develop a strong and supportive leadership culture (Providers)
  - Create a sense of shared accountability for Registered Managers with Responsible Individuals and Directors (Providers, Ofsted)
  - Examine the capacity of the Registered Manager to delegate to a capable team, ensuring the effectiveness of support systems such as deputies, team leaders, and Responsible Individuals (Providers, Ofsted)
  - Build robust management structures that allow for delegation, annual leave or sickness (Providers)
  - Train leaders in distributed/delegated leadership models (Providers, dialogue)
- 9. Address excessive paperwork and auditing (Providers, Ofsted, dialogue)
- 10. Strengthen focus on good leadership practice and positive cultures within Leadership & Management Quality of Care Regulation 45 assessments and through inspection (Providers, Ofsted)

### **Training, supervision and support**

- 11. Utilise supervision and appraisal mechanisms to understand what affects workload and approach (Providers)
- 12. Evaluate the scope and effectiveness of their Workforce Plan, considering in particular the needs of Registered Managers, ensuring they have suitable leadership training (Providers)
- 13. Develop training pathways to support aspiring and new managers to ease the progression into registered roles (Providers, dialogue) developing strategies to build confidence in Registered Managers, deputies and others in the team such as building inspection management skills (Providers, dialogue)
- 14. Evaluate the quality of supervision being delivered to ensure it has the required impact on children, staff and managers (Providers, Ofsted)
- 15. Prioritise professional development and training (including qualifications, as well as shadowing experienced professionals and seeking out peer support opportunities with other managers)(Registered Managers, providers)

16. Consider the development of a national leadership programme for Registered Managers (DfE)
17. Promote universal wellbeing interventions for the workforce as a key strategy to reduce stress (providers)

### **Regulation**

18. Consider the repeal of the disqualification regulations with more appropriate measures put in place through the Disclosure & Barring Service (DfE)
19. Allow transferrable registration so that managers' registration can be applied to similar homes without a further application or fit person interview (DfE)
20. Provide greater clarity and perhaps flexibility in the application of regulation 28, while recognising providers themselves prioritise suitable experience (Ofsted, DfE)

### **Application to be a Registered Manager**

21. Support managers to reduce errors in Fit Person applications (Providers, dialogue)
22. Explore ways to create a timely pathway to registration (DfE, Ofsted)
23. Continue to review the Ofsted administrative processes to remove any avoidable delay (Ofsted)
24. Continue to develop transparency in the actual registration timescales regionally, particularly while there are known to be delays (Ofsted)
25. Build applicants' confidence in the fit person interview, such as through training, written guides and preparatory materials (Ofsted, Providers, dialogue)
26. Continue to improve both the consistency and approach of the 'fit person interview' while maintaining the integrity and importance of this important safeguarding process (Ofsted)

### **Inspection**

27. Consider commissioning an independent review of the impact of inspection on the wellbeing of leaders in children's homes and Residential Special Schools (DfE, Ofsted)
28. Further explore and implement changes to reduce the isolation and individual responsibility felt by children's homes leaders, particularly following a poor inspection outcome (DfE, Ofsted, providers)
29. Consider making adjustments to inspection approach that create undue stress, for example:
  - Consider providing some notice of inspections (e.g. 24 hours ahead of a visit) while recognising young people prefer inspection to be unannounced (DfE, Ofsted)
  - Explore models of inspection that are experienced supportively (DfE, Ofsted)
  - Give weight to manager pre-planned annual leave in deciding inspection dates (Ofsted)
30. Continue to improve the quality and consistency of inspection, for example:
  - Highlighting the voice of young people and their appraisal of the home
  - Reduce perceived inconsistency between inspectors
  - Ensure inspectors have relevant residential experience
  - Improve continuity of inspectors
  - Streamline documentation and clarify expectations to reduce unnecessary workload during inspection



- Focus inspection on children's progress and wellbeing, rather than system compliance
- Continue to build on the values of professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect rather than judgemental approaches (Ofsted)

### **Further research areas**

- Review of the feasibility of the role of the Registered Manager (DfE, Ofsted, providers), in particular:
  - how and why the challenge of the role has risen in the last decade;
  - how much of the Registered Provider's role sits with the Registered Manager within the current framing of the regulations;
  - whether and why managers leave in the early stages of appointment;
  - motivators and barriers to progressing to Registered Manager roles for Deputy Managers and senior care staff; and
  - what other models retain the importance of accountability for children's lives while ensuring the role is achievable and individuals are not unduly exposed
- Urgent research into the optimal size of children's homes as the trend towards smaller children's homes appears to be escalating and underpins much of the valuable work already begun around local authority sufficiency (Ofsted, DfE)
- Urgent further research to focus on the factors supporting the retention of Registered Managers in the sector including, for example, the nature of roles Registered Managers are leaving for. Lots of the managers submitting responses noted they would be willing to contribute further evidence. Many of the drivers and recommendations in this report are likely to be relevant to retention (Ofsted, DfE)
- Consider commissioning an independent wellbeing impact assessment ahead of the proposed Ofsted framework for Children's Homes (Ofsted)
- Research on diversity of the individuals registered as managers of children's homes, perhaps by the regulator who routinely collates some of this data for specified and lawful purposes, may be beneficial to explore whether there are blocks, barriers and untapped resources for the Registered Manager role (Ofsted, DfE)
- Begin to publish information specifically about managers registered for more than one setting (Ofsted)
- Further research into the effectiveness of settings for young people where managers are registered for more than one setting, including consideration whether such registrations could be extended further (Ofsted)
- Learn from how Artificial Intelligence is being used to reduce social workers' workload into how AI may be usefully applied to the recording and assessment requirements in residential services and the residential workforce for children (DfE, providers).

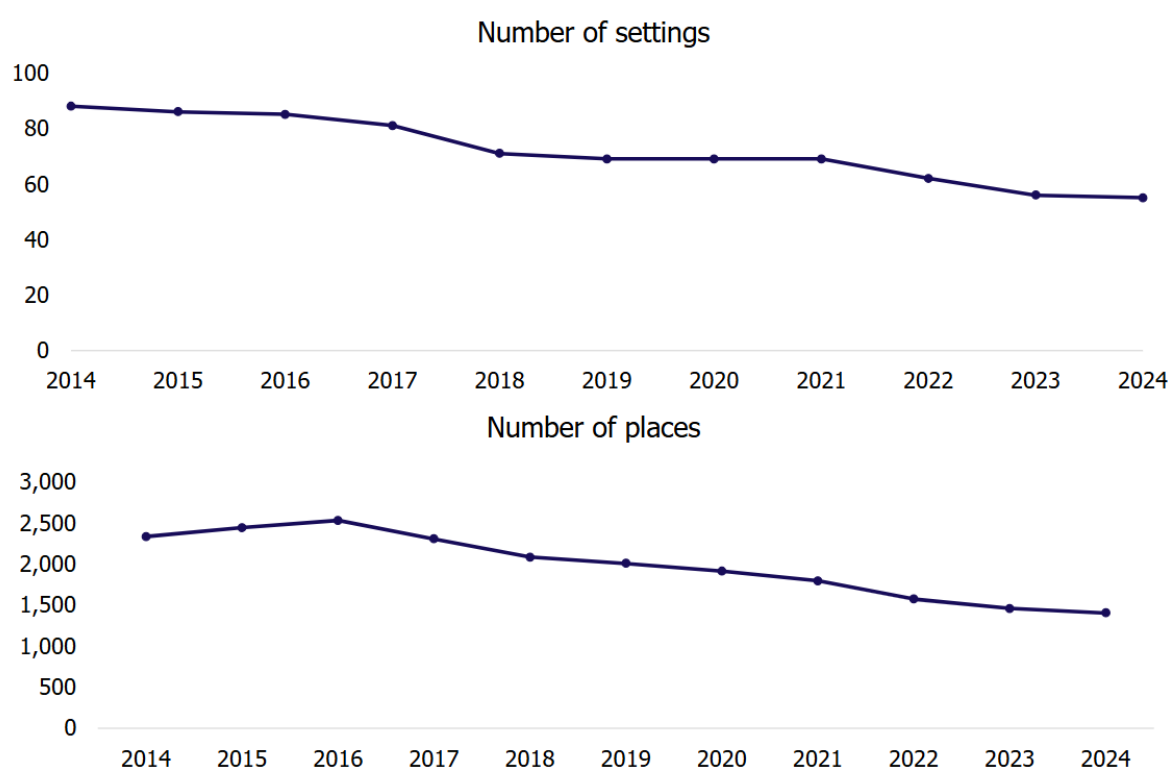
## Appendix 1 – Residential Special Schools (RSS)

### Residential special schools registered as children's homes

As at 31 March 2024, there were 55 residential special schools registered as children's homes, offering 1,402 places. This is a 2% decrease in the number of providers and a 4% decrease in the number of places since March 2023.

This continues the longer-term trend of the steadily decreasing number and potential capacity of residential special schools registered as children's homes.

**Figure 1: The year-on-year decrease in the number of residential special schools registered as children's homes and places since 2014<sup>76</sup>**



While this creates a different trend for the RSS sector, many of the experiences of Heads of Care were similar to those in Children's Homes and the above main findings report will be applicable.

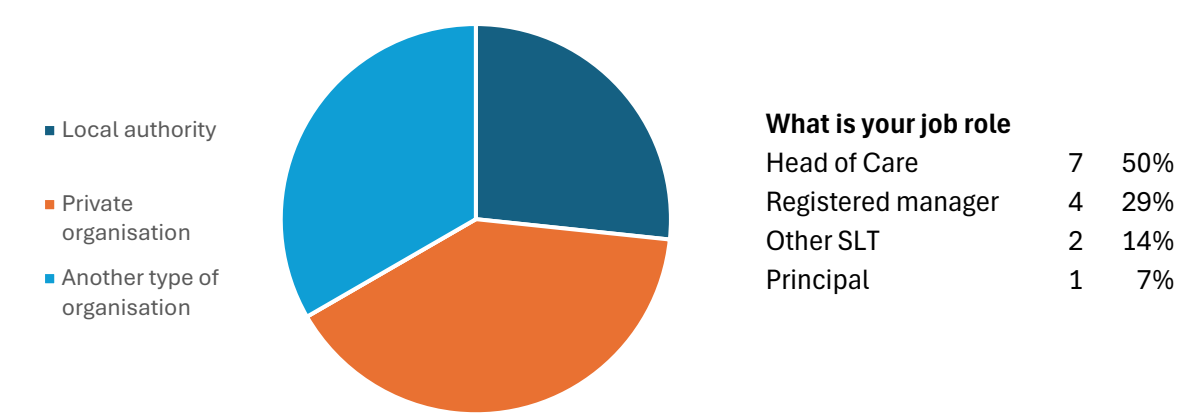
In this Appendix we explore differences in the responses between RSS Heads of Care and children homes Registered Managers. The following areas showed different trends when we separated out those working in Residential Special Schools.

It should, however, be noted that responses from the sector were low (n=15) despite an additional opportunity to submit being shared by the National Association of Special Schools in September. Participants were almost evenly distributed across settings caring for children for

<sup>76</sup> Ofsted (2024) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2024](#)

more than 295 days and those caring for children 295 days or less and respondents were from a range of types of ownership:

**Figure 2      RSS Heads of Care survey respondent profile**



As may be expected, while 79% of children’s homes respondents indicated planned growth in the next two years, most Residential Special School participants had no such plans:

**Table 1      RSS sector growth plans**

Is your organisation planning to grow in the next 2 years?		
Yes	5	33%
No	8	53%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	2	13%

These settings were marginally less confident in recruitment, but the sample size is too small to be reliable. They were less likely to agree the Registered Manager/Head of Care role carries too much responsibility (53% compared to 71%), and that Registered Managers/Heads of Care feel stressed by the job (80% rather than 92%) perhaps reflecting their shared role in a setting with a senior leadership team, although they had similarly high working hours. Levels of pay satisfaction were broadly similar.

Other findings are too skewed by the small sample size to share.

Overall, it is likely that Heads of Care could transition easily between Residential Special Schools into the Children’s Home sector and so they are affected by similar pressures and opportunities, but it has not been possible to fully explore these links.

Other approaches to further understand the views and experiences of Heads of Care, such as focus groups, may have more success.

## Appendix 2 – Survey

1. Which of the following best describes your setting in your statement of purpose?
  - a. A children's home which provides short term care
  - b. A children's home which provides long term care
  - c. Residential family centre
  - d. A secure children's home
  - e. A short break children's home
  - f. A residential special school registered as a children's home (for MORE than 295 days a year)
  - g. In the registration process
  - h. Supported Accommodation
  - i. A residential special school NOT registered as a children's home (295 days a year or LESS)
  - j. We have a variety of long stay and short breaks homes
  - k. Short breaks and residential care
  - l. Short Breaks and Long term care
  - m. Regulation 44 visitor
  - n. Short and Long Term Children's Homes
  - o. Other
2. How many young people your setting / school is registered to provide for?
3. Which sector best reflects your setting's ownership?
  - a. Local Authority
  - b. Private Organisation
  - c. Voluntary Organisation
  - d. Another Type of Organisation
4. Where is your setting located? (you can select more than one option)
  - a. East Midlands
  - b. East of England
  - c. North East, Yorkshire and Humber
  - d. North West
  - e. South East
  - f. South West
  - g. West Midlands
  - h. London

5. Is your organisation planning to grow in the next 2 years?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't Know/Prefer Not to Say
6. Is your organisation confident in recruiting to new and/or replacement leadership roles?
- a. Very Confident
  - b. Somewhat Confident
  - c. Not Very Confident
  - d. Concerned
  - e. Don't Know/Prefer Not to Say
7. What is your job role? (Required)
- a. Head of Care
  - b. Registered Manager
  - c. Deputy Manager or similar
  - d. Manager covering a Registered role
  - e. Responsible Individual
  - f. Dual role or RI and RM
  - g. Peripatetic Manager
  - h. Registered Manager and Operations Manager
  - i. Reg44 Visitor
  - j. Principal
  - k. Director
  - l. Operations Director
  - m. Quality Assurance and Compliance
  - n. Recruitment Manager
  - o. Owner
  - p. Company Founder
  - q. Other Senior Leadership Role

8. Are you planning to register? *(only for Managers covering a Registered Role)*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Prefer not to say
9. Can you give us some more information on your role and what informed your decision not to register? (max 1000 characters) *(only if no/prefer not to say to Q8)*
10. Are you or any of your managers the registered manager for more than one setting or building?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't Know
11. Please explain the reasons you have registered for more than one setting. (max 1000 characters) *(only if yes to Q10)*
12. How many years' experience working in residential children's care did you have when you were first appointed as a registered manager? *(Only for RMs)*
  - a. Under 2 years
  - b. Between 2 years and up to 3 years
  - c. Over 3 years experience and up to 6 years experience
  - d. 6 or more years experience
13. How many years' experience working in residential children's care do you have? *(only for Deputy Manager or similar)*
  - a. Under 2 years
  - b. Between 2 years and up to 3 years
  - c. Over 3 years experience and up to 6 years experience
  - d. 6 or more years experience
14. In the last two years has your setting had a period of time with no Registered Manager/Head of Care?
  - a. No change of manager in this time
  - b. No, a Registered Manager / Head of Care was appointed without a gap
  - c. Yes, gap of 4 weeks or less
  - d. Yes, gap of 1 to 3 months
  - e. Yes, gap of 3 to 6 months
  - f. Yes, gap of 6 months or more
  - g. Don't Know/Prefer Not to Say

15. Can you tell us why? (tick all that apply) (*only if yes to Q14*)
- a. Manager in post, but not registered
  - b. Unexpected departure of RM
  - c. Difficulty in recruiting new RM
  - d. Failed induction / probation of new RM
  - e. Unsuccessful at Fit Person's Interview
16. While respecting the confidentiality of individuals, please tell us more... (max 1000 characters)  
(*only if yes to Q14*)
17. What do you think would help with recruitment and retention of Registered Managers / Heads of Care (RSS)? (max 1000 characters)
- Examples might include... better pay, benefits (e.g. pension, time off and similar), financial incentives such as overtime pay, better working culture, CPD/training, career progression, flexible hours, TOIL, more manageable workload, better wellbeing offer, more flexibility in qualification/experience requirements (Reg 28), better advertising of the roles/expectations.
18. Experience of applying to be a Registered Manager / Head of Care
- a. The fit person interview puts people off becoming a Registered Manager / Head of Care
    - i. Strongly Agree
    - ii. Slightly Agree
    - iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
    - iv. Slightly Disagree
    - v. Strongly Disagree
- You can add a comment if you wish...
- b. The Registered Manager / Head of Care role feels unachievable – there is too much work
    - i. Strongly Agree
    - ii. Slightly Agree
    - iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
    - iv. Slightly Disagree
    - v. Strongly Disagree
- You can add a comment if you wish...

c. The Registered Manager / Head of Care role carries too much responsibility

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Slightly Agree
- iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- iv. Slightly Disagree
- v. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

d. The inspection process is too stressful

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Slightly Agree
- iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- iv. Slightly Disagree
- v. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

e. Regular, good quality supervision is available to Registered manager / Head of Care

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Slightly Agree
- iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- iv. Slightly Disagree
- v. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

f. Training / Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is available to Registered Managers / Heads of Care (RSS)

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Slightly Agree
- iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- iv. Slightly Disagree



- v. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

- g. Registered Managers / Heads of Care feel stressed by the job

- i. Strongly Agree
- ii. Slightly Agree
- iii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- iv. Slightly Disagree
- v. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

- h. People's organisations are considerate of their life outside work

- vi. Strongly Agree
- vii. Slightly Agree
- viii. Neither Agree or Disagree
- ix. Slightly Disagree
- x. Strongly Disagree

You can add a comment if you wish...

- 19. What do you think prevents people starting or completing the process of becoming a Registered Manager / Head of Care of a children's / residential special school? *Please add your views whether or not you are a Registered Manager / Head of Care.* (max 1000 characters)
- 20. What do you think would improve the process of becoming a Registered Manager / Head of Care of a children's home / residential special school? (max 1000 characters)

**Questions 21-30** are only for RM/HofC/RI/Principal

- 21. Hours of Work

When thinking about hours, please consider average hours over 17 weeks (in line with the working time directive). We have added options for contracted hours and for hours actually worked (if different). How many hours does the RM/Head of Care work in a week, excluding on-call time.

- a. In the contract
  - b. In reality
- 22. How many hours are they on call?
  - a. In the contract
  - b. In reality
- 23. How often would you say Registered Managers and Heads of Care (RSS) work over and above contracted hours to keep with their workload?
  - a. All the time
  - b. Most weeks
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
  - e. Don't Know
- 24. If overtime (extra hours) are worked, are these paid?
  - a. Yes, All hours paid
  - b. Yes, Some hours paid
  - c. Other arrangement e.g. Time off in lieu
  - d. No, Overtime hours not paid
  - e. No arrangements
  - f. Don't Know
- 25. Are RMs paid for on-call time?
  - a. Yes, always
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Never
  - d. Don't Know
- 26. Please add any comments about working hours (max 500 characters).
- 27. Are you planning to leave the role of the Registered Manager / Head of Care in RSS in the near future? *RM/HoC only*
  - a. No plans to leave the role
  - b. Yes to another RM role
  - c. Yes plan to leave role altogether within the next year
  - d. Yes, plan to leave the role altogether within the next 1-3 years
- 28. IF YES.... Can you say why...? (max 500 characters)

29. What is the best thing about your role? (max 500 characters)
30. What advice do you have for colleagues thinking about the role? (max 500 characters)

**Further questions are for everyone**

31. Reflecting on how things are going for you at the moment, please let us know what you think about the following statements:
- a. I feel valued by my employer
    - i. Strongly agree
    - ii. Slightly agree
    - iii. Slightly disagree
    - iv. Strongly disagree
    - v. Neither agree or disagree
  - b. I am proud to tell people I work in residential child care
    - i. Strongly agree
    - ii. Slightly agree
    - iii. Slightly disagree
    - iv. Strongly disagree
    - v. Neither agree or disagree
  - c. The sense of achievement you get from your work
    - i. Very satisfied
    - ii. Fairly satisfied
    - iii. Fairly dissatisfied
    - iv. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - d. The amount of pay you receive
    - i. Very satisfied
    - ii. Fairly satisfied
    - iii. Fairly dissatisfied
    - iv. Very dissatisfied
    - v. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - e. Public respect for the sort of work you do
    - i. Very satisfied
    - ii. Fairly satisfied

- iii. Fairly dissatisfied
- iv. Very dissatisfied
- v. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

32. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about being a manager in the residential child care sector? (max 500 characters)

33. Interest in joining further discussions

We aim to complete the review with recommendations for the sector this Summer. We will publish these findings in dialogue's monthly bulletin for the sector and run free events to share and discuss the results.

a. On-going research

- i. Yes – Happy to be contacted
- ii. No – Please do not contact me

b. Would you like to register for dialogue's bulletin?

*We will let you know when the findings of this work are available, invite you to events, share inspection top tips and tell you about other work we do.*

- i. Yes – Please sign me up
- ii. No – Please do not contact me

34. *Contact details are gathered only if the answer to 33 (a) or (b) is yes*

