Learning together

learning from each other

Report of the 'Hard to Reach' Foster Carers Project

the fostering network
the voice of foster care
Learning together
learning from each other
Foreword

The most important relationship a child or young person will have is with the people who care for them. For some children and young people that means their foster carers. This is a key relationship; we need to make sure it is strong and supportive of the child or young person’s needs. The Children’s Workforce Development Council is committed to making sure that all those who work with children and young people have the right kind of skills and knowledge and can access the training, support and development they need to fulfil their role.

Foster carers are very important within our society and their skills and expertise can make a fundamental difference to children whose lives are changed because of the safe, caring and supportive foster family in which they live. Foster carers come from varied backgrounds but all share a common interest in wanting to work with children and to help children in care; and feel they have something to offer. That is why the Children’s Workforce Development Council has supported the development of this toolkit so that all foster carers can access the right training, support and development. In October 2006 the Government report Options for Excellence – Building the Social Care Workforce of the Future identified that there were more than 1.6 million people working in social care. Amongst them it recognised the key contribution that foster carers make to the lives of some of our most vulnerable children and young people. Foster carers are part of that wider social care workforce.

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care were developed and launched in 2007 as part of the drive to value that vital contribution. They set a national minimum benchmark of good practice which all existing approved foster carers are expected to complete by 2011. If foster carers are to continue to make a positive difference to the lives of the children and young people they care for, they need access to the right kind of learning and support. This means we need to: listen to what foster carers and fostering service providers say about what works; understand what the barriers to learning are; and put in place the right kind of approaches to overcome these. Everyone learns in a different way and so it is important to make sure that materials to support the implementation of the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care are understandable and can be used widely. These materials do exactly that. They raise some key issues about supporting learning and highlight the benefits of using the Standards. They form part of a practical toolkit for fostering service providers and set out some innovative ways of engaging foster carers in learning.

The Children’s Workforce Development Council will continue, together with partners, to support foster carers in building their skills and knowledge. Together, we can help them to help children and young people make the best of their lives.

Ann Harrison
National Programme Manager, Social Care, Children’s Workforce Development Council
## Contents

### Executive Summary

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Learning together; learning from each other

1.2 Children’s Workforce Development Council

1.3 The Fostering Network

1.4 University of Hertfordshire

1.5 Project Reference Group

Chapter 2 – Background

2.1 Children looked after in England

2.2 Definition of ‘hard to reach’ foster carers

2.3 Training, support and development for foster care

2.4 Adult participation in learning in the UK: an overview

Chapter 3 – Method

3.1 Preliminary survey and supplementary questionnaire: foster carers and fostering service providers

3.2 Main survey: foster carers

3.3 Main survey: fostering service providers

3.4 Focus groups and interviews: foster carers

3.5 Focus groups and interviews: fostering service providers
Executive Summary

The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) introduced the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care in 2007. These standards are designed to: ‘Equip Foster Carers with the knowledge and skills needed to provide high quality care for the children and young people they look after.’ and to ‘Ensure that all Foster Carers are given the necessary help to develop knowledge and skills to carry out their job as Foster Carers and appropriate opportunities for career development.’

The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading charity for everyone involved in fostering. In their work with people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care, they consistently find there are groups of foster carers who are less willing or able to participate in training, development and other areas of expectations or requirements of their role. The Fostering Network received funding from the CWDC to carry out a project between September 2008 and March 2009. This project was carried out to develop guidance and recommendations on how fostering service providers might remove barriers to learning experienced by these ‘hard to reach’ foster carers, in particular men who foster. Members of the University of Hertfordshire School of Education research team were engaged as an academic partner. A Hard to Reach Foster Carers Project Reference Group was established to oversee the implementation of the project and to contribute expertise to the delivery of the outcomes.

In 2008 there were almost sixty thousand children looked after in England of whom more than forty-two thousand were in a foster placement. Documents from the Government and other influential bodies provide some of the national context and contribute to the subject of training, support and development for foster care. Nationally, the development of the childcare workforce and the transformation of children’s services are part of an extensive and ongoing programme.

The report provides a brief overview of adult participation in learning in the UK and of foster carers’ engagement in learning. It includes definitions of learning, some findings from previous research on attitudes towards learning and factors affecting access to learning. A mixed method approach was used to identify the barriers to learning faced by ‘hard to reach’ foster carers and ways in which these barriers might be overcome. The methods included surveys, focus groups and interviews which provide a rich source of data on issues relating to training, support and development from those within the sector.

The key message of this report is reflected in its title Learning together; learning from each other. This highlights the valued and interconnected contribution to fostering of learning with and from others: foster carers; fostering service providers; people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care; sons and daughters of foster carers; foster families; children and young people.
looked after. The report shares some of the learning from the consultation with foster carers and fostering service providers who voice some of the benefits of training, support and development to foster carers and provide insight into factors affecting access to learning. *Learning together; learning from each other* uses a broad interpretation of learning, learning activities and approaches. It also recognises that the factors affecting participation in learning vary from one individual to another. Some foster carers in ‘hard to reach’ groups do find ways to engage in learning.

In this report the guidance and recommendations are set out as five focus points for fostering service providers. These five focus points articulate how fostering service providers can support the ‘learning journey’ of each foster carer. They are also applicable and relevant across the wider childcare workforce. The ultimate aim of the project is to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction
1.1 Learning together; learning from each other

Learning together; learning from each other, the report of the ‘Hard to Reach’ Foster Carers Project focuses on foster carers and the children and young people they look after. The ultimate aim of the project is to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.

Learning together; learning from each other provides guidance and recommendations on how fostering service providers might remove barriers to learning for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers. For the purposes of this project ‘hard to reach’ groups of foster carers included respite carers, older carers and in particular men who foster. The guidance and recommendations have been developed through consultation with foster carers and fostering service providers and following a review of the literature. They form part of a practical toolkit designed to facilitate the achievement of the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care in England. This practical toolkit comprises this report, a DVD and a CD-Rom. Further details about this toolkit are provided in Chapter 5.

The key message of this report is reflected in its title Learning together; learning from each other. This highlights the valued and interconnected contribution to fostering of learning from children and young people looked after, foster carers, sons and daughters of foster carers, foster families, fostering service providers and people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care. The report shares some of the learning from the consultation with foster carers and fostering service providers who voice some of the benefits of training, support and development to foster carers and provide insight into factors affecting access to learning.

Learning together; learning from each other uses a broad interpretation of learning, learning activities and approaches. It also recognises that the factors affecting participation in learning vary from one individual to another. Some foster carers in ‘hard to reach’ groups do find ways to engage in learning.

Learning together; learning from each other is written for the main stakeholders in this project, the CWDC, the Fostering Network, fostering service providers and foster carers. It is also applicable and relevant across the wider childcare workforce.
1.2 Children’s Workforce Development Council

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care introduced by the CWDC in 2007 (CWDC, 2007a) are designed to:

- Equip Foster Carers with the knowledge and skills needed to provide high quality care for the children and young people they look after.
- Ensure that all Foster Carers are given the necessary help to develop knowledge and skills to carry out their job as Foster Carers and appropriate opportunities for career development.’

The standards support a three-stage Training Framework for Foster Care: pre-approval, induction and foster carer development. All new foster carers are expected to complete the standards within twelve months of their approval. The CWDC and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) are committed to full implementation of the standards by 2011.

1.3 The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading charity for everyone involved in fostering. They are uniquely placed to bring people and organisations together to improve the lives of children in foster care. In their work with people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care, the Fostering Network consistently finds there are groups of foster carers who are less willing or able to participate in training, development and other areas of expectations or requirements of their role as foster carers.

The Fostering Network received funding from the CWDC to carry out a project between September 2008 and March 2009 to support fostering service providers in overcoming the barriers to learning experienced by these harder to reach groups. The purpose of the project was to produce guidance and recommendations on how fostering service providers might remove barriers to learning for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers, in particular men who foster.

1.4 University of Hertfordshire

The University of Hertfordshire School of Education has strong partnership arrangements leading to interprofessional working with national agencies including the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners, as well as local education providers, schools, colleges and training organisations. Members of the School of Education research team were engaged to work on this project as an academic partner. Research and consultancy activities in the School include diversity and inclusion issues, developing qualification routes, and coaching/mentoring. In particular, the School has expertise in research on the childcare workforce and specifically on recruiting, selecting and supporting men working in early years, primary and secondary settings.
1.5 Project Reference Group

A Hard to Reach Foster Carers Project Reference Group was established to oversee the implementation of the project and to contribute expertise to the delivery of the project outcomes.

Members of the Reference Group included: from the Fostering Network, the Director of Services (England), Development Manager (Membership), Regional Consultant (South West); representatives of Local Authority and Independent Fostering Providers; foster carers and members of the research team from the University of Hertfordshire School of Education.
CHAPTER 2

Background
2.1 Children looked after in England

At 31 March 2008 there were 59,500 children looked after in England of whom 42,300 (71 per cent) were in a foster placement (DCSF, 2008a).

2.2 Definition of ‘hard to reach’ foster carers

For the purposes of this project ‘hard to reach’ groups of foster carers included respite carers, older carers and in particular men who foster.

2.3 Training, support and development for foster care

Documents from the Government and other influential bodies contribute to the subject of training, support and development for foster care. A sample of these documents is referred to in this section of the report to provide some of the national context for training, support and development for foster care. The development of the childcare workforce and the transformation of children’s services are part of an extensive and ongoing programme.

The Options for Excellence Review of the social care workforce, led by the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) recognised foster carers ‘...as part of the wider social care workforce...’ (DH/DfES, 2006).

The Fostering Network argue that the registration of foster carers with an approved and national body ‘...has a role to play in improving the quality of foster carers, in driving up standards by requiring continued training and increasing the status of foster carers. Registration will also increase public confidence in foster carers who will be obliged to abide by the code of practice for social care workers and who will be accountable for their conduct and standards of practice’ (Tapsfield, 2006). In the view of the Fostering Network this ‘...should be seen as a key part of a strategy to transform foster care and the outcomes of children in foster care’.

The Fostering Network’s policy paper, Towards a Professional Foster Care Service: what it means to be a professional foster carer was published following consultation with members of the Fostering Network (the Fostering Network, 2008). The Fostering Network ‘make the case for why foster carers should be regarded as professionals, and put forward recommendations for how the foster carer role needs to be better supported, enhanced and recompensed if foster carers are truly to be recognised as key partners in the team surrounding the child and valid members of the children’s workforce.’
**Every child matters**  
*HM Treasury, September 2003 (Cm 5860)*

This Green Paper put forward proposals in ‘...four main areas: supporting parents and carers; early intervention and effective protection; accountability and integration – locally, regionally and nationally; and workforce reform.’ As part of the consultation on ‘supporting parents and carers’ the Green Paper included proposals on measures to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers, ‘...and to ensure that foster carers have the skills and support they need to care for vulnerable children...’.

**Every child matters: next steps**  
*Department for Education and Skills, 2004a*

*Every child matters: next steps* sets out the views from the consultation, outlines the Children Bill and describes the initial stages taken to implement the Green Paper. The transformation of children’s services described in *Every child matters* is being implemented through the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme of local and national action (DfES, 2004b). The legal framework for this transformation of services is provided by the *Children Act 2004*.

**Every Child Matters: Change for Children – Children’s Workforce Strategy**  
*Department for Education and Skills, April 2005*

The consultation on the Government’s proposed children’s workforce strategy took place in 2005. The consultation document put forward the Government’s vision for the children’s workforce:

‘Our goal is to improve outcomes for all children and young people. Success depends in large part on the capacity and quality of those people who plan, manage and deliver services at the front line. We need a skilled and more stable workforce, in sufficient numbers, led and deployed effectively around the needs of children and young people.’

The strategy outlined some of the challenges for foster care:

‘...Looked after children are among the most vulnerable in our society and there is a pressing need to improve the local supply and quality of foster carers where we face significant shortages.’
The strategy also recognised the need for appropriate training and support for foster carers:

‘We also need to make sure that existing – and future – foster carers receive the training and support which they need to help them care properly for children, and that delivery is flexible to take account of their childcare responsibilities. The nature of their work makes it particularly important that they are equipped to deal with a diverse range of situations and behaviours and, in some cases, makes them the subject of unfounded allegations of violence or abuse. The relative isolation in which foster carers tend to work contributes to these issues; unfortunately it also means that the extraordinary work which they do often goes unnoticed.’

Proposals were put forward for a range of initiatives including the launch of Fosterline, the national advice line for foster carers, and the development of a national framework for the support and training of foster carers.

The role of social pedagogues was discussed, referred to in later documents:

‘The pedagogue is a profession widely found in continental Europe, where practitioners are commonly referred to as social pedagogues. The emphasis of this professional model is on learning, care and upbringing being inseparable, interconnected parts of life. The child is seen as a social being, connected to others and at the same time with his or her own distinctive experiences and knowledge. The social pedagogue works closely with individuals and groups to enable them to develop their potential as social beings.’

Every Child Matters: Change for Children – Children’s Workforce Strategy. The Government’s response to the consultation

Department for Education and Skills, February 2006a

The Government’s response to the consultation, which took account of stakeholders’ comments, was published in 2006.

Options for Excellence – Building the Social Care Workforce of the Future

Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, October 2006

The Review was established to improve on recent advances in the social care sector and in particular to bring forward a series of recommendations about the social care workforce.

The report puts forward the vision of the workforce in 2020 as ‘...that of a highly skilled, valued and accountable workforce drawn from all sections of the community...’ As part of the vision for 2020 in terms of support for informal and formal carers the report suggests:

‘...carers and volunteers will receive the support they need to carry out their vital roles, including access to training, information and advice for their caring role, and support to continue in or return to paid employment.’

One of the early actions proposed in the report was to commission the CWDC to carry out work to support foster carers, including the development of support, training and development standards. A longer term option was:

‘Develop a comprehensive support, training and development framework for
foster and residential carers in children’s services, incorporating the principles of social pedagogy, leading to qualifications, offering flexible working and respite opportunities and including continuing professional development.’

Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care

Department for Education and Skills, October 2006b (Cm 6932)

This Green Paper proposed changes to address the ‘...significant and widening gap between ... [outcomes for children in care] and the outcomes for all children...’. Despite recent improvement of outcomes for children in care, the outcomes were ‘...not improving at the same rate as those of all children’.

The consultation exercise ran from October 2006-January 2007. The proposals to reform the care placements system included: ‘Introducing a tiered framework for foster placements to respond to different levels of need, underpinned by a new qualifications framework, fee structure and national minimum standards...’ In relation to foster carers the Green Paper reports that 5 per cent of foster carers have an NVQ3 qualification which is relevant to working with children.

Care Matters: Consultation Responses

Department for Education and Skills, 2007a

More than two thousand individuals and groups responded to the written Care Matters consultation and others contributed at consultation events. Although responses to the proposal of developing a tiered framework for placements were mixed, 70 per cent of children who contributed to the written consultation thought that carers and staff should receive more training. The proposal that the tiered framework should be supported by a formal qualification framework was generally welcomed. Respondents suggested ‘...that a formal qualification framework would help professionalise the care workforce, raising the status of carers...’. However, there was also concern that this ‘...could act as a disincentive for some carers...’ and several organisations thought the system could be optional so that carers were not lost. The British Association of Social Workers would like more qualifications to be developed at foundation and degree level, based on social pedagogy and utilising work-based learning and previous experience.

Following the consultation, working groups were established to look at four specific areas. These included a group chaired by Lord Laming, which was set up to look at the proposal of the tiered model of placement types and the national qualifications framework.
Care Matters: Placements Working Group Report

Lord Laming, June 2007

The Placements Working Group was set up to consider some of the proposals put forward in Care Matters. These included the suggestion of a national ‘tiered’ model of placement types supported by a national qualifications framework for foster carers and residential carers. A series of thirty-six Recommendations were put forward in the report, including several which specifically address the training, support and development needs of foster carers. Overall, the report recommends:

'Recommendation 1

Government must take action to ensure a better trained, supported and managed range of staff and carers. Central and Local Government must recognise that children and young people entering care have more diverse and complex needs than in the past.'

Some of the main issues addressed in the report in relation to training, support and development for foster care are identified here:

Social pedagogy

'Recommendation 12

The Government needs to look at lessons from those areas in the UK which are already employing pedagogues, as well as those where pedagogy students are on work placement. It should also seek ways of implementing a pedagogic framework for training and education which adapts to the English situation and builds upon it.'

The ‘professionalisation’ of the foster care workforce

'In addressing the requirement of a wider range of placements there is much debate about the ‘professionalisation’ of the foster workforce and different views as to what this means in practice. Foster care is truly a unique occupation; both loving relationships and a high level of competence and skill are key to successful placements. We cannot determine the ‘right’ kind of carer simply by assessing their educational background, qualifications or level of training. We need to focus on their ability to care, and on their capacity to meet the needs of this group of children. For that reason there will always be a place in foster care for those who are not seeking career progression as such. The development of a high quality workforce must take account of such people and recognise that expectations around training, development and qualifications may vary according to the individual. However, fostering is a challenging task which brings with it huge responsibility and all carers must be properly equipped with the skills they need to do the job.

‘On a day to day level it is clear that much more can be done to ensure that foster carers feel valued as part of a professional team, and that their status is recognised. Often foster carers are not involved in discussions about children’s care, or in decisions about their care planning, and they may not be empowered to make basic administrative decisions. As a result they sometimes feel like second class members of the workforce. The reality is that these are the people who care, often 24 hours a day, for children with the most challenging
Training, support and development for foster care

needs, opening up their homes, their families and their hearts to other people’s children. Good parenting skills are an essential aspect of fostering in supporting, developing and encouraging children to move forward. But fostering involves much more than good parenting skills. The value of foster carers’ contribution to society cannot be overstated; it must be recognised and rewarded. One essential ingredient of good outcomes is the availability of 24 hours appropriate support.

'Recommendation 25
For those who provide 24 hour care there should be the availability of 24 hour support.'

Training

'As this report has already highlighted, the complex needs of children in the care system demand a range of skills from those who care for them. The term training needs to be given a broad interpretation: formal training courses play a part in enabling carers to acquire new skills but less formal development is crucial, as is effective support and supervision. For that reason the Government also needs to consider the competence of supervising social workers and those in supporting roles within the local authority.

'As far as carers themselves are concerned, however, training, development and support must be appropriate and serve to equip them with the skills and competences they need, whether they are in a residential or a foster care setting. The overlap between the two placement types is considerable and in both cases a balance is needed between the parenting role and professional skills. In this context too, the Government must move towards a more coherent approach which builds on the similarities rather than highlighting the differences.

'Recommendation 26
The status of both residential and foster carers must be addressed, including through greater access to training and continuing professional development, proper recompense, and through strong leadership and support.'

... 

'Recommendation 27
The usefulness and standard of training currently available should be robustly reviewed. Emphasis should be given to a wider understanding of Child Development and carers must be properly equipped to deal with challenging behaviour.

In considering the issue of training and development, thought must be given to demographic issues, particularly with regard to the foster care workforce. The level of educational attainment among foster carers varies widely and the content and delivery of training should reflect this. This gives rise to a number of questions, including whether all carers should receive the same training or whether bespoke training should be available.

'Although the focus in this report is on the training requirements of carers and social workers, local authorities need to take account also of the training needs of others who may be involved in the life of a looked after child. A lack of understanding on the part of a teacher, for example, can have a negative impact on the young person – and in some cases on the success of the placement itself.'
Registration

In terms of mandatory registration of foster carers, proposed in Care Matters, ‘Members of the Placements Working Group strongly advocated the introduction of mandatory registration...’. Among other benefits they felt it would ‘Enforce requirements around training and development...’.

Care Matters: Time for Change

Department for Education and Skills, June 2007b (Cm 7137)

The steps that will be taken to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care are set out in the White Paper. It is informed by responses to the consultation exercise on the Green Paper, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care and the conclusions of the subsequent working groups.

To improve the quality of care placements the White Paper sets out the following steps in relation to training and support for foster carers:

‘Improving foster care by setting clear standards outlining the skills that all foster carers should have and increasing access to specialist training and support. Foster carers are central to many children and young people’s experience of care. It is essential that we value and support them and ensure that they are properly equipped with the necessary range of skills;...’.

Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care – An implementation plan was published in March 2008 [DCSF, 2008b].

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

Children’s Workforce Development Council, May 2007a

Related documentation includes: A Guide for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers; A Guide for Foster Carers and Your Induction and Workbook to Foster Care (CWDC, 2007b,c,d).

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, developed by the CWDC support a three-stage Training Framework for Foster Care: pre-approval, induction and foster carer development. The standards, which are at induction or foundation level, provide the basis of training for new foster carers and should be met by all foster carers within twelve months of their approval. ‘The Standards are also a national benchmark for the continuing professional development and training, supervision and support of Foster Carers.’ The Standards and Training Framework are based on or link to the relevant Code of Practice, regulations, standards, legislation and guidance.

Guidance from the DCSF is that new foster carers should be working to the standards from April 2008 and to evidence they have met the standards within their first year of fostering. Existing foster carers need to demonstrate that they meet the standards by April 2011. So far, the DCSF have not specified a timeframe for some groups of foster carers.

The seven standards each include several topics with specified learning outcomes. The standards are shown in Table 1, together with the topics for Standard 7, which addresses the continuing professional development (CPD) and career progression of foster carers.
Training, support and development for foster care

### Table 1 The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>understand your role as a Foster Carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>understand health and safety, and healthy care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>know how to communicate effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>understand the development of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>develop yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your role and approval as a Foster Carer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being aware of the impact of fostering on sons and daughters and extended family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using support and supervision to develop your role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting learning needs as part of continuing professional development (CPD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Career progression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuing professional development is defined in the Induction and Workbook to Foster Care (CWDC, 2007b) as ‘an on-going and planned learning process to help you keep up to date and improve and broaden your knowledge and skills, and further develop the personal and professional qualities needed to be an effective foster carer’.

Each foster carer is required to have a personal development plan, developed with their supervising social worker and updated annually. This document should set out the foster carer’s learning needs and the agreed learning activities, which will help to meet these needs. ‘...The personal development plan is the foundation of the Foster Carer’s personal development portfolio.’ Foster carers will provide evidence that they have met the Training, Support and Development Standards through completion of the CWDC Workbook and their personal development portfolio.

Learning activities listed in the workbook include: one-to-one discussion, distance learning, guided reading, shadowing, training programmes, e-learning, structured use of supervision, mentoring by a more experienced foster carer, use of reflective diaries and support groups.

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care A Guide for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers (CWDC, 2007c) includes information on ‘Good Practice’, which supervising social workers should consider when implementing the training and development framework and standards. Issues included are listed under the following headings: ‘Tailoring learning and training to Foster Carers’ needs; Ensuring accessibility; Ensuring attendance and uptake of training; Ensure flexibility and provide support; Resource and capacity issues’. A checklist is available for fostering service providers.
Implementing the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. Key Messages from early implementation and field testing

Children’s Workforce Development Council, May 2008

This further guidance includes some important messages for foster care providers, supervising social workers and foster carers. Preparation, positive encouragement and support were found to be helpful in implementing the Training, Support and Development Standards Workbook. Some supervising social workers reported that the process was supported by the use of ‘buddying’ systems, drop-in sessions, peer support sessions, the preparation of tailored materials, basic literacy skill support and the translation of the standards into community languages.

2.4 Adult participation in learning in the UK: an overview

This section of the report provides a brief overview of adult participation in learning in the UK. It starts with the Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (HM Treasury, 2006). Learning is defined and some of the findings on attitudes towards learning and factors affecting access to learning are presented from national and local surveys. The section ends by looking at engaging foster carers in learning and then focuses on engaging men who foster in learning. This section focuses on adult participation in learning and not on the evaluation of training activities and the impact of training.

The need to increase adult participation in learning and to understand the attitudes to learning has received increased impetus with the publication of the Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (HM Treasury, 2006).

‘The Review has identified five key factors that underpin a culture of learning:

- aspiration and motivation. All individuals must be aware of the benefits from improving their skills and be both encouraged and motivated to do so;
- fully informed. People must be fully informed and impartially advised of how best to improve their skills, based on the economic value attached to particular skills and changes in the labour market;
- choice. Learning must be tailored to the individual, delivered in a flexible responsive way; and
- appropriate financial support. People need to be able to afford to learn. Support to meet the costs of learning at all levels must be targeted at those who face the biggest barriers and credit constraints.’
In terms of raising aspiration and awareness, the Review suggests:

’For people to consider improving their skills, they need to be aware of and motivated by the benefits of doing so. They must see a link between skills development and achieving their own personal ambitions, such as improving their career, or being able to help their children with their homework. On its own, an abstract knowledge that learning can deliver higher wages will not be effective. For awareness to translate into action, people must be able to make informed choices so that they invest wisely. They need access to good quality, impartial information and advice on local learning opportunities and their relevance in the labour market.

Raising aspirations and awareness is a key challenge. Surveys point to a number of attitudinal barriers including a lack of interest in learning and a lack of confidence about going back to the classroom. Practical barriers, such as lack of time (particularly for those in work), are also important. Effective information and advice can help to explain the flexible learning opportunities on offer. 26 per cent of non-learners gave a lack of knowledge of local learning opportunities as a reason for not learning.’

In the context of helping those who lack skills and qualifications a publication from the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) Adult Learning and Skills Investing in the first steps (DIUS, 2007) suggests that when ‘Targeting hard-to-reach learners’… ‘There is no “one size fits all” approach. So we are using the flexibility of the system to develop a better, more personalised offer...’

Surveys of adult participation in learning

There has been a considerable amount of research on the participation of adults in learning in the UK. This research includes two series of surveys which demonstrate national patterns of adult participation in learning. These are the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) and the surveys carried out for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

The baseline survey for the NALS series, carried out in 1997 was followed by similar surveys in 2001, 2002 and 2005. The most recent survey, NALS 2005, (Snape et al, 2006) was conducted in 2005-2006 on behalf of the DfES by the National Centre for Social Research. The NALS series is used by the DfES to monitor various aspects of participation in learning by adults in England and Wales and more recently in Scotland. Almost five thousand adults aged 16 and over took part in NALS 2005. Participation in learning varied with age, gender, employment status, socio-economic background, duration of initial education and geographical location.

In 1997, Sargant et al reported the findings of a UK-wide survey on adult participation in education and learning, funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and conducted for NIACE (Sargant et al, 1997). As for the NALS series, participation was associated with a range of characteristics. The NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey involves a sample of approximately five thousand adults aged 17 and over in the UK.
At a local level, participation in adult learning is monitored through the Local Labour Force Survey. This was developed in 2000 by adding questions to the Labour Force Survey. Adults’ learning experiences and factors influencing participation in learning were also explored recently in a local context, two London boroughs (Bariso, 2008).

**Definitions of learning**

The definitions of learning used in the NALS and NIACE series of surveys and the definition agreed by respondents to the study by Bariso are given here.

**National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2005:** The NALS series uses ‘…a broad definition of learning…’, which includes taught and self-directed learning (Snape et al, 2006). Learning is further classified as vocational and non-vocational.

*Taught learning* is defined as:
- Any taught courses meant to lead to a qualification
- Any taught courses designed to help develop skills used in a job
- Any courses, instruction or tuition in driving, playing a musical instrument, art or craft, sport or any other practical skill
- Any adult education classes including evening classes
- Any learning involving an individual working on their own from a package of materials provided by an employer, college, commercial organisation or other training provider
- Any other taught course, instruction or tuition

*Self-directed learning* is defined as:
- Supervised training while doing a job
- Time spent keeping up to date with work or professional developments
- Deliberately trying to improve one’s knowledge about anything or teach oneself a skill without taking part in a taught course

‘Therefore, throughout the NALS series a learner has been defined as:

A respondent who has left continuous full-time education and has taken part in at least one of the preceding taught or self-directed learning activities within the three years prior to the survey or since leaving continuous full-time education, depending upon whichever period was shorter.’

**The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2008:** In the 2008 NIACE survey (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008), learning was described in one of the survey questions as follows:

‘Learning can mean practising, studying or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full time, or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like a college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished.’
Local survey: In the study conducted by Bariso in London (Bariso, 2008), respondents themselves defined learning:

‘... respondents’ common definition was that ‘learning is a process of acquiring experiences, skills and knowledge’. Various phrases were used to explain the concept of learning, including: ‘knowing more’, ‘fulfilling requirements for a qualification or job’, ‘attending classes’ and ‘investigating issues and ideas to understand them better’.

‘Almost all interviewees agreed that formal, non-formal and informal learning exist. The validity and usefulness of formal learning was not challenged. They also recognised that non-formal learning was useful, as it usually took place in a less threatening environment when compared to formal settings. There was a consensus among respondents about the role of both formal and non-formal learning as a means of promoting adult education. Most respondents agreed that people learn all the time by observing others, their environment and through self-study...’.

Attitudes to learning

Survey findings

National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2005: As part of the NALS 2005, learners and non-learners were asked about their attitudes towards learning and the role learning played for them (Snape et al, 2006). The findings were as follows:

- ‘In terms of the value of learning, learners were more likely than non-learners to see learning as an investment in their future (81% compared to 57%). Furthermore, non-learners tended to place less value on learning for its own sake and were twice as likely as learners to agree that only qualification-based learning is worthwhile (29%, 16%).

- Not surprisingly, non-learners were more likely than learners to express a lack of interest in learning, to disassociate themselves with people who learn and to have had negative experiences of learning in the past.

- Learners were more open than non-learners to the possibility of learning in new ways, such as using CD ROMs or the Internet (75%, 51%) and non-learners were more likely to say they found computers confusing (19%, 41%). Non-learners were also more likely to say they lacked the confidence to learn on their own (30%, 18%).’

The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2008: Data on attitudes towards learning were collected in the 2008 NIACE survey (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008). The data ‘...clearly demonstrate that a much greater proportion of the population have a positive view of learning and of their own ability to learn new skills...’. Just over a third (38 per cent) of the sample had taken part in learning during the previous three years. Similarly, 36 per cent of those who had left full-time education intend to take part in learning in the next three years. More than three-quarters of respondents (79 per cent) agreed that ‘Learning is enjoyable for its own sake’.
Segmentation studies

Learndirect, established by Ufi, is the largest e-learning network of its kind. In 2000, Ufi/learndirect commissioned the market information company TNS to carry out a segmentation study of the adult population in the UK according to attitudes to learning (Ufi/learndirect, 2003). More than one thousand five hundred adults aged 16-64 years were interviewed about their attitudes to learning and learning experience and behaviour and related issues. The survey data was analysed to group respondents according to their attitudes to learning. Seven groups were identified: Personally Disinterested; Switched Off; Enthusiasts; Low Priority; Work Motivated; Independents and Conflicting Priorities.

More recently, data from part of the NALS 2005 dataset was used to develop a segmentation analysis of attitudes towards learning and barriers to learning. This study commissioned by DIUS was carried out by Continental Research (Chilvers, 2008). Ten segments were identified and described in the report. These ten segments were: Enthusiastic and Enlightened; Fulfilled and Family-focused; Hampered Hard Workers; Looking for Learning; Trapped on a Treadmill; Older into Other Things; Too Late to Learn; Sceptical but Scraping by; Unfulfilled and Unhappy; Disaffected and Discouraged.

Factors affecting access to learning in the UK: incentives and barriers

National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2005: Obstacles to learning and incentives to learning were investigated in NALS 2005 (Snape et al, 2006). The most common obstacles included lack of time due to work or family, preferring to spend time doing other things, difficulty paying course fees and lack of awareness of local learning provision. These were mentioned by both learners and non-learners.

Findings in relation to non-learners have been summarised as follows:

‘Non-learners tended to have more concerns about their personal aptitudes, and returning to learning in general. They were also more likely to express disinterest in learning and were less likely to see potential benefits, work-related or otherwise. Non-learners tended to be less aware of local learning opportunities, and less aware of where they could seek information on learning. They were also more likely to rule out the possibility of learning due to age or health problems, partly reflecting the fact that non-learners tend to be older.’

Data analysed according to gender showed that men were more likely to report time constraints associated with work, and women to report ‘Lack of time due to family’, and ‘Lack of time due to children’.

Non-learners were asked about incentives, which might encourage them to take part in learning. The most frequently chosen options from a list were as follows: funding, advice, ‘the expectation of improved job chances’ and learning that was available at the right time or location.
The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2008: In the NIACE 2008 survey barriers to learning were investigated for those respondents who reported ‘…that they were not ‘very likely’ to take up learning in the next three years…’ (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008). The two most frequently selected barriers were ‘Not interested/don’t want to’ and ‘Nothing is preventing me’.

Local survey: In the study conducted in London (Bariso, 2008) factors affecting access to learning were identified from published literature and from the interviews carried out in this study. Dispositional, situational, institutional and labour-market factors were identified as incentives for taking part in learning and barriers to participation.

The most common dispositional factors encouraging participation in learning were ‘…developing a career, gaining a qualification and getting a new job...’ and ‘...the three main dispositional barriers were a lack of awareness of learning provision..., interest... and feeling too old...’. Situational barriers to participation included lack of time, the cost of learning (both direct and indirect costs), transport and home situations including child care issues and the nature of employment status and distance from a learning provider.

Institutional factors reported to affect participation in learning included lack of information, lack of suitable courses, problems with the time or day of course provision and respondents’ past or present experiences with learning providers.

Engaging foster carers in learning

Caring for our Children published by the Fostering Network in 2004 reports the findings from a study of foster care in Scotland (the Fostering Network, 2004a,b,c). Published in three parts, the first two present the perspectives of foster carers and of fostering agencies. The final report sets out the training needs of the foster care service in Scotland. The importance of training to improving the outcomes for children looked after is highlighted as follows:

‘Increasingly, the complexity of issues of children in foster care need the involvement of specialists and foster carers are required to work alongside other professionals to maintain these children in their home, school and community. There is a need to increase the skills of foster carers, teachers, psychologists and mental health professionals in working together to improve the outcomes for children looked after and accommodated.’

The role of foster carers in the education of children looked after is also identified:

‘Foster carers are key partners in the strategy to increase the educational attainment of children looked after, and it is of concern that their educational achievements since becoming foster carers are low. If foster carers are to provide an educationally rich environment to children, there must be a greater investment in their education and training to improve the current low levels of educational attainment in this workforce.’

In terms of engaging in learning the findings from a survey of almost seven hundred foster carers suggested that they were keen to take part in further training. However, access to training was not consistent across all fostering agencies. Just over a fifth of respondents (21 per cent) indicated that they had not attended training in the previous two years. Some foster carers gave more than one reason for this. One third of respondents (33 per cent) selected ‘Unsuitable day or time’, the most commonly selected reason. Other reasons included: ‘Unable to get child care cover, Not relevant subject, Too far away, Not offered any training, Not interested in topic’.
The related survey of fostering agencies was published in *Caring for our Children, Part 2*. This reported that preparation training for foster carers was available in all fostering agencies, and 70 per cent of fostering agencies required foster carers to take part in training following approval.

Some of the challenges of meeting the learning needs of foster carers are set out in the final part of the report, *Caring for our Children, Part 3*. Some fostering agencies reported difficulty in engaging some ‘long-serving’ foster carers in training. An increased interest in training was reported by fostering agencies which had introduced post-approval training requirements and fees linked to qualifications.

The report suggests a flexible approach to meeting the training needs of foster carers:

‘In order to meet the deficit in training within the foster care workforce, there is a need for much greater flexibility in the approaches to training, the materials and methods of delivery to increase the opportunities for foster carers to participate in training. The focus of training must also meet with the aspirations of foster carers and give them the confidence and recognition they need to take their place within the child care workforce.’

The need for a flexible approach is supported by the findings from a study of foster carer training in England (Ogilvie et al, 2006). The question ‘How can foster carers be encouraged to attend training regularly?’ was examined using data collected between 2001-2002. The authors suggest:

‘The thread woven through all the issues linked to encouraging attendance at training is consideration for foster carers’ circumstances and pressures. Carers lead complex and demanding lives and greater forethought when planning training events can make an immense difference to their ability and willingness to attend...’.

One of the ways foster carers provide each other with peer support and peer led learning opportunities is through local voluntary self-help organisations called foster care associations. Guidance on setting up and running a foster care association is available from the Fostering Network (the Fostering Network, 2004d). These are set up and run by foster carers, usually together with social workers and sometimes with others involved in or interested in, foster care. The roles of a foster care association include: mutual support for foster carers; promoting working partnerships; representing foster carers as a group; developing awareness, knowledge and skills, creating opportunities for children and young people to meet together. The Fostering Network suggests that:

‘...Help, training, support and a sense of teamwork are keys to attracting new recruits, encouraging people to keep fostering, helping foster carers provide higher-quality care and making sure that fostered children and young people have the best possible chances in life. One way to provide all this to foster carers is through a local foster care association.’
Engaging men who foster in learning

The role of men as foster carers in fostering couples and their experiences has been explored using a review of the literature, focus groups and workshops [Gilligan, 2000]. Gilligan suggests:

‘...Training can help alert social workers and foster carers to the practical and therapeutic potential of the man’s role. Agencies should create opportunities for men to have peer support and to discuss their own specific concerns. This almost certainly implies the involvement of male workers...’

Different approaches have been used to engage men who foster in learning. Examples include ‘all-men’ activities such as the training events for men carers in East Lothian [Henry, 2003].

Some of the resources available from the Fatherhood Institute for ‘engaging fathers’ in early years and childcare settings might also be applicable to men in foster care. A publication from Fathers Direct, which focuses on improving language, literacy and numeracy, provides practical advice on some approaches to try to engage men in learning activities [Burgess, 2006]. Fathers in Sure Start [National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2003] also provide some practical suggestions for involving men in local Sure Start programmes.
CHAPTER 3

Method
A mixed method approach was used to identify the barriers to learning faced by ‘hard to reach’ foster carers and ways in which these barriers might be overcome.

A preliminary survey of foster carers and fostering service providers was completed to gauge interest in participation in the project. Some foster carers and fostering service providers who expressed an interest in contributing to the DVD in response to this survey were invited to complete a brief supplementary questionnaire.

Following the preliminary survey, the views of foster carers and fostering service providers were sought on issues relating to training, support and development using the main survey, focus groups and interviews.

Throughout the project the findings from a review of the literature were used to provide context and to support the design and conduct of the consultations with foster carers and fostering service providers. Some of the information obtained during this literature review has been included in earlier sections of this report. It sets out some of the issues relevant to training, support and development for foster care at a national level and includes some findings from research on the participation of adults in learning in the UK.

The report does not include quotations from the data from the focus groups and interviews. However, some of the ideas, themes and phrases have been synthesised and included using detailed notes made during these sessions. Some of the rich data from the focus groups and interviews are included as video extracts in the DVD component of the toolkit.

The challenge of video recording the focus groups and interviews was shared with the participants. However, the participants reported that they enjoyed the process and the opportunity to document their views and opinions. The research team considered that the benefits of video recording the sessions outweighed any disadvantages inherent in the process. Participants were informed of the purpose of the project and the video filming and gave written consent for the footage to be used in the DVD, which forms part of the toolkit.

Interpretation of findings

The main limitations of the approach used in this project are those common to the methods used. Due to the size of the sample of foster carers and fostering service providers consulted, findings cannot be regarded as representative of all foster carers and providers. However, the surveys, focus groups and interviews provide some in-depth information on issues relating to training, support and development from those within the sector. Some foster carers and fostering service providers contributed to more than one of the methods used.

Some differences in pattern of response between foster carers and fostering service providers are not unexpected. Whilst the foster carers who responded to the survey might belong to ‘hard to reach’ groups, these groups include a spectrum of learners including foster carers who are keen to engage in training, support and development.
3.1 Preliminary survey and supplementary questionnaire: foster carers and fostering service providers

The approach

The Fostering Network carried out a preliminary survey of their members using the online survey software SurveyMonkey in September – November 2008. A supplementary questionnaire was sent to a small number of respondents.

The questionnaire

Two forms of questionnaire were used for the preliminary survey. These were appropriate to foster carers and to fostering service providers. The questionnaires included an explanation of the reason for the project and an invitation to take part in one or more aspects of the project. Methods of participation included completing a further questionnaire; taking part in a focus group discussion; sharing experiences relevant to the project by email, letter or interview and contributing to a DVD.

The supplementary questionnaire included questions about the duration of the respondents’ experience as a foster carer or fostering service provider, the ‘hard to reach’ foster carer group they belonged to or had experience of and views on the most important barriers to training and development and ways in which those barriers might be removed or reduced.

The sample

Seventy respondents completed the online survey. Respondents included 28 foster carers (40 per cent) and 38 fostering service providers (54 per cent). The remaining four respondents skipped this question.

Most respondents, 64 (91 per cent) agreed with the overall aims of the project: to develop guidance to help fostering services overcome the barriers to learning experienced by these harder to reach groups including kinship carers, older carers and in particular men who foster. Two respondents (3 per cent) did not agree, one did not know and three did not complete this question.

There was a positive response from 67 (96 per cent) of respondents to the invitation to take part in one or more aspects of the project.

Six respondents, four foster carers and two fostering service providers completed the supplementary questionnaire.
3.2 Main survey: foster carers

The approach

The main survey of foster carers was carried out in November and December 2008. Questionnaires were distributed by post or by email.

The questionnaire

Learning from foster carers: your experience of fostering and your views about training, support and development

The questionnaire for the main survey of foster carers was designed to provide information about the reasons why some foster carers find it more difficult than others to take part in training, support and development activities. It was developed by members of the project team at the University of Hertfordshire with reference to a scoping document prepared by the Fostering Network, findings from the literature review and consultations with members of the Hard to Reach Foster Carers Project Reference Group. Questionnaire design was also informed by published literature (McColl et al, 2001).

The questions were set out in seven sections. Additional comments were invited at the end of the questionnaire. The section headings were as follows:

1. Fostering: your experience so far
2. Training, support and development: your experience so far
3. Training, support and development: what are the benefits for you?
4. Training, support and development: what helps you or hinders you?
5. Training, support and development: what needs to be done to support you?
6. Training, support and development: how can we work together?
7. Finally: a little more about you

The cover letter designed to accompany the questionnaire included an explanation of the project and an invitation to foster carers to complete the questionnaire. Emphasis was put on a foster carer’s personal experience of fostering and personal views about training, support and development in their role as a foster carer.

The sample

Respondent characteristics and profile

Fifteen foster carers completed the questionnaire. The length of time respondents had been a foster carer ranged from six months or less for five respondents (one third) to 34 years for one respondent. Four respondents had been a foster carer for more than twenty years. One of these four respondents was no longer a foster carer. The remaining fourteen respondents fostered for a local authority fostering service provider in England.
Fourteen respondents indicated the age group which applied to them as follows: 41-50 years (3 respondents); 51-60 years (7 respondents) and 61-75 years (4 respondents). Eleven respondents provided contact details for further follow up. Eight of these respondents, more than half of the total sample, were women and three were men.

Experience of fostering

All respondents considered they belonged to one or more of the following groups of foster carers: an emergency/short term carer; a long term/permanent carer; men who foster; a single carer; a carer of children with disabilities; a partner of a carer living in the same household (often referred to as a second applicant); a short break/respite carer; a working carer. In addition, four respondents considered they belonged to ‘other groups of foster carer’, one each as follows: parent and child assessment foster carer; carer specialised in bridging placements; therapeutic carer; main carer with partner caring for teenage years. None of the respondents selected a kinship carer (also referred to as a family and friends carer) or a carer who has English as an additional language. However, one respondent had some experience as a kinship carer.

The number of respondents selecting each of these groups of foster carers is shown in Figure 1. Most respondents, thirteen, selected more than one group.
3.3 Main survey: fostering service providers

The approach

The main survey of fostering service providers was carried out in November and December 2008. Questionnaires were distributed by post or by email.

The questionnaire

Learning from fostering service providers: your experience of providing training, support and development for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers

The questionnaire for the main survey of fostering service providers was designed to provide information about the reasons why some foster carers find it more difficult than others to take part in training, support and development activities. It was developed by members of the project team at the University of Hertfordshire with reference to a scoping document prepared by the Fostering Network, findings from the literature review and consultations with members of the Hard to Reach Foster Carers Project Reference Group. Questionnaire design was also informed by published literature (McColl et al, 2001).

The questions were set out in seven sections. Additional comments were invited at the end of the questionnaire. The section headings were as follows:

1. Fostering service provision: your organisation
2. Training, support and development: your provision
3. Training, support and development: what are the benefits?
4. Training, support and development: what helps or hinders?
5. Training, support and development: what needs to be done to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers?
6. Training, support and development: how can we work together?
7. Finally: a little more about your organisation

The cover letter designed to accompany the questionnaire included an explanation of the project and an invitation to fostering service providers to complete the questionnaire. Emphasis was put on the respondents’ personal experience of providing training, support and development for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers and their views about engaging them in these activities.

The sample

Respondent characteristics and profile

Eleven completed questionnaires were returned. Eight questionnaires were completed by respondents from local authority organisations and three were returned from independent fostering service providers. One questionnaire was completed by two respondents.
Experience of engaging foster carers in training, support and development

Fostering service providers were asked which groups of foster carers they found difficult to engage (‘hard to reach’) in training, support and development. Ten respondents selected more than one group from the list. The most frequently selected groups were: a partner of a carer living in the same household (often referred to as a second applicant); a kinship carer (also referred to as a family and friends carer); a working carer. These groups were each selected by seven respondents. The group ‘men who foster’ was selected by six respondents. Other groups suggested were ‘geographical distance’ and ‘some experienced foster carers’.

One respondent commented:

“There does not seem to be one or more of the groups listed above who do not attend training. It tends to be those who have a positive attitude towards learning that attend training... A recent training needs analysis of the service has revealed that some experienced [foster] carers feel that they have nothing to learn.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

The number of respondents selecting each of these groups of foster carers is shown in Figure 2.
3.4 Focus groups and interviews: foster carers

The approach

Focus groups for foster carers were held in London and Leeds in November 2008. These were used to explore some of the issues raised in the main survey in greater depth. The focus group sessions were video recorded so that the insight and experience discussed by the participants could be shared more widely in the DVD component of the toolkit. Some participants were interviewed individually or in pairs and these interviews were also video recorded.

The questions

Issues discussed in the focus groups were based on the following questions:

1. What is your previous experience of training and development?
2. What has encouraged you to engage with training and development?
3. What has prevented you from engaging with training and development?
4. What is 'good' training and development? Can you give some examples?
5. What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (eg men) to engage in training and development?
6. Any other comments

The CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care were discussed during the sessions and some phases were closed by identifying two or three priorities or key issues.

The sample

Eight foster carers took part in the focus groups as follows:

- Focus group held in London: 3 foster carers (all men)
- Focus group held in Leeds: 5 foster carers (3 men, 2 women)
3.5 Focus groups and interviews: fostering service providers

The approach

Focus groups for fostering service providers were held in London and Leeds in November 2008. These were used to explore some of the issues raised in the main survey in greater depth. The focus group sessions were video recorded so that the insight and experience discussed by the participants could be shared more widely in the DVD component of the toolkit. Some participants were interviewed individually or in pairs and these interviews were also video recorded.

The questions

Issues discussed in the focus groups were based on the following questions:

1. What is your previous experience of providing training and development?
2. What encourages foster carers to engage with training and development?
3. What has prevented foster carers from engaging with training and development?
4. What is ‘good’ training and development? Can you give some examples?
5. What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (e.g. men) to engage in training and development?
6. Any other comments

The CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care were discussed during the sessions and some phases were closed by identifying two or three priorities or key issues.

The sample

Six fostering service providers took part in the focus groups, three in London and three in Leeds. Participants were from both local authority fostering service provider and independent organisations.
CHAPTER

Main findings
The main findings from the surveys and focus groups are presented in this chapter. These findings come from those with personal experience of the sector. The voices of the participating foster carers and fostering service providers give some insight into issues relating to training, support and development for foster care and some solutions to overcoming the barriers to engaging in learning. These barriers include attitudes, logistical barriers and accessibility of services. This chapter of the report also includes some of the information from the literature review.

The main findings in this chapter of the report have been incorporated into the content and messages of the DVD, which forms part of the toolkit.

**Sections 4.1 – 4.5**

The main findings in this chapter are set out in the following sections:

4.1 Training, support and development for foster care: introduction
4.2 Training, support and development for foster care: the benefits
4.3 Training, support and development for foster care: factors affecting access to learning
4.4 Training, support and development for foster care: interpretations and approaches
4.5 Training, support and development for foster care: learning together; learning from each other

Each section opens with some findings from the literature, which ‘set the scene’ within the broader context. This is followed by the main findings from the surveys and focus groups which provide the views of foster carers and of fostering service providers. There follows a ‘closing comment’ from the Fostering Network.

The key points at the end of each section form a summary. Where appropriate, the structure of these key points follows the sequence: the national context (setting the scene); children and young people; foster carers; foster carers’ families; fostering service providers; the Fostering Network. These key points have been used to prepare the guidance and recommendations in chapter 5.

**Section 4.6**

Section 4.6 brings together some of the findings from sections 4.1-4.5. These findings are specific to engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development.
4.1 Training, support and development for foster care: introduction

This first section of the main findings introduces the importance of the role of foster carers using findings from the literature. It then sets out some of the benefits of being a foster carer using the voices of some of the respondents to the main survey. The section concludes with a closing comment from the Fostering Network and some key points.

A Some findings from the literature: the role of foster carers

‘... Today, we expect foster carers to provide a supportive and caring family environment and to support the educational achievement and health outcomes of their foster child, whilst simultaneously advocating for that child with statutory services and helping the child to maintain relationships with his or her birth family. We need to develop appropriate support and training to make caring for vulnerable children an attractive option for more people to improve the life chances of looked after children.’

Every Child Matters: Change for Children – Children’s Workforce Strategy, Department for Education and Skills, April 2005

‘...The value of foster carers’ contribution to society cannot be overstated; it must be recognised and rewarded...’

Care Matters: Placements Working Group Report
Lord Laming, 2007

‘... Foster carers are central to many children and young people’s experience of care. It is essential that we value and support them and ensure that they are properly equipped with the necessary range of skills;...’

Care Matters: Time for Change
Department for Education and Skills, June 2007 (Cm 7137)
What are the benefits of being a foster carer?

The views of foster carers

Question from main survey: foster carers
What would you say if someone asked you the question: 'What are the benefits of being a foster carer?'

All fifteen foster carers who responded to the main survey answered this question. Their responses provide valuable insight into how they view their role. Some of these responses were as follows:

‘The rewards of seeing children thrive and achieve while in your care.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Sharing your life with a child. The pride and satisfaction of seeing a child ... blossom and develop into a wonderful productive young person.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘The rewards felt when children’s lives are improved because of the care given by you.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Knowledge of helping children. Joy of seeing them build their self esteem, believe in themselves and be able to start trusting others. Knowing that, in the majority of cases, we have made their lives happier, more secure, with a future they can look forward to.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Feeling that you’ve made a difference in a child’s life. Helping parents through the trauma of their children coming into the care system. Meeting people from all walks of life and making new friends.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘The pleasure of making a positive contribution to someone else’s life.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Being able to help a child find security and family life.’
Foster carer – main survey
C  What do foster carers bring to the role?

Foster carers and fostering service providers commented on the need to recognise and build on the skills and experience of foster carers. For example one foster carer made the following closing comment to the main survey:

‘I believe more recognition should be made of foster carers’ previous experiences and qualifications.’
Foster carer – main survey

The comments from foster carers in this section of the main findings fit closely with the Fostering Network’s views of fostering set out in the closing comment.

D  Closing comment

‘Fostering means looking after a child or young person in your home and caring for them while their own parents are unable to do so. As a foster carer, you will provide a stable family environment, nurturing the child to help them develop and succeed.’
Website – The Fostering Network, 2009
Key points Training, support and development for foster care: introduction

These key points provide a summary of the main findings in Section 4.1. They include extracts from some of the quotations which are referenced in that section.

Some findings from the literature: the role of foster carers

The role of foster carer is ‘central to many children and young people’s experience of care’.

Foster carers are expected to:
• ‘provide a supportive and caring family environment’;
• ‘support the educational achievement and health outcomes of their foster child’;
• act as an advocate and
• help the child to maintain birth family relationships.

In order to fulfil this role, foster carers need:
• to be recognised, valued and rewarded;
• to be equipped with the necessary skills;
• appropriate training, support and development.

What are the benefits of being a foster carer?

Foster carers see the benefits of their role:

For children and young people as:
• providing ‘security and family life’ and helping them to ‘thrive and achieve’, ‘blossom and develop’, ‘build their self esteem’, ‘start trusting others’, live happier lives, look forward to the future.

For foster carers as:
• making ‘a difference in a child’s life’, ‘helping parents’, meeting other people, ‘making new friends’, using their skills to help others.

For foster carers’ families as:
• providing and sharing family life.

For fostering service providers, the CWDC and the Fostering Network as:
The way in which foster carers see their role suggests that through helping children, young people and their families, they are making a valuable contribution to society. This meets the objectives of fostering service providers, the CWDC and the Fostering Network.

What do foster carers bring to the role?

Recognise and build on the skills and experience of foster carers.
4.2 Training, support and development for foster care: the benefits

This second section of the main findings sets out some of the benefits of training, support and development for foster care and for foster carers. These benefits have been identified from the literature and from the responses to the main survey. The respondents’ previous experience of taking part in or providing training, support and development provides some context for their replies. Some of the words and phrases which are used by the individual groups of respondents (foster carers and fostering service providers) and by both groups are highlighted. The section concludes with a closing comment from the Fostering Network and some key points.

A Some findings from the literature: the benefits of training, support and development

In terms of raising aspiration and awareness, the Leitch Review of Skills suggests:

‘For people to consider improving their skills, they need to be aware of and motivated by the benefits of doing so…’

Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, HM Treasury, 2006

‘In addressing the requirement of a wider range of placements there is much debate about the ‘professionalisation’ of the foster workforce and different views as to what this means in practice. Foster care is truly a unique occupation; both loving relationships and a high level of competence and skill are key to successful placements. We cannot determine the ‘right’ kind of carer simply by assessing their educational background, qualifications or level of training. We need to focus on their ability to care, and on their capacity to meet the needs of this group of children. For that reason there will always be a place in foster care for those who are not seeking career progression as such. The development of a high quality workforce must take account of such people and recognise that expectations around training, development and qualifications may vary according to the individual. However, fostering is a challenging task which brings with it huge responsibility and all carers must be properly equipped with the skills they need to do the job.’

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care introduced by the CWDC are designed to:

- Equip Foster Carers with the knowledge and skills needed to provide high quality care for the children and young people they look after.
- Ensure that all Foster Carers are given the necessary help to develop knowledge and skills to carry out their job as Foster Carers and appropriate opportunities for career development.’

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care
CWDC, 2007a

B The benefits of training, support and development for foster care

The views of foster carers

Question from main survey: foster carers
What would you say if someone asked you the question: ‘What are the benefits of training, support and development activities for foster carers?’

All fifteen respondents to the main survey of foster carers answered this question. Some of the benefits identified by foster carers were as follows:

‘You can never know enough (and you never will know enough). Therefore, training and development is essential for effective foster care. To continually update knowledge through training is vital.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Keeping up to date, getting new ideas – you always need new ideas to help each child.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Enabling and empowering [foster] carers to provide the best care for the children placed with them.’

Foster carer – main survey
‘Keeping information and knowledge up-to-date and fresh in my mind. Plus you gain friends and sharing knowledge and confidence.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘I fully believe in the lifelong learning ethic and value all training. I have gained huge benefits from ALL the training sessions I have attended over the years – not least of which is discovering that you are not alone and that there is a lot of support available from fellow [foster] carers as well as the professionals involved. The training I have attended and the people I have met have enabled me to recognise and deal with my own limitations as much as helping the young people in my care.

I have gained a greater understanding of issues around rejection, abuse and attachment disorders which has helped me to support the young people in my care and to form lasting relationships which have endured beyond the care system through to adulthood.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘The chance to update and extend the skills you can offer to the service. To gain confidence in your role as a foster carer. To be able to use your support group to support you in your role.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Meeting other [foster] carers and sharing experiences. Keeping you up to date with new ideas. Keeping you confident with what you are doing. Helping you to realise that others are in the same boat and you are not alone. Often training can help you decide what other support you may need.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Keeps you updated, learning new ways to help provide the care, revision, networking with other [foster] carers, discussions, sounding board, chance to talk with trainers.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Keeps you up to date with new thoughts and ideas and also makes you aware of the knowledge you’ve already acquired.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘They make me a better [foster] carer. I learn from other people’s experience so am better prepared in times of difficulty. I meet people for mutual support.’

Foster carer – main survey
The views of fostering service providers

Question from main survey: fostering service providers

What would you say if someone asked you the question: 'What are the benefits of training, support and development activities for foster carers?'

Ten respondents to the main survey of fostering service providers answered this question. Some of the benefits identified by fostering service providers were as follows:

- ‘Improving standards of care for young people placed. Creating career progression (CPD) for foster carers.’
  Independent fostering service provider – main survey

- ‘Building a trained workforce, keeping [foster] carers up to date, mutual support, increase in skills, reduction of disruption in placements [hopefully]. Improving service.’
  Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

- ‘Knowledge, skills, enhanced status, mutual benefit to [foster] carers and organisation ... the service develops and grows, recognition as part of the professional team, placement stability, improved outcomes for children, positive role models for children ... eg educational attainment.’
  Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

  Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

- ‘There is often something new to learn. The information they already know may help to reinforce that they are already doing a great job. Foster carers get an opportunity to network – social event. Content of courses can be interesting. New skills may come in extremely useful.’
  Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

- ‘[Foster] carers cannot do the task effectively without these activities. They are crucial for an effective service for children.’
  Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

- ‘Values their role; hopefully improves their practice but certainly should improve their confidence and knowledge.’
  Independent fostering service provider – main survey
The views of foster carers and fostering service providers

The quotations shown earlier in this section are illustrative and not the full set of responses. Some of the words and phrases used to describe the benefits of training, support and development activities for foster carers in response to the main survey are shown in Table 2. These words and phrases have been extracted from the full set of responses. There are some differences in emphasis between foster carers and fostering service providers. Understanding and using the language of foster carers in relation to the benefits of training, support and development might be helpful in engaging them in learning activities.

Table 2  Words and phrases used by respondents to the main survey to describe the benefits of training, support and development activities for foster carers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foster carers only</th>
<th>Foster carers and fostering service providers</th>
<th>Fostering service providers only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>discussions/chance to talk</td>
<td>confidence</td>
<td>career progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowering</td>
<td>effective (foster care/service for children)</td>
<td>consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enabled/enabling</td>
<td>improve</td>
<td>enhanced status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new ideas</td>
<td>information</td>
<td>good/improved outcomes for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regulations</td>
<td>keeping up-to-date/update knowledge</td>
<td>placement/placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing</td>
<td>learn/learning</td>
<td>stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support group</td>
<td>meeting other foster carers</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>mutual support</td>
<td>retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>network/networking</td>
<td>social event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional</td>
<td>standards of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the service</td>
<td>topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skills</td>
<td>trained workforce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two foster carers made these closing comments when completing the main survey:

“I am thoroughly enjoying my experience as a foster carer and I am making full use of all the training that is on offer. I would encourage all foster carers to take up any training and development as I consider this to be a vital part of effective caring.”

Foster carer – main survey

‘Training and support is essential to increase the expertise and confidence of [foster] carers, in order to provide the very best care of our foster children. We can’t do it in isolation.’

Foster carer – main survey

C Previous experience of training, support and development

Some information about the respondents’ previous experience of training, support and development was collected during the main survey. This included their experience of taking part in activities (foster carers) and of providing activities (fostering service providers). This information provides some background for the respondents’ comments about the benefits of training, support and development activities for foster carers.

The views of foster carers

Kinds of training, support and development: More than two-thirds of respondents had taken part in one or more of the following specified kinds of training, support and development:

- Induction/pre-approval training eg The Skills to Foster course (13 respondents);
- Post-approval training eg Safer Caring (14 respondents);
- Interdisciplinary or multi-agency training, eg with social workers and/or other professionals (11 respondents).

Seven respondents, more than third, had taken part in qualification training (eg NVQ, BTec, social work diploma) and/or specialist training (eg Men in Foster Care). Two respondents had participated in online or web-based training (eg Pathways Through Fostering courses available from the Fostering Network in partnership with Akamas).

Seven respondents commented that they had taken part in other kinds of training, support and development. These kinds included the CWDC induction training, attendance at training sessions for new foster carers and involvement in supporting and ‘mentoring’ for new foster carers. One respondent also commented that her teenage son had been invited to sessions for new foster carers to share his experiences of a ‘child who fosters’.

Aspects of induction training/fostering preparation: Fourteen respondents suggested aspects of their induction training/fostering preparation they found helpful. Respondents’ comments included:
‘All aspects of the skills to foster course were very relevant and I have used the skills that I gained since.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Support by other foster carers.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘The opportunity to meet other foster carers already experienced in the role. The wide ranging types of fostering explained. A guide to what would be required of myself and my family when taking on this role.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘... Handouts are welcomed as they can be studied at home.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Good general overview, assisted to manage expectations.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Safe caring. Impact on [foster] carer’s family.’

Foster carer – main survey

‘Talking to others, especially foster carers, and young people in care.’

Foster carer – main survey

Meeting the CWDC induction standards programme: Seven respondents, more than a third, had started to meet the CWDC induction standards programme. Two respondents didn’t know and six respondents had not started to meet the standards. These six included the respondent who was no longer a foster carer.

The views of fostering service providers

Kinds of training, support and development: Most respondents (ten) had provided the following kinds of listed training, support and development: induction/pre-approval training (eg *The Skills to Foster* course); post-approval training (eg *Safer Caring*); qualification training (eg NVQ, BTec, social work diploma); specialist training (eg *Men in Foster Care*). All eleven respondents had provided interdisciplinary or multi-agency training (eg with social workers and/or other professionals). Online or web-based training (eg *Pathways Through Fostering* courses) was provided by four fostering service providers and a further respondent said this was being considered.

Implementing the CWDC induction standards programme: Most respondents, (ten), had started to implement the CWDC induction standards programme. The remaining respondent was based outside England, the geographical area covered by the CWDC.
D Closing comment

‘The Fostering Network believes that all foster carers will benefit from training that helps them develop their skills, and that this will lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.’

2008 publications and resources catalogue – The Fostering Network

Key points Training, support and development for foster care: the benefits

These key points provide a summary of the main findings in Section 4.2. They include extracts from some of the quotations which are referenced in that section.

Some findings from the literature: the benefits of training, support and development

- The perceived benefits of training, support and development are important ‘For people to consider improving their skills’;
- Foster care is a ‘unique occupation’ and a ‘challenging task’. It requires ‘a high level of competence and skill’ and ‘loving relationships’;
- Foster carers have individual experience of training, support and development

Training, support and development are needed:

For children and young people to:
- receive ‘high quality care’;

For foster carers to:
- carry out their role; have opportunities for personal and professional development.

For fostering service providers, the CWDC and the Fostering Network to:
- develop a ‘high quality workforce’.

The benefits of training, support and development for foster care

Foster carers and fostering service providers see the benefits of training, support and development for foster care:

For children and young people as:
For foster carers as:

- ‘reinforcing learning’ and ‘learning new skills’, knowledge, information and understanding; constant and regular updating and extending skills; ‘enabling and empowering’; social networking; meeting and sharing with others and learning from others (e.g. foster carers, social workers); increasing confidence in role; making aware of existing knowledge; importance of talk and friendship; compliance with regulatory requirements; ‘enhanced status’; ‘recognition as part of the professional team’; ‘creating career progression’; ‘mutual support’; role becomes more rewarding personally and professionally.

The benefits for children, young people and foster carers are also benefits

For fostering service providers, the CWDC and the Fostering Network:

- ‘building a trained workforce’ upskilled and updated to meet the needs of the individual child over time; skills used for the benefits of children, young people and other foster carers; they can draw on the knowledge and experience of foster carers and other professionals; ‘increased likelihood of placements’ and ‘reduction of disruption in placements’, improving the service.

Previous experience of training, support and development

Foster carers’ responses revealed their understandings of the different kinds of training, support and development in which they had taken part;

Foster carers:

- valued the training, which provided a guide/overview to the role and ‘assisted to manage expectations’;
- found it very helpful to themselves and their families;
- emphasised the opportunity to meet and talk to other foster carers and young people in care;
- said learning happened in the training and can be followed up at home.

Fostering service providers were providing a range of kinds of training, support and development. There was flexibility of provision and uptake of different kinds of training, support and development. Formats of learning included face-to-face, online and learning from others, including foster carers, young people in care, ‘children who foster’, social workers and other professionals.

All fostering service providers in England were providing training for the CWDC induction standards and more than a third of foster carers had started to meet them.
4.3 Training, support and development for foster care: factors affecting access to learning

This third section of the main findings sets out some of the factors affecting access to learning. It starts with some factors common to many adults in learning, which have been identified from the literature. Next, factors which help and encourage access to training, support and development are illustrated using findings from the main survey. Similarly, barriers to learning are also identified. Responses to questions which focus solely on ways to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers are placed near the end of the section. The section concludes with a closing comment from the Fostering Network and some key points.

A Some findings from the literature: factors affecting access to learning

Barriers to learning: attitudinal and practical

‘Raising aspirations and awareness is a key challenge. Surveys point to a number of attitudinal barriers including a lack of interest in learning and a lack of confidence about going back to the classroom. Practical barriers, such as lack of time (particularly for those in work), are also important. Effective information and advice can help to explain the flexible learning opportunities on offer. 26 per cent of non-learners gave a lack of knowledge of local learning opportunities as a reason for not learning.’

Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills, HM Treasury, 2006

A personalised approach to learning

‘Each Foster Carer is required to have a personal development plan which should be developed with their supervising social worker within 6 weeks of their approval, and updated annually as part of the Foster Carer’s annual review. The personal development plan should contain details of the Foster Carer’s training needs, identify training and other learning activities, and include timescales for the completion of training. It should also identify the support needed for the Foster Carer. The meeting to agree or review the plan provides an opportunity to consider changing service needs, or the Foster Carer’s changing role and issues arising from supervision. The personal development plan is the foundation of the Foster Carer’s personal development portfolio.’

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care
A Guide for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers
CWDC, 2007c
Factors which help and encourage access to training, support and development

The views of foster carers

Question from main survey: foster carers
Which factors, if any, help you take part in training, support and development activities? (eg payment for training, convenient timing or location)

Thirteen respondents suggested factors which would help them in response to this question. These factors included the following:

‘I particularly liked the online training.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Convenient timing and location, ability to hear the speaker clearly.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Timings is always an issue for me – I hold down a very busy full time job and care [for] my own teenage son as well as my foster children, online training would be great for me...
With enough notice I can usually rearrange my schedule but often the training is announced with insufficient notice.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘The provision of childcare facilities. Convenient location.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘The department pays for childminding expenses. School-friendly hours (say 9.30 to 2.30). Comfortable venue with refreshments/lunch provided.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Topics of interest. A crèche or facilities to leave the children in safe hands while you go to training. Location and who will be doing the training.’
Foster carer – main survey

‘Mainly good speakers/trainers/programmes on relevant subjects. Convenient times, pleasant locations, nice lunches all help make training etc more attractive.’
Foster carer – main survey
All thirteen respondents who completed this question selected ‘interesting’ and ‘relevant’ as factors which would encourage them to take part in future training, support and development activities. One respondent suggested childcare provision as an additional factor.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed factors is shown in Figure 3.
Participants suggested several factors which had encouraged them to engage with training and development during the focus group discussions. These factors included some which had been raised in the main survey. For example, childcare, location and quality of location, easy access and timing.

Other factors which were discussed included emphasising the personal benefits of training, support and development. These benefits might include a broadened knowledge base, becoming a better foster carer, better quality care. Some of the benefits of training, support and development from the viewpoint of foster carers have already been set out in section 4.2.

One participant commented that the role of foster carer ‘can be very isolating’. Attending training, support and development provides an opportunity to meet other foster carers and social workers. It was noted that often others ‘have the answers’. Being able to talk as foster carers was seen as very important.

Additional factors raised in the subsequent discussion of factors which prevented foster carers from taking part in training, support and development are also relevant here. These include having sufficient notice to plan ahead; payment for a child minder; being met and greeted and having knowledgeable trainers.

The views of fostering service providers

Ten respondents suggested factors which in their experience would help foster carers take part in training, support and development activities. These factors included:

‘Encouragement from Supporting Social Workers.’
Independent fostering service provider – main survey

‘Be flexible...do you need to offer training, support and development in different formats, languages, times of day including weekends, cover child care costs etc. Have fun...Provide decent venues, refreshments etc.’
Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

‘In the main, one to one discussions about their learning needs...’
Local authority fostering service provider – main survey
Participants suggested several factors which encourage foster carers to engage with training and development during the focus group discussions. These factors included:

- making sure that foster carers know why they are expected to do training – better outcomes for children;
- taking a personalised, one-to-one approach to training, support and development, which involves listening to foster carers. Developing the learning environment starting from where foster carers are rather than abstract;
- having enthusiasm and buy-in from supervising social workers;
- selling the benefits of training, support and development;
- making the training fun, without trivialising it.

The contribution of different members of the childcare team in delivering training, support and development was also recognised. There were some examples of ways in which this might be done:

- including a contribution from foster carers’ own experience in every group, with the theory, background and legislation content provided by relevant personnel;
- getting ‘experts’ in to deliver training;
- running foster carer support groups led by foster carers with a supporting social worker.

One participant commented that sometimes foster carers will solve a problem as a group.
C Factors which prevent access to training, support and development

The views of foster carers

The following question in the main survey was designed to provide information about foster carers’ views of previous training, support and development activities. The statements in the question could be used to help identify preferences when arranging future activities.

Question from main survey: foster carers

Which of the following factors, if any, apply to the training, support and development activities you have already attended?

1 Activities haven’t taken account of my background and experience
2 Activities haven’t suited my ways of learning
3 Activities haven’t helped me
4 Activities weren’t challenging enough
5 Activities were too challenging
6 Activities were too emotional (touchy-feely)
7 Activities encouraged me to share too much information

Six respondents selected one or more of the seven response options. A further three respondents indicated that none of the responses were applicable to them.

The number of respondents selecting each of the response options is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Number of respondents who selected different factors which applied to the training, support and development activities they had already attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>haven’t taken account of my background and experience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haven’t suited my ways of learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haven’t helped me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weren’t challenging enough</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were too challenging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were too emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouraged me to share too much information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foster carers were also asked to identify some factors which prevent them from taking part in activities.

**Question from main survey: foster carers**

Which of the following factors, if any, stop you from taking part in training, support and development activities?

Response options: Cost of the activity, Cost of the travel, Bad memories of school, Doesn’t fit in with work, Don’t like reading and writing; Don’t need any more training; Health problems; It’s boring; Lack of confidence; Lack of information about activities; Looking after others/family commitments; Problems with transport; Timing; Too far to travel; Too busy; Other factors. *If so, please specify*

Fourteen respondents completed this question, of whom three responded ‘none’ or ‘not applicable’. The three factors selected by one third (five) or more of respondents were ‘timing’, ‘looking after others/family commitments’ and ‘doesn’t fit in with work’.

Three respondents suggested other factors. These factors included: not always relevant, lack of refreshments at lunch-time, unsuitable venue, family contact and children being excluded from school.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed factors is shown in Figure 5.
Issue discussed in focus groups: foster carers

What has prevented you from engaging with training and development?

One participant commented that foster carers include a wide spectrum of people. The need to look at different styles of training for different people fitted in with the personalised approach to training, support and development previously mentioned in this report.

Some of the barriers experienced by members of different ‘groups’ of foster carers were discussed. One participant commented ‘it’s our family that fosters’ both foster carers in the household have different roles. Caring for children can have implications for the timing of activities and the time involved in taking part.

One participant noted that the new standards were ‘scaring’ some foster carers and there was some confusion about what was expected.

The views of fostering service providers

Fostering service providers were asked a related question about factors which act as barriers to taking part in training, support and development activities.

Question from main survey: fostering service providers

In your experience, which of the following factors, if any, do foster carers give for not taking part in training, support and development activities? (again, we are interested in all foster carers but particularly those whom you find difficult to engage)

Response options: Cost of the activity; Cost of the travel; Bad memories of school; Doesn’t fit in with work; Don’t like reading and writing; Don’t need any more training; Health problems; It’s boring; Lack of confidence; Lack of information about activities; Looking after others/family commitments; Problems with transport; Timing; Too far to travel; Too busy; Other factors. If so, please specify

All eleven respondents completed this question. The three factors selected by one third or more of foster carers (‘timing’, ‘looking after others/family commitments’ and ‘doesn’t fit in with work’) correlated with the responses from the fostering service providers. However, more than half of the fostering service providers also identified additional factors from the list.

The number of respondents selecting each of the factors listed is shown in Figure 6.

Three respondents identified other factors. These factors included: second or male carers often do not see themselves as ‘the main foster carer’ and don’t see why they should undertake training; last minute cancellations due to new placements; problems with foster child on that day; the foster carer is unwell; the activity has been forgotten and the needs of children they look after i.e. disabilities.
Participants’ suggestions included:

• foster carers not receiving the information about resources;
• fear of the unknown, formal arena or assuming it will be like school;
• literacy;
• language, eg some foster carers are concerned they might use the wrong terms and feel they don’t have the correct language;
• ‘I don’t need the training’;
• geographical differences in attendance;
• the feeling of being isolated in a group, eg a few men in a female group;
• men are often a ‘second carer’ and have a full-time job.

Other barriers were ones which had already been discussed, such as transport, timing, location of venue and cost (eg time off work).
The issue of engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development was only explored with foster carers during the focus group discussions.

**Issue discussed in focus groups: foster carers**

What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (eg men) to engage in training and development?

**The views of foster carers**

During the discussion with foster carers some of the themes which had already been raised were repeated with respect to engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development. For example, the need to acknowledge that ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. It was noted that some men who foster are surprised by how much they know when they get involved in training. In some cases they probably contribute more than they can take away. The importance of men who foster as role models was noted and one foster carer posed the question: ‘Why do we foster? ...We foster because we like it. It enhances the quality of our lives.’

Some examples of formats of training which had been considered or used to engage men in training, support and development activities were mentioned. These included:

- Getting men who foster together to talk about ‘how to get men together’ in a pub setting;
- Addressing men’s issues in training for men held in a rugby club. This session was very well attended;
- Arranging men only support group and social events, family events and talking to men who had not previously attended.

**The views of fostering service providers**

Fostering service providers were asked three questions which were specifically about engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development activities. Responses to two of these questions are included in this section of the main findings. The third question, on formats of training, support and development activities is included in Section 4.4. All of these findings are drawn together in Section 4.6.

**Question from main survey: fostering service providers**

What would you say if someone from another fostering service provider asked you the question: ‘In your experience, what’s the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development?’

All eleven respondents provided suggestions for the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development. These suggestions included:
4.3 Training, support and development for foster care: factors affecting access to learning

‘Encouragement from Supporting Social Workers/Link Workers – Fees and Fines.’

Independent fostering service provider – main survey

‘Ask what would encourage them to engage... find out what they want in terms of training, support and development... be flexible do you need to offer training, support and development in different formats, languages, times of day including weekends, cover child care costs etc.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

‘My response would be: talk to [foster] carers about the training before they attend, breaking it down and letting them know what’s involved at each stage...’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

‘Flexibility in timing and materials/format of what constitutes training... to respond to different circumstances and adult learning styles. Consulting with the [foster] carers over what they feel they need and how they’d like to receive it.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

However, the voice of one respondent encapsulated many of the issues. Their words are used here as a useful summary of the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development.

‘Outline the regulations and requirements for foster carers. Confirmation of training within their contract. Engage them in a process of looking at past experiences as foster carers and their learning identifying gaps in the knowledge and identify training and learning opportunities to address these needs. In doing this consider their past experience of learning [at school etc] explore their experiences to identify any barriers to learning and identify preferred learning styles. Use information above to design a personal learning and development profile.

Look at a range of methods to meet needs ie. E- Learning, discussions with supervising social workers one to one. Small group discussions methods on areas of similar interest, guided reading, shadowing, observations etc. For [foster] carers where English is an additional language, support to improve skills through local educational resources, use of translators at training/discussion groups. To take a personal approach talking to [foster] carers about attending training one to one. Linking carers to other carers so that they do not need to attend training alone [training buddies]. For more experienced [foster] carers talk to them about sharing their experiences with others by attending training, and if they are willing involve them as trainers. The usual things like training in the evenings and weekends, training timed to enable them to take and collect children from school, provide crèche, food! and transport if necessary, with a certificate of attendance. Try to remove the barriers to their attendance.”
For male [foster] carers, male staff encouragement has helped, also the men in foster care course normally gets them to know other male [foster] carers making it easier for them to attend because they have built up these links. To consider financial rewards for attending each course. Also to consider a structure within the service that rewards [foster] carers who develop their skills. To ensure that the learning outcomes are seen by [foster] carers as relevant and can be practically applied by them either practically or through reflection on tasks. Finally, need [a] budget to support this and a dedicated training post helps.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

Question from main survey: fostering service providers

Which of the following factors, if any, would encourage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers to take part in future training, support and development activities?

Response options: Convenient day(s). If so, please specify which day(s); Convenient time(s). If so, please specify which time(s); Easy to get to; Getting a qualification; Interesting; Relevant; Payment for taking part; Linking skills to payment (eg payment for skills schemes); Support groups (eg men’s support groups, kinship carer support groups) If so, please specify which groups; Other factors. If so, please specify

All ten respondents who completed this question selected ‘convenient times’ as one factor which would encourage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers to take part in future training, support and development activities. All response options were selected by six or more respondents.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed factors is shown in Figure 7.

One respondent suggested:

‘Confidence – encouraging them to bring friends/family member/supporter’

as an additional factor. Another respondent commented:

‘...Also issue that attendance is not in itself useful – needs to be learning and application.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey
The question posed to foster carers about engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development was also put to fostering service providers during the focus group sessions.

**Issue discussed in focus groups: fostering service providers**

**What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (eg men) to engage in training and development?**

Similar points were identified by the groups of foster carers and of fostering service providers during the discussion of this question. These included the need for an individual solution, the personal approach, the positive role model of men who foster and their unique role together with that of all foster carers. Once again, the importance of peer support and peer learning was recognised. In relation to men who foster being a ‘hard to reach’ group, one participant commented that this was a logistical issue rather than an issue of gender.

### Closing comment

‘Due to their full-time child care responsibilities, there are some logistical challenges in planning and delivering training to the foster care workforce. Some foster carers need child care support to be able to attend training as the children they are caring for may be in crisis or excluded from school. To accommodate other employment demands training is often delivered in evenings and at weekends and this may not be compatible with foster carers’ fostering and family commitments.’

*Caring for our Children Part 3 – The Fostering Network, 2004c*
Key points **Training, support and development for foster care: factors affecting access to learning**

These key points provide a summary of the main findings in Section 4.3. They include extracts from some of the quotations which are referenced in that section.

**Some findings from the literature: factors affecting access to learning**

- Research of adult participation in learning in the UK has demonstrated a range of *‘attitudinal barriers including a lack of interest in learning and a lack of confidence about going back to the classroom’* and *‘practical barriers, such as lack of time’*;
- The CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care advocate a personalised approach to identifying and meeting learning needs. Foster carers’ learning needs and activities should be documented in a personal development plan, which forms the basis of the foster carer’s personal development portfolio.

**Factors which help and encourage access to training, support and development**

Factors identified by foster carers and fostering service providers:

**Attitudinal and dispositional factors which help and encourage access:**
- encouragement and enthusiasm from supervising social workers;
- emphasis on the personal benefits for foster carers;
- ensure foster carers understand the requirement for training, support and development;
- obtain a qualification eg a foundation degree/ accreditation of the role;
- provide a range of levels of training; informative trainers and speakers and ensure training content is interesting, relevant and of good quality;
- making training fun, without trivialising it;
- involve foster carers with professionals and experts in providing and or contributing to training, support and development;
- provide a personalised, flexible approach to learning, *‘starting where they are’*, taking account of foster carers’ background and experience and involving one-to-one discussions and listening to foster carers;
- knowing someone else who is going;
- arrange support groups to allow foster carers to meet other foster carers and have an opportunity to talk.

**Practical factors which help and encourage access:**
- provide plenty of notice; convenient days and times; easy to get to/convenient location; childcare provision or expenses;
- arrange for foster carers to be met and greeted; quality and suitability of the venue and facilities; quality refreshments;
- consider linking training to the standards; linking skills to payment; payment for taking part.
Factors which prevent access to training, support and development

Factors identified by foster carers and fostering service providers:

**Attitudinal and dispositional factors which prevent access:**
- bad memories of school; fear of the unknown, formal arena or assuming it will be like school;
- it’s boring; don’t need any more training; second carers often do not see why they should undertake training;
- lack of confidence; don’t like reading and writing; language eg concern about using the wrong terms; literacy;
- the feeling of being isolated in a group, eg the only man in a group.

**Practical factors which prevent access:**
- lack of information about activities; activity has been forgotten; cancellations due to new placements;
- some foster carers have a full time job; doesn’t fit in with work; too busy; timing;
- health problems; looking after others/family commitments;
- too far to travel; problems with transport; cost of the travel; cost of the activity.

Ways to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development

Once again it was noted that ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. A personalised approach is needed. Foster carers and fostering service providers suggested examples of approaches to engaging with foster carers from two ‘hard to reach’ groups:

Foster carers who have English as an additional language:
- providing support to improve language skills;
- ‘use of translators at training/discussion groups’;
- providing training, support and development in different languages.

Men who foster:
- men encouraging and supporting men who foster to attend;
- men attending with a training buddy, another male foster carer or a male professional;
- running men only activities including support groups;
- using peer support and peer learning;
- welcoming and acknowledging men; inviting them to join, participate and contribute;
- ‘targeting’ and speaking to men who have not previously attended eg at social events;
- using venues in which men feel comfortable eg rugby clubs, pubs;
- addressing issues of concern to men (men’s issues);
- encouraging men to bring family members, friends or supporters.

Some of these ways to engage men who foster could be applied to other ‘hard to reach’ foster carers.
4.4 Training, support and development for foster care: interpretations and approaches

This fourth section of the main findings introduces some interpretations of learning from the literature. Different approaches to training, support and development are suggested in terms of formats and resources using the findings from the main survey. Three examples of current practice are identified and the section concludes with a closing comment from the Fostering Network and some key points.

A Some findings from the literature: interpretations of learning

In The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2008 (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2008), learning was described in one of the survey questions as follows:

‘Learning can mean practising, studying or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full time, or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like a college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished.’

The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2008

‘...Good parenting skills are an essential aspect of fostering in supporting, developing and encouraging children to move forward. But fostering involves much more than good parenting skills...’

‘...the complex needs of children in the care system demand a range of skills from those who care for them. The term training needs to be given a broad interpretation: formal training courses play a part in enabling carers to acquire new skills but less formal development is crucial, as is effective support and supervision...’

There are different ways to learn new things. Sometimes it is better to be told information, sometimes better to watch someone else do a task, sometimes better to talk about ideas with other people, and so on.

Different people learn best in different ways. Most prefer a mix of activities and these include:

- One-to-one discussion
- E-learning
- Distance learning
- Structured use of supervision
- Guided reading
- Mentoring by a more experienced foster carer
- Shadowing
- Use of reflective diaries
- Training programmes
- Support groups

Your Induction and Workbook to Foster Care, CWDC, 2007b

B Approaches to training, support and development activities: formats

The views of foster carers

Foster carers were asked about their previous experience of taking part in different formats of training, support and development activities in the main survey. All respondents had taken part in five or more of twelve different formats of activities. Two-thirds (ten) or more of respondents selected: review meeting; keeping a diary/log/reflective journal; social worker visit; workshops (eg standards or special training); reading materials (eg books/ booklets/ factsheets); role play; support groups; telephone conversation; observation reports. One respondent commented that they had been involved in all of these activities during their experience as a foster carer.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed formats of training, support and development activities is shown in Figure 8.

A critical incident has been defined as ‘An unplanned event or series of events and circumstances that may result in an undesirable consequence’ (Woloshynowych et al, 2005).
In a later question foster carers were asked to consider which formats would be helpful for any future training, support and development activities. A more extensive list of response options was provided. However, there was some overlap between the response options for both questions.

**Question from main survey: foster carers**

**Considering any future training, support and development activities, which of the following formats, if any, would be helpful for you?**

Response options: Buddying/peer mentoring; Drop-in session; Small group session; General support group (open to all foster carers); Special support group (e.g., men’s support group); Social worker visit; Reading material (e.g., books/booklets/factsheets); Recording skills/report writing skills; Review meeting; Role play; Telephone conversation; Workshop; Literacy skills support; Online training; CD-Rom; DVD; Other format. If so, please specify

Twelve respondents completed this question. Formats selected by more than half of these twelve respondents included: general support group, small group session, social worker visit, reading material and online training. One respondent suggested ‘more from young people themselves’ as another format which would be helpful.

The number of respondents selecting each of the formats listed is shown in Figure 9.
The views of fostering service providers

Fostering service providers were asked about their previous experience of providing different formats of training, support and development activities in the main survey. All respondents had provided three or more of twelve different formats of training, support and development activities. Reading materials (e.g., books/booklets/factsheets) and workshops (e.g., standards or special training) had been provided by all respondents. The number of respondents selecting each of the twelve listed formats of training, support and development activities is shown in Figure 10.

The number of respondents who selected different formats which would be helpful for them for future training, support and development activities is shown in Figure 9.
Eight respondents recorded other kinds or formats of training, support and development provision in response to questions in this section of the questionnaire. These kinds or formats included: shortened versions of traditional training packages, support groups with a training element; refresher training; evening and weekend courses; drop-in workshops; roadshows; large scale conferences; annual half-day conference for foster carers; peer education programmes; foster carers supporting social work students (e.g., learning through teaching); foster carers acting as buddies/mentors (i.e., learning through shared learning and teaching).

In a later question, fostering service providers were asked about the provision of future training, support and development activities. In this case, the emphasis was placed on formats they would use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers.

**Question from main survey: fostering service providers**

**Considering any future training, support and development activities, which of the following formats, if any, would you use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers?**

Response options: Buddying/peer mentoring; Drop-in session; Small group session; General support group (open to all foster carers); Special support group (e.g., men’s support group); Social worker visit; Reading material (e.g., books/booklets/factsheets); Recording skills/report writing skills; Review meeting; Role play; Telephone conversation; Workshop; Literacy skills support; Online training; CD-Rom; DVD; Other format. *If so, please specify*

All respondents answered this question. Evening and weekend courses and focus groups were other formats suggested by respondents.

The number of respondents selecting each of the formats listed is shown in Figure 11.
4.4 Training, support and development for foster care: interpretations and approaches

C Approaches to training, support and development activities: resources

The views of foster carers

Question from main survey: foster carers
Which, if any, of the following types of support and sources of advice and information would be helpful to you?
Response options: Reading material (eg books/booklets/factsheets); British Association for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF) publications; The Foster Carer Handbook or manual; Local Authority support groups; Fosterline (the foster carers’ advice line); The Fostering Network; Other type(s). If so, please specify.

Thirteen respondents completed this question. Most of these respondents (ten or eleven) selected all of the listed response options.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed factors is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Number of respondents who selected different types of support and sources of advice and information which would be helpful to them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of support and sources of advice</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading material</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAAF publications</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Foster Carer Handbook or manual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority support groups</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fosterline</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fostering Network</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question from main survey: foster carers
Which, if any, of the following resources would you like to have in a training pack?
Response options: Reading material (eg books/booklets/factsheets); CD-Rom; DVD; Memory stick; Posters; Story book; List of relevant websites; List of relevant contact numbers; Other resource(s). If so, please specify.

Fourteen respondents completed this question. Resources selected by most respondents (thirteen or fourteen) included: list of relevant websites, reading material and list of relevant contact numbers. No additional resources were suggested.

The number of respondents selecting each of the resources listed is shown in Figure 13.
4.4 Training, support and development for foster care: interpretations and approaches

Figure 13 Number of respondents who selected different resources which they would like to have in a training pack

The views of fostering service providers

Question from main survey: fostering service providers
Which, if any, of the following resources would you like to have in a toolkit to help you engage with ‘hard to reach’ foster carers?
Response options: Reading material (e.g. books/booklets/factsheets); CD-Rom; DVD; Memory stick; Posters; Story book; List of relevant websites; List of relevant contact numbers; Other resource(s). If so, please specify

All eleven respondents completed this question. Resources selected by most respondents (nine or ten) included: list of relevant contact numbers, reading material, CD-Rom, DVD and list of relevant websites. No additional resources were suggested.

The number of respondents selecting each of the resources listed is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14 Number of respondents who selected different resources which they would like to have in a toolkit to help them engage with ‘hard to reach’ foster carers
What is ‘good’ training, support and development?

Participants in the focus groups were asked for their views on ‘good’ training, support and development.

The views of foster carers

One participant gave an example of a session in which the speaker was interesting, had made an effort and was well prepared. The session was located in a comfortable venue and most of the learning took place through interaction between foster carers facilitated by the speaker. Another commented on having supervisors with the right skills to draw out what foster carers have learnt and the skills they have.

The views of fostering service providers

The pivotal role of foster carers in meeting the educational and health needs of the child was discussed and the way in which a positive experience of learning will be passed onto the child. Foster carers were seen as part of a multiagency team around the child, taking part in multiagency training so that they feel part of the team.

Once again, using a person centred approach to learning was discussed, interacting with individual foster carers and asking foster carers whether training has helped. Also, involving foster carers and young people in contributing to training, support and development activities. An environment which includes nice bright rooms, feels comfortable and is non-threatening was suggested. Recognising different learning styles and using ‘a raft of approaches’ including face-to-face and online activities and a variety of presentations. Buddying and mentoring were recommended.

Examples of current practice

Three examples of current practice of engaging foster carers in training, support and development have been selected from the consultations with foster carers and fostering service providers. Two of these examples involve use of the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. An additional example of current practice involved providing audio-typist facilities for foster carers who require literacy support.
We run daytime and evening training groups each covering one of the development standards and enabling foster carers to identify the evidence they require for their portfolios. This has motivated [foster] carers to work on building their portfolios. Proactive SSWs have linked into these groups and follow through the material presented with their [foster] carers.

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

A fostering service provider asked for nominated foster carers to work with the standards and act as an advocate. This has had a ‘snowball effect’.

Fostering service provider – focus group

A pilot scheme ‘running in conjunction with Adult Learning to break down the barriers to learning and... attended by [foster] carers and workers alike. It is enabling [foster] carers and staff to understand basic numeracy and literacy skills, helps to build confidence and assist the young people within their care to improve their educational attainment...’

Fostering service provider – supplementary questionnaire

E Closing comment

‘In order to meet the deficit in training within the foster care workforce, there is a need for much greater flexibility in the approaches to training, the materials and methods of delivery to increase the opportunities for foster carers to participate in training. The focus of training must also meet with the aspirations of foster carers and give them the confidence and recognition they need to take their place within the child care workforce.’

Caring for our Children Part 3 – The Fostering Network, 2004c
Key points *Training, support and development for foster care: interpretations and approaches*

These key points provide a summary of the main findings in Section 4.4. They include extracts from some of the quotations which are referenced in that section.

**Some findings from the literature: interpretations of learning**

There are many definitions of learning. Learning can take place through different types of activities and in different settings. It can lead to development of ‘skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something’.

‘...Good parenting skills are an essential aspect of fostering in supporting, developing and encouraging children to move forward. But fostering involves much more than good parenting skills...’

**Learning in foster care:** ‘The term training needs to be given a broad interpretation...’

‘There are different ways to learn new things...Different people learn best in different ways...’

The CWDC list of learning activities in the Workbook includes: one-one discussion; distance learning; guided reading; shadowing; training programmes; e-learning; structured use of supervision; mentoring by more experienced foster carer; use of reflective diaries; support groups.

**Approaches to training, support and development activities: formats**

A range of different formats and kinds of training, support and development were suggested in response to the main survey. These included responses suggested in the questions and others identified by foster carers and fostering service providers.

Formats suggested in the questions: buddy/peer mentoring; critical incidents; CD-Rom; DVD; drop-in session; keeping a diary/log/reflective journal; literacy skills support; observation reports; online training; small group session; social worker visit; support groups (general support groups and special support groups eg men’s support group); reading material (eg books/booklets/factsheets); recording skills/report writing skills; review meeting; role play; telephone conversation; workshops.

Additional formats and kinds suggested by respondents: shortened versions of traditional training packages; support groups with a training element; refresher training; evening and weekend courses; drop-in workshops; roadshows; large scale conferences; annual half-day conference for foster carers; peer education programmes; foster carers supporting social work students (eg learning through teaching); foster carers acting as buddies/mentors (ie learning through shared learning and teaching).
Fostering service providers were specifically asked to consider formats they would use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers. In addition to many of the formats listed above focus groups were suggested.

**Approaches to training, support and development activities: resources**

Helpful types of support and sources of advice for foster carers were suggested. These included: British Association for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF) publications; the Foster Care Handbook or manual; Fosterline (the foster carers’ advice line); the Fostering Network; local authority support groups; reading material (e.g. books/booklets/factsheets).

Different resources were suggested for a training pack for foster carers and for a toolkit for fostering service providers to use with ‘hard to reach’ foster carers. Resources included CD-Rom; DVD; list of relevant websites; list of relevant contact numbers; memory stick; posters; story book; reading material (e.g. books/booklets/factsheets).

**What is ‘good’ training, support and development?**

Foster carers and fostering service providers identified several features of ‘good’ training, support and development. These included features mentioned in earlier sections of the main findings, e.g. using a person centred approach. Engaging foster carers as part of the multi-agency team which centred on the child and young person was also discussed.

**Examples of current practice:**

- Training groups covering the development standards. This has enabled foster carers to build their portfolio. Supervising social workers provide follow through.
- Foster carers asked to act as advocates for and work with the standards, which has had a ‘snowball effect’.
- A pilot scheme to support foster carers and staff with basic numeracy and literacy skills, build confidence and assist the young people in their care to improve their educational attainment.
4.5 Training, support and development for foster care: learning together; learning from each other

This fifth section of the main findings uses the literature to introduce the contribution to fostering of learning from children and young people looked after, foster carers, fostering service providers and people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care. It then uses findings from the main survey to identify ways in which foster carers can contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers. The section concludes with a closing comment from the Fostering Network and some key points.

A Some findings from the literature: learning together; learning from each other

‘Foster Care providers should provide a range of learning opportunities and activities, including support groups and reflective learning based on the carer’s experience of fostering. Foster Carers strongly value opportunities to participate in group training programmes alongside Foster Carers and other professionals working with children. …

Providers will need to ensure that experienced Foster Carers are provided with opportunities to develop their skills to a higher level as they are likely to be offering the more challenging placements. These should include specialist skills training, access to training alongside residential workers and social workers and multi-agency training.

All Foster Carers should be encouraged to update their knowledge and skills to take account of new legislation, guidance and practice developments.’

...

‘Training delivered in partnership with current or ex-Foster Carers as co-trainers is the most effective model of training delivery. Foster Care providers are encouraged to make full use of experienced Foster Carers as co-trainers to deliver pre-approval (preparation) training, core training courses and support/mentoring to Foster Carers working on the Standards. Foster care trainers will also require access to training, to develop their training skills and familiarise themselves with relevant course materials.

Similarly, involving care-experienced young people to make specific contributions and as co-trainers on relevant courses, has been shown to be very effective...’

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care
A Guide for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers
CWDC, 2007c
B The contribution of foster carers

The views of foster carers

Question from main survey: foster carers
In what ways, if any, could you contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers?
Response options: Buddying/peer mentoring; Contributing to an event; Drop-in session; Small group session; General support group; Special support group; Talking about your experience as a foster carer; Leading a workshop; Other way(s). If so, please specify.

All fifteen respondents selected at least one way in which they could contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers. Ways of contributing selected by most (thirteen) respondents included: buddying/peer mentoring, contributing to an event and talking about their experience as a foster carer. One respondent suggested 'assisting at Skills to Foster' as another way of contributing.

The number of respondents selecting each of the ways of contributing listed is shown in Figure 15.
The views of fostering service providers

Question from main survey: fostering service providers
In what ways, if any, do foster carers contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers?
Response options: Buddying/peer mentoring; Contributing to an event; Drop-in session; Small group session; General support group; Special support group; Talking about their experience as a foster carer; Leading a workshop; Other way(s). If so, please specify

All eleven respondents selected ways in which foster carers contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers. Two respondents each suggested another way in which foster carers contribute as follows: designing and delivering training courses/sessions/events etc and maybe hosting a coffee meet for local foster carers away from the centre.

The number of respondents selecting each of the ways in which foster carers contribute is shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16  Number of respondents who selected ways in which foster carers contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers

Ways of contributing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of contributing</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddying/peer mentoring</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to an event</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in session</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group session</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General support group</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special support group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about experience as a foster carer</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading a workshop</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘hands-on’ experience of foster carers and the way in which they could be empowered to carry out training was discussed by foster carers in the focus groups. It was noted that foster carers learn through informal as well as direct training. For example, a lot of learning takes place through networking during coffee and lunch breaks. There was a suggestion that somebody will always have a solution; there will always be someone at the end of the phone; foster carers need to know someone is there.

Fostering service providers also discussed the way in which foster carers learn from other foster carers. For example, new foster carers say they learn so much from other foster carers, and the issue of getting foster carers to recognise the knowledge and skills they have and getting them to share.
One fostering service provider emphasised the importance of the involvement of foster carers in training, support and development in a closing comment to the main survey.

‘Effective training, support and development MUST be informed by the views of foster carers and wherever possible delivered by foster carers. Peer education is mutually beneficial to foster carers and the service, [foster] carers feel valued and respected and other foster carers recognise and identify with the credibility that the foster carer trainers bring to training, support and development events.

Utilise the skills and knowledge that foster carers bring to your organisation to inform your service’s growth and development.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

C Closing comment

‘For new foster carers and those with challenging placements, fostering can feel an isolated activity. Family, friends and neighbours may not really understand what is involved, and foster carers are limited in what information they can share with them about the children in their care. The fostering service is there to offer supervision, guidance and support, but foster carers do not always feel comfortable raising their anxieties and doubts with social workers. Having the chance to ask, and be supported by, another experienced foster carer can make a real difference to a fostering career.’

Simon Newstone, Foster Carer Peer Mentoring (cover text)
The Fostering Network, 2008

Key points Training, support and development for foster care: learning together; learning from each other

These key points provide a summary of the main findings in Section 4.5. They include extracts from some of the quotations which are referenced in that section.

Some findings from the literature: Learning together; learning from each other

‘Foster Care providers should provide a range of learning opportunities and activities, including support groups and reflective learning based on the carer’s experience of fostering. Foster Carers strongly value opportunities to participate in group training programmes alongside Foster Carers and other professionals working with children. ...
Providers will need to ensure that experienced Foster Carers are provided with opportunities to develop their skills to a higher level as they are likely to be offering the more challenging placements. These should include specialist skills training, access to training alongside residential workers and social workers and multi-agency training.

All Foster Carers should be encouraged to update their knowledge and skills to take account of new legislation, guidance and practice developments.

The role of foster carers and young people as partners or co-trainers in the delivery of training, support and development:

‘Training delivered in partnership with current or ex-Foster Carers as co-trainers is the most effective model of training delivery. Foster Care providers are encouraged to make full use of experienced Foster Carers as co-trainers to deliver pre-approval (preparation) training, core training courses and support/mentoring to Foster Carers working on the Standards. Foster care trainers will also require access to training, to develop their training skills and familiarise themselves with relevant course materials.

Similarly, involving care-experienced young people to make specific contributions and as co-trainers on relevant courses, has been shown to be very effective...’

The contribution of foster carers

Many foster carers do contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers. Ways in which they could contribute include: buddying/peer mentoring; contributing to an event; drop-in session; small group session; general support group; special support group; talking about their experience as a foster carer; leading a workshop.

Foster carers can learn from each other because:

- they have hands-on experience of providing foster care;
- ‘peer education is mutually beneficial’;
- foster carers ‘feel valued and respected’;
- somebody will always have a solution;
- ‘other foster carers recognise and identify with the credibility that the foster carer trainers bring’;
- foster carers have experience, knowledge and skills they can share.

Foster carers can learn from each other through:

- informal as well as direct training eg through networking and self help groups;
- someone at the end of the phone;
- using ‘the skills and knowledge that foster carers bring to your organisation to inform your service’s growth and development’.
4.6 Training, support and development for foster care: engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers

This final section of the chapter brings together some of the findings from earlier sections. These findings are specific to engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development.

The views of foster carers

The issue of engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development was only explored with foster carers during the focus group discussions.

Issue discussed in focus groups: foster carers

What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (eg men) to engage in training and development?

During the discussion with foster carers some of the themes which had already been raised were repeated with respect to engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development. For example, the need to acknowledge that ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. It was noted that some men who foster are surprised by how much they know when they get involved in training. In some cases they probably contribute more than they can take away. The importance of men who foster as role models was noted and one foster carer posed the question: ‘Why do we foster? ...We foster because we like it. It enhances the quality of our lives.’

Some examples of formats of training which had been considered or used to engage men in training, support and development activities were mentioned. These included:

- Trying to arrange a male foster carer group to talk about ‘how to get men together’ in a pub setting;
- Addressing men’s issues in training for men held in a rugby club. This session was very well attended;
- Arranging men only support group and social events, family events and talking to men who had not previously attended.

The views of fostering service providers

Fostering service providers were asked three questions which were specifically about engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development activities.

Question from main survey: fostering service providers

What would you say if someone from another fostering service provider asked you the question: ‘In your experience, what’s the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development?’
All eleven respondents provided suggestions for the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development. These suggestions included:

‘Encouragement from Supporting Social Workers/Link Workers – Fees and Fines.’

Independent fostering service provider – main survey

‘Ask what would encourage them to engage… find out what they want in terms of training, support and development… be flexible do you need to offer training, support and development in different formats, languages, times of day including weekends, cover child care costs etc.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

‘My response would be: talk to [foster] carers about the training before they attend, breaking it down and letting them know what’s involved at each stage…’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

‘Flexibility in timing and materials/format of what constitutes training… to respond to different circumstances and adult learning styles. Consulting with the [foster] carers over what they feel they need and how they’d like to receive it.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

However, the voice of one respondent encapsulated many of the issues. Their words are used here as a useful summary of the best way to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development.

‘Outline the regulations and requirements for foster carers. Confirmation of training within their contract. Engage them in a process of looking at past experiences as foster carers and their learning identifying gaps in the knowledge and identify training and learning opportunities to address these needs. In doing this consider their past experience of learning (at school etc) explore their experiences to identify any barriers to learning and identify preferred learning styles. Use information above to design a personal learning and development profile.

Look at a range of methods to meet needs ie. E-learning, discussions with supervising social workers one to one. Small group discussions methods on areas of similar interest, guided reading, shadowing, observations etc. For [foster] carers where English is an additional language, support to improve skills through local educational resources, use of translators at training/discussion groups. To take a personal approach talking to [foster] carers about attending training one to one. Linking carers to other carers so that they do not need to attend training alone (training buddies). For more experienced [foster] carers talk to them about sharing their experiences with others by attending training, and if they are willing involve them as trainers.'
The usual things like training in the evenings and weekends, training timed to enable them to take and collect children from school, provide crèche, food! and transport if necessary, with a certificate of attendance. Try to remove the barriers to their attendance.

For male [foster] carers, male staff encouragement has helped, also the men in foster care course normally gets them to know other male [foster] carers making it easier for them to attend because they have built up these links. To consider financial rewards for attending each course. Also to consider a structure within the service that rewards [foster] carers who develop their skills. To ensure that the learning outcomes are seen by [foster] carers as relevant and can be practically applied by them either practically or through reflection on tasks. Finally, need [a] budget to support this and a dedicated training post helps.

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey

Question from main survey: fostering service providers
Which of the following factors, if any, would encourage 'hard to reach foster carers' to take part in future training, support and development activities?
Response options: Convenient day(s); Convenient time(s); Easy to get to; Getting a qualification; Interesting; Relevant; Payment for taking part; Linking skills to payment (eg payment for skills schemes); Support groups (eg men’s support groups, kinship carer support groups); Other factors. If so, please specify

All ten respondents who completed this question selected ‘convenient times’ as one factor which would encourage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers to take part in future training, support and development activities. All response options were selected by six or more respondents.

The number of respondents selecting each of the listed factors is shown in Figure 17.

One respondent suggested:

‘Confidence – encouraging them to bring friends/family member/supporter’
as an additional factor. Another respondent commented:

‘...Also issue that attendance is not in itself useful – needs to be learning and application.’

Local authority fostering service provider – main survey
The question posed to foster carers about engaging ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in training, support and development was also put to fostering service providers during the focus group sessions.

**Issue discussed in focus groups: fostering service providers**

*What would encourage and allow hard to reach foster carers (e.g., men) to engage in training and development?*

Similar points were identified by the groups of foster carers and of fostering service providers during the discussion of this question. These included the need for an individual solution, the personal approach, the positive role model of men who foster and their unique role together with that of all foster carers. Once again, the importance of peer support and peer learning was recognised. In relation to men who foster being a ‘hard to reach’ group, one participant commented that this was a logistical issue rather than an issue of gender.

Fostering service providers were asked about the provision of future training, support and development activities they would use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers.
Question from main survey: fostering service providers
Considering any future training, support and development activities, which of the following formats, if any, would you use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers?

Response options: Buddying/peer mentoring; Drop-in session; Small group session; General support group (open to all foster carers); Special support group (eg men’s support groups); Social worker visit; Reading material (eg books/ booklets/ factsheets); Recording skills/report writing skills; Review meeting; Role play; Telephone conversation; Workshop; Literacy skills support; Online training; CD-Rom; DVD; Other format. If so, please specify

All respondents answered this question. Evening and weekend courses and focus groups were other formats suggested by respondents.

The number of respondents selecting each of the formats listed is shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18 Number of respondents who selected different formats which they would use to engage ‘hard to reach’ foster carers in future training, support and development activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formats</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddying/peer mentoring</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in session</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group session</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General support group</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special support group</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker visit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading materials</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording skills/report writing skills</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review meeting</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone conversation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy skills support</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online training</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-Rom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other format</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

Guidance and recommendations
Chapter 5 of *Learning together; learning from each other* sets out the guidance and recommendations on how fostering service providers might remove barriers to learning for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers, in particular men who foster. The guidance and recommendations have been developed using some of the learning from the consultation with foster carers and fostering service providers (Chapters 3 and 4) and from a review of the literature (Chapter 2). They form part of a practical toolkit designed to facilitate the achievement of the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care in England.

This practical toolkit *Learning together; learning from each other* comprises:

- Report of the ‘Hard to Reach’ Foster Carers Project
- DVD – an original narrative film incorporating video extracts from the focus groups and interviews with foster carers and fostering service providers
- CD-Rom – a set of innovative approaches, ideas, resources and sources of further information for fostering service providers which can be adapted for different contexts

Suggestions for how to use the toolkit are provided in the CD-Rom.

One of the core themes of the guidance and recommendations is reflected in the title of this report *Learning together; learning from each other*. This highlights the valued and interconnected contribution to fostering of learning with and from others: foster carers; fostering service providers; people and organisations across the spectrum of foster care; sons and daughters of foster carers; foster families; children and young people looked after. The guidance and recommendations are also applicable and relevant across the wider childcare workforce.

The guidance and recommendations are set out as five focus points for fostering service providers. The five focus points articulate how fostering service providers can support the ‘learning journey’ of each foster carer. The structure of the five focus points follows the sequence of the main findings in Chapter 4 and fits with the five-part structure of the DVD. The guidance and recommendations are presented in this format to allow fostering service providers to use a personalised approach to engage and support foster carers in learning and development. This fits with the personalised approach to identifying and meeting learning needs through a personal development plan, advocated in the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care.

**Five focus points to support a foster carer’s learning journey**

**Focus point 1 – Foster carers’ experience**

- establish the premise that foster carers play a central role in the lives of many children and young people
- encourage foster carers to identify and voice the benefits of being a foster carer
- recognise and build on the skills, experiences and attributes that foster carers bring to the role
Focus point 2 – Benefits of training, support and development

• ensure foster carers understand the requirement for training, support and development
• realise that foster carers who perceive the benefits of training, support and development are more likely to engage in learning
• recognise, articulate and promote the benefits of training, support and development
• encourage and support foster carers to identify and articulate the benefits in their own words
• provide foster carers with opportunities to discuss their previous experience of training, support and development

Focus point 3 – Factors affecting access to learning

• be aware of factors affecting adult participation in learning, eg attitudinal and practical barriers
• use a personalised approach to identify and meet individual learning needs; ‘one size doesn’t fit all’
• be aware of factors which help and encourage access to learning identified by foster carers and fostering service providers
• be aware of factors which prevent or act as barriers to learning identified by foster carers and fostering service providers
• appreciate that some foster carers in ‘hard to reach’ groups do find ways to engage in learning
• customise the training to meet the needs of the ‘hard to reach’ foster carers, eg foster carers with English as an additional language, kinship carers, respite carers, older carers and men who foster

Focus point 4 – Interpretations of learning and approaches to learning

• use a broad interpretation of learning, learning activities and approaches
• be aware of different learning styles and of the ways learning takes place
• provide a range of different formats and kinds of learning activities
• use a variety of resources to support learning
• provide a range of types of support and sources of advice
• adapt and adopt examples of good practice in training, support and development
• offer flexibility in the approaches to training, support and development, materials and methods
Focus point 5 – Learning together; learning from each other

• utilise the skills, knowledge and experience of other professionals and specialists in the delivery of training, support and development
• work in partnership with foster carers and young people in the delivery of training, support and development
• encourage foster carers to contribute to the training, support and development of other foster carers
• provide opportunities for foster carers to learn from and support other foster carers
• recognise the importance of and encourage networking and social learning
• draw on the skills, knowledge and experience of foster carers and other professionals for the benefit of children and young people
Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank all those who contributed their time and expertise to this project. This includes the members of the Hard to Reach Foster Carers Project Reference Group and the foster carers and fostering service providers who took part in the consultation.

The project team is particularly grateful to Martin Clarke, Robert Portsmouth, Damien Watt and Peter Watt.

Documents from the Government and other influential bodies have been used in this report to inform the subject of training, support and development for foster care. Many of these documents are Crown Copyright protected material.

Crown Copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Queen’s Printer for Scotland.

Preparation of the Learning together; learning from each other toolkit:

The DVD
Farad Painchun and Uzma Iqbal

The Report and CD-Rom
Dr Claire Dickerson and Dr Kit Thomas, University of Hertfordshire School of Education

The Fostering Network would like to thank the CWDC for funding the production of this toolkit.
References


Chilvers D [Continental Research]. Segmentation of Adults by Attitudes Towards Learning and Barriers to Learning. Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills; 2008


Department for Children, Schools and Families. Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care. An implementation plan. HM Government, the Association of Directors of Children’s Services and the Local Government Association on behalf of the Children’s Inter-Agency Group; 2008b

Department for Education and Skills. Every child matters: next steps. Department for Education and Skills; 2004a


Department for Education and Skills. Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care. The Stationery Office; 2006b (Cm 6932)

Department for Education and Skills. Care Matters: Consultation Responses. Department for Education and Skills; 2007a


Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills. *Adult Learning and Skills Investing in the first steps*. Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills; 2007

The Fostering Network. *Caring for our Children Part 1. The foster carers' perspective*. The Fostering Network; 2004a

The Fostering Network. *Caring for our Children Part 2. The fostering agencies' perspective*. The Fostering Network; 2004b

The Fostering Network. *Caring for our Children Part 3. The training needs of the foster care service in Scotland*. The Fostering Network; 2004c


Gilligan R. *Men as foster carers A neglected resource?* Adoption & Fostering 2000; 24(2): 63–69

Henry R. *The challenging role for men in foster care*. Adoption & Fostering 2003; 27(2): 74–75

HM Treasury. *Every child matters*. The Stationery Office; 2003 (Cm 5860)


Newstone S. *Foster Carer Peer Mentoring. Good practice guidelines for establishing and running a peer mentoring scheme*. The Fostering Network; 2008

Ogilvie K, Kirton D, Beecham J. *Foster carer training Resources, payment and support*. Adoption & Fostering 2006; 30(3): 6–16


Learning together; learning from each other
Report of the ‘Hard to Reach’ Foster Carers Project

Learning together; learning from each other provides guidance and recommendations on how fostering service providers might remove barriers to learning for ‘hard to reach’ foster carers, in particular men who foster. The guidance and recommendations have been developed through consultation with foster carers and fostering service providers and following a review of the literature. They form part of a practical toolkit designed to facilitate the achievement of the Children’s Workforce Development Council Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care in England.

Learning together; learning from each other provides a brief overview of adult participation in learning in the UK and of foster carers’ engagement in learning. It includes definitions of learning, some findings from previous research on attitudes towards learning and factors affecting access to learning.

The key message of this report is reflected in its title Learning together; learning from each other. This highlights the valued and interconnected contribution to fostering of learning with and from others. It also recognises that the factors affecting participation in learning vary from one individual to another. Some foster carers in ‘hard to reach’ groups do find ways to engage in learning.

In this report the guidance and recommendations are set out as five focus points for fostering service providers. These five focus points articulate how fostering service providers can support the ‘learning journey’ of each foster carer. They are also applicable and relevant across the wider childcare workforce. The ultimate aim of the project is to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.