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Children's homes research: phase 3

Research report

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Kantar Public

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Aims and Methodology	5
2.1 Overall aims	5
2.2 Methodological approach	5
2.3 Analysis	6
3. Summary of findings	8
3.1 Summary	8
3.2 Initial reaction to and expectations of the Regulations and Quality Standards	8
3.3 Impact of Regulations and Quality Standards in practice	12
3.4 Attributes and skills of a manager	16
3.5 Training and qualifications	18
3.6 Career progression	21
4. Key messages from Phase 3 Stakeholder research	24
Annex: Topic Guides	26
Phase 3 – Stakeholder Topic Guide	26

1. Introduction

In the autumn of 2013 the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Kantar Public were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to carry out a programme of research to better understand the qualifications, skills and training required to meet the needs of young people living in children's homes.

The overall research programme consisted of three phases of research:

- **Phase 1** – A census that generated a profile of children's homes across England, 2013
- **Phase 2** - Case studies were conducted across 20 children's homes, December 2013 and April 2014
- **Phase 3¹** – 20 stakeholder interviews, April 2015.

This report presents a summary of the findings from phase 3 of this research. The reports from the first two phases were published in January 2015 and can be found here:

1. Phase 1: Children's homes workforce census
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-workforce-census>
2. Phase 2: Training and developing staff in children's homes
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-and-developing-staff-in-childrens-homes>.

Addendum

The research for this paper concluded in February 2016 shortly after the introduction of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations and Quality Standards 2015. Since then, key processes have changed and a review of residential care was commissioned by the government.

In July 2016 Sir Martin Narey published his review of residential care which provides a commentary on many of the points raised in this paper. While Sir Martin concluded that the level 3 diploma had been "a success", he also made a series of recommendations to improve things further.² In its response, the Government committed to ensuring commissioners have the information that they need regarding evidence-based programmes and approaches that are likely to prove effective in developing staff. It also

¹ Note that this Phase was solely undertaken by Kantar Public.

² *Residential Care in England, Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review into children's residential care*, July 2016

committed to commissioning and disseminating qualitative research on best practice for recruiting staff.³

The interim period has also seen the number of children's homes rated by Ofsted to be good or better increase from 70% to 82%. In its 2017 annual report, Ofsted stated that this was "in part due to the impact of the quality standards on the quality of care".

In 2017 Ofsted introduced the Social Care Common Inspection Framework to ensure a consistent approach to inspection across children's services. The framework requires that inspections should reflect the needs of each individual child, be consistent, and that the evidence required should be clear to all parties.

³ *Government response to Sir Martin Narey's independent review of Residential Care*, December 2016

2. Aims and Methodology

2.1 Overall aims

Phase 3 of the Children's Homes Evaluation project builds on the findings from two previous phases of research. Following the publication of the Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards⁴ that came into effect in April 2015, it was agreed that the final phase of research would focus specifically on understanding and supporting the effective implementation of these new regulations. Phase 3 involved a consultation with stakeholders about the skills, knowledge and qualifications of children's home managers and staff and the impact of the children's homes regulations.

A specific focus of the phase 3 study was on one of the regulations, the Leadership and Management Standard, that specifically requires:

...the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that, (a) helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and (b) promotes their welfare.

While this Standard does not necessitate a change of skills among children's home managers per se, it does provide them with a clear framework within which to take leadership of their provision. It was therefore considered useful for this final phase of research – conducted 8-10 months following the publication of the regulations - to explore the impact of the regulations. Specifically, the aims of this research were to:

- Explore the expectations in relation to the implementation and impact of the new regulations;
- Understand the impact of the new regulations on strategic management, staff operations and children themselves; and,
- Explore views on qualifications, pay and routes in/out of the residential care sector.

2.2 Methodological approach

Depth interviews of 45-60 minutes were undertaken with a targeted sample of 20 strategic stakeholders to provide a contextualised understanding of the implementation and impact of the new regulations. Interviewees were purposively selected in

⁴ DfE (2015) Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards.

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

consultation with DfE to ensure a spread of views were gathered from individuals working within organisations that had a strategic overview of the children's homes sector.

Interviews were conducted with the following key stakeholder groups between December 2015 and February 2016:

- **4 local authority commissioning managers** whose roles included: Commissioning manager; Commissioning lead; Operations Manager; Head of Services
- **4 decision makers** in large commercial care service group providers (job titles withheld to protect anonymity but all held senior operational management roles)
- **4 local authority providers** from a spread of regions and whose roles included: Service manager; Senior manager; Head of Service; and County Services Manager
- **4 umbrella organisations** from a mix of national and local organisations, and whose roles included: three CEOs and a Research and Development Officer
- **4 Training providers** including a mix of private providers (national and global) and local authority providers, and whose roles include: Programme Lead; Portfolio Manager; Programme Developer; Development Officer.

The mix of respondents across the total sample gave a well-rounded view of the implementation and impact of the regulations. Decision Makers provided a commercial viewpoint, whilst the Umbrella organisations shared a more rounded view of the long-term impact of the regulations. The Responsible Individuals⁵ (RIs) within local authorities provided insight around the ripple effect of the regulations on recruitment and career pathways into management. Furthermore, the Training Providers alongside the Umbrella Organisations and RIs shared their views on the Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications and any perceived gaps in these qualifications.

2.3 Analysis

As in Phase 2, the stakeholder interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using a 'framework analysis' approach. The process involved a familiarisation stage and includes a researcher's review of the transcripts. Based on the topic guide, the researchers' experiences of conducting the fieldwork and their preliminary review of the data, a thematic framework was constructed. The analysis process then involved

⁵ If the registered provider is an organisation, they must appoint a Responsible Individual. The Responsible Individual must be a director, manager, secretary or other officer of the organisation. The role of the Responsible Individual is to supervise the management of the home(s).

summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using data matrices (that contain respondent by theme summary information) and drawing on these matrices in brainstorming held with the core project team to identify patterns and key findings.

This report provides a summary of the key findings from the qualitative interviews conducted. Note that the sample selection for this study was selected based on particular characteristics to allow for key pertinent themes to be explored; the findings should therefore not be seen as generalisable to stakeholders working within the children's home sector more widely.

3. Summary of findings

3.1 Summary

The stakeholder interviews provided an understanding of the implementation and implications of the new Regulations, with a specific focus on the Leadership and Management Standard (Regulation 13), wherever possible. This phase of research was important in supporting an understanding of the factors that might act as barriers or help to facilitate the implementation the Regulations.

Interviews with stakeholders suggested that at the time of this research there had been a widespread positive acceptance of the Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards and an acknowledgement that these had been an improvement on the National Minimum Standards that were in place prior to April 2015. There was real positivity about the professionalisation of the sector and of the increased accountability placed upon Children's Homes to demonstrate good practice.

However, the stakeholder interviews also highlighted a number of risks in relation to implementation and the implications of the Regulations and Standards which placed a greater emphasis on quality, rigour and evidence-based practice. The lack of clarity on how exactly these aspects should be demonstrated, coupled with an inspection focus on outcomes could leave Managers anxious and unsure of where they stood in meeting the Standards. Furthermore, the increased responsibilities (and paperwork) the Standards have introduced can be seen to introduce a risk of reducing the appeal of managerial roles within children's homes.

We detail findings against key themes below.

3.2 Initial reaction to and expectations of the Regulations and Quality Standards

"We don't want minimum, we want better than minimum for the children we look after." (*Responsible Individual*)

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research were largely positive about the introduction of the new Regulations and Quality Standards. The Regulations were seen as an iterative development, building on the Minimum Standards previously in place, consolidating guidelines that were previously covered in 'different places', and reinforcing what many decision makers within large organisations and RIs already held to be good practice. The greater emphasis on evidence and accountability focused the responsibilities of Children's Home Managers on outcomes and the needs of the children

in their care. It should be noted that several of the stakeholders representing umbrella organisations were involved in drafting the Regulations.

“I think it is quite refreshing that they were putting a greater emphasis on leadership and management...the number one thing that prevents a home working correctly is the quality of the management, the quality of the leadership and the quality of the organisation and the investment they have put into the managers but as well as that a manager’s ability to refuse placements, and I think it strengthened that piece.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

“It reinforced what we believe is good practice.” (*Responsible Individual*)

There were a number of specific elements of the Regulations and Quality Standards that particular stakeholders identified as being of value dependent on their interest area:

- the new regulations dealt with the issue of building in greater flexibility around staff teams, for example, previously staff had to be four years older than the oldest child which caused problems in homes with 19 or 20-year-old young people
- greater specificity and clarity around safeguarding expectations
- greater clarity around the accountability of the Children’s Home Manager, and an emphasis on their relationship with Ofsted

As the previous Standards were minimum standards, many of the stakeholders working in organisations with responsibility for delivering or overseeing provisions reported that practices were already in line with the new Regulations and Quality Standards. As such there was minimal need for any changes in practice or management of children’s homes.

“It was business as usual. Good practice is good practice. We were already measuring outcomes; we already had a really good outcomes measuring model.” (*Decision Maker*)

A small minority of Decision Makers and RIs involved in the management of children’s homes expressed some concern at a perceived lack of clarity within the Regulations. That the Regulations allowed for a degree of interpretation meant that some stakeholders had initial concerns that children’s homes may not implement the Regulations or Standards in the way Ofsted might expect, leading them to be unfairly penalised. Allied to this, one Umbrella Organisation had anticipated that Managers might struggle to understand what evidence they would be required to gather and would require a stronger direction than what was being articulated in the Regulations. This was reinforced by a point raised by one Decision Maker as to how children’s homes would be expected to

evidence certain aspects of the Standards, for example ensuring that staff are working as a team. The concern was that the Regulations were too reliant on the Ofsted inspector and their own individual interpretation of good practice:

"It was a case of you must achieve this, you show us how you do it and we will decide if it is fit for purpose." (*Decision Maker*)

"We anticipated that it would be difficult for managers to conceive of what was being required of them in terms of evidence." (*Umbrella Organisation*)

"You can have very damaged children who refuse to attend school, the Home can be trying to build their confidence and we will do everything possible, we will move heaven and earth to try and persuade them to go to school and take education seriously but Ofsted inspectors do not judge the steps they are taking, they just look and say he is not going to school. It feels unfair." (*Responsible Individual*)

"When one comes to discussing professional judgment, because of the lack of detail and description, sometimes it's difficult to establish the consensus around professional judgment and also to evidence." (*Umbrella Organisation*)

Stakeholders involved in drafting of the Regulations interpreted this lack of specificity differently, as providing flexibility for Managers to use the new Standards to justify activities that better supported improved outcomes for children and young people.

"I think the Quality Standards give you wings. I think if you are tired of being shoved into a box and you think if only I could just tell you what I do and why I do it, I think the Quality Standards are brilliant and if you are a leader who has that mind-set I think that they offer you opportunities you would never have had under the National Minimum." (*Umbrella Organisation*)

"I think generally the spirit of the quality standard is far improved. It's keeping the care planning around the child central to the standards, and I think it offers providers more scope in defining and explaining and clarifying their role in relation to the tasks they carry out." (*Umbrella Organisation*)

Given the increased accountability that the new Regulations and Standards place on Managers, one of the main concerns among some RIs and Decision Makers, when the Regulations were first introduced, was that there would be too much paperwork. A perceived need to increase the evidence trail led these stakeholders to anticipate that more administration would be necessary, potentially reducing time spent supporting staff or children.

Many interviewees, across all stakeholder sub-groups, reflected on the current challenges within the children's home sector in attracting and retaining suitably qualified Managers. A small number of Decision Makers held some concerns that because the Regulations placed a greater onus on managers it could reduce the relative attractiveness of managerial roles within children's homes. Similarly, the requirement for staff to attain Level 3 qualifications may serve to reduce the pool of staff that homes have access to. One Umbrella Organisation reflected that adhering to the Quality Standards required critical thinking skills and an ability to make sense of the needs of young people. Given a perceived lower level of education among staff working within the sector, this combination of skills may be more challenging to find. This is not to say that this stakeholder believed the requirements to be unrealistic or undesirable.

"Managers who were excellent have left the role and have moved into quality assurance teams and this has caused a huge problem for retention and recruitment of managers. So they are now evaluating the job that they really should be doing. There is now a very small pool of managers out there who are qualified who want to do the job." (*Decision Maker*)

Several stakeholders, both LA Commissioning Managers and Training Providers reflected that the new Regulations potentially place Children's Home Managers in an awkward position. One in which they are expected to challenge and critique their own organisation, the same organisation that pays their salary. While the Regulations provide Managers with a little more distance to be able to do this, it may place them in a position where they will be stuck in between doing what they feel is required by their employer or by Ofsted.

3.3 Impact of Regulations and Quality Standards in practice

Across the range of stakeholders interviewed there was a highly variable view on the impact of the new Regulations and Quality Standards⁶. Most stakeholders (across all stakeholder types) felt there had been very limited impact, largely because the children's homes that they had contact with (or responsibility for) were already largely practicing in a manner which met the new Standards. This research was also undertaken relatively shortly following the implementation of the new Regulations and Quality Standards (i.e. within 8-10 months) therefore the impact on staff and children had yet to be seen. This was particularly the view among LA Commissioning Manger who tended to defer to the judgement of Ofsted in relation to assessing the impact of the new Regulations. In a minority of cases, some RIs and Decision Makers could identify homes (both privately owned or managed by local authorities) who were seen to have improved practices through implementing the regulations (detailed below). In these instances, Managers were reported to have engaged in training, were focused on embedding the new framework and had incorporated monitoring and evaluation frameworks successfully.

"The standards have not caused a revolution in practice, they have given a really good framework to work under" (*Umbrella Organisation*)

"For Children's Homes that were already achieving positive outcomes for children and young people...I would wager that this would not have made much difference." (*Decision Maker*)

"We always wanted to be able to do that, be ambitious and have a good strong staff team and strong leadership. It reflects how we run our children's homes." (*Responsible Individual*)

There was one clear area that stakeholders were able to identify an immediate impact of the new Regulations, and in particular the Leadership and Management Standard (Regulation 13), and this was on the role and responsibilities of Children's Home Managers. As previously highlighted, the Regulations and Standards were seen to provide a much clearer framework of expectations against which children's homes and Managers could be held accountable.

The Leadership and Management Standard emphasises the importance of understanding the impact that the quality of care provided in the Home has on the

⁶ Note that Training Organisations provided very little feedback on the impact of the Regulations and Quality Standards

progress and experiences of children, and of evidence based practice. Whilst some children's homes and managers reportedly struggled with the interpretation of what was required, other stakeholders felt that the new regulations have set out what is required much more clearly than previous guidance. Furthermore, the fact that this is now a requirement has forced managers to show evidence in a more standardised and regulated way. Under the previous National Minimum standards this was approached in a significantly more haphazard way with some Homes simply not demonstrating the evidence of practice and impacts that is now a requirement. As such, the new Standards were felt by all stakeholders to have introduced greater accountability and expectation of scrutiny both around the management and practice of children's homes and on the measurement of outcomes for children and young people.

A small number of RI and Decision Maker stakeholders made reference to Ofsted when discussing the influence of the Leadership and Management Standard. Here there was an interesting difference between stakeholder types: Decision Makers reported a markedly different relationship with Ofsted based around dialogue and advice that could improve practice. Whereas RIs expressed concern that Ofsted did not sufficiently consider the context under which progress has been achieved with individual children. This appears to reflect a concern that Managers are now more overtly being judged by Ofsted, as well as the homes more broadly.

"So, demonstrating very clear outcomes for those children is a long and slow process, they don't get fixed in the short term and there is pressure to show an improvement from a starting point."

(Responsible Individual)

"Ofsted have been much more advisory. Not in terms of telling us what to do but say well think about it in this sort of way, have you thought about this which has been beneficial I think in terms of for us as a service". *(Decision Maker)*

With greater clarity of expectations around standards, and more focused regulation via Ofsted, some stakeholders identified a greater potential of wider impacts, from staff confidence in their own practice through to positive impacts on the children and young people residing in children's homes. While the majority of stakeholders (across all stakeholder groups) struggled to tangibly evaluate the effects of the regulations on staff or those in care yet, some stakeholders (largely within umbrella organisations) claimed to have observed a hugely positive impact:

"It has identified how important it is to make sure that they are, the staff and manager, are getting regular feedback from children and

young people. It has finely tuned what they were doing already, but benefitting the children." (*Responsible Individual*)

"Children have benefited, [homes] being able to respond to children's wishes and feelings in a much more identifiable way."
(*Umbrella Organisation*)

More broadly, one LA Commissioning Manager commended the Regulations for offering a formalised approach to recruitment which enabled organisations to review both the supervision and training of staff: they were pleased that it was now a requirement for staff to be trained to a specific level. Furthermore, since the implementation of the regulations, 'bank staff'⁷ were considered to have been vetted more intensively and incorporated more seamlessly into the core team to promote a more consistent and rounded level of support than was previously the case.

"Bank staff have been incorporated into the core team, rather than just using people as and when they need them. This offers more consistency to young people, rather than everybody coming in and out, it is more like a family approach." (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

One additional impact that could be seen positively or negatively was the perceived greater autonomy that the Regulations gave children's homes around referrals. Specifically, the Regulations were seen to have enabled Managers to be more discerning about which young people they accept, leading several stakeholders (LA Commissioning Managers and RIs) to acknowledge that homes are turning away children with more complex needs because homes perceived there to be an increased risk of Ofsted penalising them (due to their relatively higher levels of absenteeism).

"There is a cycle, providers who are good and outstanding are nervous about taking more complex young people because they are worried about the long-term effect on their business if they require improvement." (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

"I think now it is brought in more robustness, that the managers have the ability to say 'I am not accepting that placement' and there

⁷ Bank staff traditionally refers to a pool of people an employer can call on as and when work becomes available. The employer is not obligated to provide work for these staff, nor are they obliged to accept it.

is a course of action that they can now.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

While there was almost universal recognition that greater accountability and clarity around the standards of management and practice was a positive development, many stakeholders were also acutely aware that this also presented significant challenges for the sector.

Firstly the additional level of accountability and scrutiny placed on Children’s Home Managers was seen to significantly increase the pressure and reduce the relative attractiveness of the role for both current and future Managers. In an environment which can be challenging and unpredictable, this increased accountability was seen by several Decision Makers, Umbrella Organisations and RIs as having the potential to increase the stress and anxiety for all members of staff. This was largely because of uncertainties around how they would be judged by Ofsted and holding accountability for aspects of the homes performance that were less in their control (e.g. children’s behaviour or staff retention). Greater clarity around monitoring and evaluation requirements (i.e. what data should be collected) and confidence that contextual information would be accounted for in Ofsted inspections were both felt as ways in which this anxiety could be reduced. As it stands these stakeholders reported that the Manger role had become significantly less attractive.

“Without many of them, not all of them anyway, having access or easy access to that knowledge and evidence and experience, this has increased anxiety for them.” (*Umbrella Organisation*)

“How do you tangibly evidence in terms of how the home is improving and how the child is improving? The concern is that children may only make a small progress e.g. smiling - and this is difficult to capture in a management system.” (*Decision Maker*)

“I think there’s probably a lot more anxiety, particularly around staff retention and that continuity of care for the young people.” (*Decision Maker*)

An allied point made by two Decision Makers was that the volume of paperwork had increased. In one instance this had resulted in needing to expand the team to manage the additional administrative requirements. While there was recognition of the importance of having a clear evidence trail, the requirements were perceived to have increased substantially (e.g. health & safety checks, fire checks, workforce plans, business development plans, continuity plans etc. for every child) reducing the amount of time Managers were able to spend practicing. There is a risk that the Children’s Home Manager becomes more of an administrative post than hands-on management of

children, which is what motivated many managers to move into the post in the first instance.

“There is so much paperwork and the manager is responsible for all of it. It is frustrating, for 90% of the paperwork will hardly every be reviewed or used.” (*Decision Maker*)

"The managers are not managing, they are just being administrators; to spend time with children they have to work a lot longer hours than they are contracted to do." (*Decision Maker*)

Given the level of responsibility placed on Managers, one LA Commissioning Manager identified that Homes could struggle to find cover for Managers at times of leave or illness, due to other staff not wanting to act-up and hold that level of accountability. Another LA Commissioning Manager also identified ambiguities in the Regulations that both LAs and Children’s Home Managers were felt to struggle with, for example:

“What happens when the Manager goes on holiday, does there have to be someone with L5 to cover them? It doesn’t actually sort of clarify whether there needs to be a deputy at L5 which is the nitty-gritty of what we need to know...” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

3.4 Attributes and skills of a manager

Stakeholders were asked to describe what makes a good residential Children’s Home Manager. Overall, there was a consensus across those interviewed that ultimately a Manager must feel passionately about the children in their care and be driven by a desire to make a difference in their lives. Stakeholders felt that good Managers need to be able to look beyond the behaviour of the children in their care and to have a sense of what is possible, rather than just a sense of what is wrong.

“The highest priority is for managers to have a good understanding of children, empathy, what being a parental figure means...” (*Decision Makers*)

“Being child-focused is the priority, managers need to understand a child’s situation and circumstance. He should be able to listen to what the child wants and needs and be able to communicate with that child.” (*Responsible Individual*)

“Want a manager and a team who has a child at their heart, who can make a house a home and a place where children would rather be than run away.” (*Umbrella Organisation*)

Stakeholders also identified the following attributes as ideal for a Manager to display: resilience; ability to accept criticism; flexibility; inspiring; experience; a sense of calm; creativity; have good communication skills; intellectual curiosity; tolerance; ability to delegate; organised and methodical and a good sense of humour. Some experience of ‘working on the shop floor’ was considered to be invaluable by Decision Makers when managing staff teams in various situations. Effective Managers need to be able to view things from a child’s perspective to ensure that they put the best solutions and mechanisms in place to help and support each individual child.

“You cannot teach a manager to care, but you can teach them management skills, the management standards and how to manage an Ofsted inspection” (*Decision Makers*)

“If you expect to finish at 5pm every day it is not a job that you can do because children in our homes are here 24 hours a day, so the role is 24/7 to some extent.” (*Decision Makers*)

One LA Commissioning Manager highlighted that Children’s Home Managers needed to lead by example and demonstrate to staff how to behave to achieve the best possible outcomes for the young people in their care. The Managers who were admired were those who value learning and development and are prepared to lead from the front. Some Decision Makers and LA Commissioning Managers felt that Managers have been given more autonomy and responsibility because of the Leadership and Management Standard, and are more involved in the recruitment process of staff. As a result, Managers must consider the mix of their staff team and focus on team members’ strengths and diversity and ensure that there is a balance of experience and personalities across this team. Within this staff team, it is helpful to have a supportive and competent Deputy to enable a manager to fulfil his/her tasks:

“They [Managers] should demonstrate the values that they believe in through their own behaviour.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

“You need a deputy to potentially complement the manager, to make sure that you have a good combination.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

There is an interesting disconnect here between the skills and attributes that are most valued about Managers - which have a high degree of practice-focus - and the skills that are emphasised in the new Regulations which focus on the more strategic and administrative requirements on Managers. Several stakeholders’ expressed concerns

that managers are judged by Ofsted inspectors on the evidence, bureaucracy and paperwork rather than these critical skills and attributes. In this sense there is a cultural shift that may need to happen within the sector, and a need for training, for Managers to embrace and perform their full range of responsibilities.

“I have seen some fantastic care home managers who love working with children and are doing everything they can to support a young person, but they get a poor Ofsted because the paperwork has not been dotted and crossed.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

3.5 Training and qualifications

Stakeholders were asked to provide their views on the current core training programmes on offer, and the allied Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications. The new qualifications for those working in residential childcare from 5th January 2015 comprised: the Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare (England); and the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management for Residential Childcare (England)⁸.

Universally, across all stakeholder types, there was a consistent feedback that the training provided to support staff and Managers to respectively achieve Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications was adequate for developing a sound theoretical knowledge-base. As a pre-requisite, stakeholders believed that staff (both practitioners and Managers) need to come with the right attitude and soft skills. The Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications were seen to provide a basis on which staff would need to regularly build more experiential and specialist skills (recommendations included attachment theory, restraint, learning disabilities, sexual exploitation, safeguarding and report writing for Managers etc.). In and of themselves the training to achieve these qualifications were seen to fall short at developing the range of skills, particularly at Level 3, that are needed to be effective in role.

“I think the idea that any off the peg qualifying level training would be enough to do the job is naïve.” (*Training Organisation*)

⁸ These qualifications replaced:

- The Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce with the children’s social care pathway; and
- The Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People’s Services with the children and young people’s residential management pathway.

"It feels like it [Level 5 qualification] is pitched at aspiring managers." (*Responsible Individual*)

"It [level 5 qualification] does not equip a manager, but it highlights their potential." (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

"I can have someone who is Level 5 and be a poor manager and I could have someone who doesn't have a Level 5 and be an amazing manager. So much of the learning is on the job." (*Decision Maker*)

Whilst the Level 5 qualification includes mandatory units that are considered to be relevant, one Training Organisation suggested that managers were frustrated by the requirement to achieve this qualification, when often it is the equivalent to other (Social Care and Management) qualifications that they already held. Some Managers were therefore seen to consider it to be a waste of time and resource.

Training Organisations also expressed some concerns that Managers have been reluctant to get on board and complete the qualification, particularly those working in the sector for many years. This was matched by some confusion about how to 'map across' previous qualifications and experience, and there were some concerns about inconsistent interpretation. Managers may feel that they already have the necessary skillset and experience, but the reality is that, without this qualification, this stakeholder felt they would struggle to progress within the sector.

"Level 5 has caused major consternation with most of the managers, they already have a social care qualification and management qualification at Level 4. They [Managers] don't understand why they need to do the same thing, which is equivalent to the qualification they already hold. The only difference is the leadership element, so there is no enthusiasm to do it..." (*Training Organisation*)

In a similar vein to the Level 5 qualification, there were concerns expressed across stakeholder groups that Level 3 qualifications should not be seen as providing staff with the range of skills needed to perform their role within a home adequately (particularly around therapeutic principles). Instead they serve as a useful theoretical basis for staff and one which helps them to understand the range of agencies which can be involved in a child's care. There was an overwhelming consensus that a member of staff needs to be on a continual developmental journey beyond the Level 3 qualification, which should involve a range of training courses that equips staff to manage both complex situations and the young people that they are faced with on a day to day basis.

“Just giving someone a qualification and the theory is definitely not enough. They need a lot more than that. And it needs to be continual.” (*Decision Maker*)

“Once they finish their probation and have done 2 years, we don’t have anything in place that promotes advance childcare beyond the basics.” (*Decision Maker*)

“So we appreciate that there is a training package which the staff are expected to do, but I think it could be strengthened about how much the organisation invests in its training offer as opposed to have the staff received this qualification, yes, tick, there we go if you like.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

“Level 3 does not always work terribly well; we have struggled to make it work in special schools. We are wary of any qualification that looks at something that you sign off as competency, as it doesn’t develop you as a free thinker.” (*Umbrella Organisation*)

Despite the concerns about the Level 3 qualification, there were a small number of stakeholders – predominantly Training Organisations - who gave positive feedback on the qualification. They felt that it provided staff with a good level of knowledge and an understanding of what is required of them. Furthermore, one Training Organisation suggested that there was flexibility in the modules which enabled staff to tailor their qualification to reflect their own professional needs:

“There are lots of optional units which means it can be tailored to the individual to meet their own needs. Three are optional modules which depend on the manager, individual and young people in care i.e. if someone has a disability, then they will select the relevant module to help them cater for it.” (*Training Organisation*)

“I believe the minimum Level 3 standard is a good thing. I am an educationalist and believe that all learning is good learning. I believe very strongly in competency based awards and think that Level 3 meets the needs of the workforce and the children. Ignorance in this sector is dangerous.” (*Training Organisation*)

One Training Organisation however expressed concerns that the flexibility of the Level 3 qualification requirement can be a ‘double-edged sword’. The Regulations were seen to provide welcome autonomy for Managers to use their discretion as to whether a Level 3 qualification was needed. However, in part due to the significant cost of training, there could be an incentive for Managers to ‘justify’ not training all staff to a Level 3 standard

because this was either not felt necessary for the role or because they already hold equivalent level skills.

“I think they [qualifications] should be subsidised wherever possible so the cost of training would not be prohibitive to providers developing services.” *(LA Commissioning Manager)*

Training Organisations reported that funding cuts had impacted on training since the regulations came into effect. For example, in one local authority the assessment centre has closed and hence they only recruit those who already have a Level 3 qualification as the alternative of putting new staff through an apprenticeship takes too long.

The majority of Decision Makers and RIs accepted and supported the timescales for achieving the qualifications, reflecting the fact that most organisations were felt to have been ensuring that staff had acquired their Level 3 before the regulations came into effect. Only one Training Provider suggested that there is a general feeling that two years is not long enough to allow staff to complete their training and suggested three years as a more realistic alternative. Furthermore, one Training Organisation expressed some concern that some long term staff may struggle with the academic requisite for this qualification despite the fact that they are very competent in their roles:

“There will be some long term staff who will not get their Level 3, even though they do a lot of the day to day work and they would have been highly skilled at working with children and young people.” *(Umbrella Organisation)*

3.6 Career progression

There was a consensus among the stakeholders interviewed that there are many opportunities for staff progression through children’s homes, if staff are dedicated and passionate. It is both viable and encouraged to progress from a support worker through to a management role, with continual training in place within the majority of providers to support this progression.

This career pathway may be more restricted in smaller care homes, where there is less scope for progression. Overall, staff were felt to need clear signposting to navigate their way through the system, with the right support in place from members of the team or managers who lead from the front. It was recommended, predominantly by Decision Makers, that Managers need to be proactive, to offer both guidance and mentoring to their team to encourage progression.

“I need to get staff specialisms and get them to feel they are actually achieving something with the children.” *(Decision Maker)*

“All our staff have a personal development plan although we recognise that some people will never want to move up and we absolutely respect that.” (*Decision Maker*)

Further to this, as an RI explained, it benefits the whole sector (including the local authority) to offer staff clear career progression and job opportunities as this encourages key members of staff to remain within the sector:

“I try to keep good working in my service area, so I encourage their progression. I would like them to stay in our City Council because it is a benefit to the Council, so it is about providing all different kinds of development job opportunities for our residential workers.”
(*Responsible Individual*)

Although stakeholders acknowledged there was a clear pathway to progression, many also expressed concerns over recruitment and staff retention across the sector. Those interviewed raised issues such as: attracting individuals into the sector can be very difficult, given that staff are paid the minimum wage and there has been a pay freeze in place for more established staff; that homes can be positioned in isolated locations; that staff are at risk from verbal and physical abuse from some of the young people in their care; that the role requires commitment beyond standard working hours; and that the management role now involves a formalised set of responsibilities that some staff may feel less comfortable with.

“It is not a sustainable career once you have got a family. We need to give care workers the same status as social workers.” (*Umbrella organisation*)

“What we hear is people saying this is where real social work happens, where real change for children happens, however to progress my career I need to go somewhere else. That is sad.”
(*Umbrella Organisation*)

The challenge appears to be most acute at either end of the seniority spectrum. At entry-level one Training Organisation reported that there no clear route of entry into the sector, where even graduates can struggle as they are unable to demonstrate the required competencies, and even if graduates are encouraged into the sector, there was a view from one RI that they may not intend to pursue a career in children’s homes but instead intend to work in the sector on a short-term basis to enhance their CV. At more of a senior level we have already highlighted how changes to the role of a Children’s Home Manager have made it a less attractive proposition for many senior practitioners. However, in some instances there is simply not the progression opportunities to management within certain homes or authorities.

“We go to Open Days at universities to show it is a positive choice. But sometimes we have to accept that we may attract student social workers who just want to do it for a short while to widen their portfolio.” (*Responsible Individual*)

“Sometimes in local authorities there is nowhere to go so people leave because there is not an opportunity for them to progress. We have had a deputy who left as there were no management opportunities so they moved in to the commercial sector.” (*LA Commissioning Manager*)

“My peers are retiring, dying and giving up, there needs to be a new cohort.” (*Umbrella Organisation*)

4. Key messages from Phase 3 Stakeholder research

Response to the Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards

There has been a largely universal positive acceptance of the Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards, with an acknowledgement that these have been an improvement on the National Minimum Standards and are largely perceived to have formalised 'best practice' across the sector. The expectations amongst stakeholders were that many Homes would already be acting in accordance with the Standards, and as such it would have minimal impact on the sector. However, the one key difference in the Regulations and Standard was the explicit accountability placed on Managers for performance, oversight and outcomes. While the structure of the Regulations and Standards supports greater ownership among RIs and Children's Home Managers, it could be argued that wider buy-in and integration of the Regulations had been hindered by a vagueness around the evidence required to demonstrate compliance and an ambiguity around some of the details of implementing the Standards.

Impact of the Regulations and Quality Standards

The Regulations have been welcomed for empowering Children's Home Managers and giving them greater credibility, professional identity and responsibility. For the sector, the new Regulations and Standards are seen to serve as an important framework for standardising good practice. However, this more explicit accountability, and the individual scrutiny and responsibility this places upon Managers also has implications for how Managers experience their role. In particular there are heightened expectations in relation to evidencing the work undertaken within Homes, and the impact of this on children and young people. The lack of prescriptiveness in the Regulations around what constitutes suitable evidence has resulted in some anxiety for Managers. The additional pressures could also have a negative impact on the recruitment of prospective candidates into management roles across the sector.

There is the potential for the Regulations and Standards to impact on staff, particularly in relation to standardising a basic level of skills and competencies, and upon children and young people in the homes. At the time of this research there had been limited impact identified by stakeholders but there was recognition that this would take longer to become evident.

Qualities and attributes of a successful manager

Overall, there is a consensus across all stakeholder groups that ultimately a Children's Home Manager must feel passionately about making an impact and difference to the children in their care. Managers need to be able to view situations from a child's perspective and be driven by a desire to improve each child's options and opportunities. The 2015 Regulations have neither helped nor hindered the potential for Managers to develop these attitudes and attributes, however they have formalised the need for additional attributes in relation to leadership and critical thinking, and skills in gathering and utilising evidence.

Impact of the regulations and quality standards on training and qualifications

For many stakeholders, the requirement for staff to acquire the Level 3 qualification was not perceived to be an obstacle, as many organisations were already acting in accordance with this requirement as standard practice. There were some concerns voiced around how generic both the Level 3 and Level 5 management qualification were. While they provided a reasonable theoretical knowledge base they were not sufficient to qualify staff or Managers to operate effectively in role. All stakeholders emphasised the importance of continued professional development in conjunction with practical experience gained through performing a role 'on the ground'.

Impact of the regulations and quality standards on career progression

There was general consensus among stakeholders that there are wide variety of opportunities for staff progression within the children's home sector if staff are dedicated and passionate about their work. Stakeholders identified a range of factors influencing both recruitment and staff retention ranging from macro-level funding cuts through to specific challenges inherent in working within children's social care. It is essential that career pathways are communicated clearly to all staff (including potential recruits into the sector), and that staff who show an aptitude for management are supported to progress down this route, as career opportunities will encourage them to remain within the sector.

Annex: Topic Guides

Phase 3 – Stakeholder Topic Guide

Introduction

(a) Researcher to introduce themselves.

(b) Reminder: Context and aims:

- TNS BMRB has been commissioned by the DfE to explore strategic stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of the new regulations and quality standards, with a specific focus on the leadership and management standard.
- The findings will be used to help identify positive learning for other homes, and to identify barriers or challenges which need to be addressed
- Altogether, we are speaking to 20 x stakeholders, from across the country, working across the sector
- We simply want to learn from your experience of working with children's homes and managers implementing the standards; and to understand your viewpoint on what is working well or less well; and what you consider to be the most significant challenges

(c) Reminder: Nature of the interviews

- The interviews will be confidential and our findings will be reported anonymously to the DfE. We will not name you or your place of work in our report.
- The interview will last no more than an hour – likely 45 minutes.
- I would like to record the interview, for accuracy - would that be OK? (It will allow me to focus on what you are saying rather than scribbling detailed notes.)

(d) Any questions/ concerns?

SECTION ONE: Background

Participant Background

- Briefly describe job title, role(s) and responsibilities
- Explain their involvement with children's homes/relationships with managers of children's homes
- Length of time working in position
- Brief overview of how came to work in care/children's homes sector
- Experience of working in children's home sector/current day to day experience

- Types of children's homes/number of children's homes they work with/general needs of young people working with?
- How closely they work with children's homes managers?

SECTION TWO: Planning for implementation

Now moving on to the regulations themselves, I'd like to take you back to the period before they came into force (prior to April of this year).

1. Can you remember your **initial reactions** to the new standards?
 - a. What did you think of them?
 - b. How did they differ to what had come before?
 - c. Why?
2. How familiar were you specifically with **the leadership and management standard** (regulation 13) of the new standards?
3. What impact did you **think** regulation 13 might have on the managers/managing staff at the children's homes that fall within your remit?
 - a. What did you think would be the main barriers/obstacles at the time of introduction?
 - b. How did you think you would need to support managing staff to implement the leadership and management standard?
4. And what impact did you **think** the leadership and management regulation might have on the **types of children's homes** that fall within your remit?
5. Did this specific regulation have an **impact** on your day to day activities/roles/responsibilities?
6. **How** did you go about assessing the implication of this specific regulation for you, managers, your staff and the young people?
7. What did you **conclude** at that point, in terms of the changes that would be required, or challenges that you might face?

SECTION THREE: Implementation in practice

Now that they've been in force for six months, I'd like to find out more about the progress you've made and any obstacles you've faced, in seeking to meet the standards.

8. Firstly, overall what, if anything, do you think has **changed** in the children's homes that you work with, directly in response to the **management and leadership standard** regulation?

FOR EACH CHANGE MENTIONED, PROBE:

- a. Was this specific to one manager in one home or consistent across all the homes that you work with?
 - b. Why, and how, did management of the homes decide to make this change? [If not already covered above]
 - c. How did the manager go about it?
 - d. How straightforward was it to put into practice?
 - e. What **helped**, or made the process easier?
 - f. How well would you say it has worked? What difference has it made?
 - g. Do you think this would have work well in other homes? Why?
9. Has anything [else] proved **tricky** or **problematic**? If so, what?
- a. Why do you think this was the case?
 - b. Were managers able to overcome this?
 - c. If so, how?
10. Do you think there been anything else managers **would have liked to do** in light of the new regulation, which hasn't been possible?
- a. Could you explain why?
 - b. Will this change, in future?
11. [If not already mentioned] We know that some homes have found [PROBE ON THEMES LINKED TO REGULATION 13 THAT HAVE NOT BEEN MENTIONED E.G. LEADERSHIP; PLANNING; QUALITY OF CARE; MONITORING & EVALUATION] particularly challenging – but you haven't mentioned it as yet. Can you tell me a bit about how managers in the homes you work with go about meeting [THIS ELEMENT OF THE STANDARD] REPEAT FOR EACH POINT IF THE REGULATION NOT MENTIONED
12. **Overall**, how would you describe the **impact** of the new leadership and management standard on the managers of children's homes, so far?
- a. [If not clear] What about the impact on **staff** in the children's homes you work with?
 - b. [If not clear] What about the impact on the **young people** in the children's homes you work with?

SECTION FOUR: Children's Home Management

13. What do you think makes a good **RCH Manager**?
14. What **skills, experience, attributes and qualities** do you think homes should look for when recruiting a home manager?
15. And of these, which of these skills, experience, attributes and qualities would be high, medium and low priority?

16. What **different skills** do they (i.e. as a manager) need within a team in order to build a team that complements each other?
17. How as a manager do they ensure the right balance of skills within their staff team?
18. How do you think the **new leadership and management standard** has influenced leadership activity and approach over the past 6 months?
 - a. Changes to recruitment?
 - b. Training?
 - c. Mentoring?
 - d. Supervision?
 - e. Culture within the homes?
19. In your experience, how are managers informed of **strategic changes** required within their homes?
20. And how were managers **informed about the new regulations** and advised how to implement them?

SECTION FIVE: Training and Qualifications

21. What do you think about the **current training programmes** on offer - core training - whether Level 3 for staff or Level 5 for management, induction and ongoing training and any additional options?
22. How well do you feel the current training **equips management** to work across the children's homes that you work with? If familiar with L3/ 5 probe views on any gaps/ improvement they perceive
23. And how far do you **think** the current management training programme is catering to all the skills required?
24. Do you think there are any **gaps** in management training? What improvements if any would you recommend?
25. What **impact** do you think the new leadership and management standard has had on training within children's homes?
 - a. Have you seen any changes in approach to training management or staff over the last 6 months since the introduction of the new regulations?
 - b. What will be the impact of these qualifications on staff retention?
 - c. What is your view on qualification vs. experience – how relevant/important do you feel the qualifications are?

- d. Do you think that these qualifications will bring an improvement in care?
Why do you say that?
26. How feasible will it be for managers to ensure that all staff within children's home have the correct training within a specific time frame?
- a. What will be the impact of these 'deadlines' on management?
 - b. What support is required to ensure that these 'deadlines' are adhered to?
 - c. How realistic are these deadlines? What are the significant barriers to complying with the 'deadlines'?

SECTION FIVE: Staff progression and career pathways

27. What **opportunities** are there for staff progression/career development (e.g. can staff be promoted, receive more money, earn other rewards within the home or do they have to leave to progress)?
28. What your views on **development pathways**?
- a. What encourages/hinders staff progression?
 - b. Based on your experience, how do you think the management of children's homes could overcome any barriers to staff progression?
 - c. Will qualifications assist or act as a barrier to this?

SECTION SIX: Commissioning managers *only*

29. **In your experience**, have there been any differences in the implementation of the leadership and management standard between LA Children's homes and privately owned children's homes?
30. Thinking about when you **commission or invest in services**, what are your priorities? PROBE: If they mention Ofsted ratings and costs, ask if there are any other factors that impact on this decision-making process?
31. And of these, which of these factors that you have mentioned would be high, medium and low priority in this decision-making process?
32. Has the leadership and management standard had an impact on the way in which you **allocate your budgets or investment**?
33. Do you think the leadership and management standard will have an impact on the way in which you **allocate your budgets or investment** in the future? Why is that?

SECTION SEVEN: Training managers *only*

34. Can you share the details of any **literature or other sources of information** that focus on different managerial models or leadership qualities that we could potentially use to inform and broaden our understanding of children's home management?

SECTION EIGHT: Future progress and reflections

35. Thinking specifically about the leadership and management standard, which element would you say poses the **greatest challenge, going forward**?
36. What, if any, **additional support** might be helpful with this?
37. What, if any, **barriers** need to be addressed, to facilitate further progress?
38. What **advice** would you give to **others working in this sector in your position**, based on your experience?
39. And what **advice** would you give to **home managers**, based on your experience?
40. Finally, is there **anything we haven't covered**, which you think is important to understanding your experience of implementing the leadership and management standard, and the challenges faced?

Thank you, reiterate assurances around confidentiality & reporting, and close.



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