

The College of Social Work Children and Families Bill Joint Survey with the NSPCC

The College of Social Work (TCSW) is the centre of excellence for social work and provides resources to its members to uphold and strengthen standards of professional practice. It holds the professional standards for social work, supports the professional development of social workers, and campaigns on issues relating to social work policy and practice. An independent membership organisation, The College provides quality assurance for initial and post-qualifying education through its training and education endorsement scheme.

Like colleges for other professions, our role is to:

- Hold the standards for the profession and support and enable our members to meet those standards.
- Be the voice of the profession to policy makers and the media, ensuring that our members speak up for the profession.
- Be led by and accountable to our members – the profession. We do this in order to improve the outcomes for the people served by our profession.

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Survey

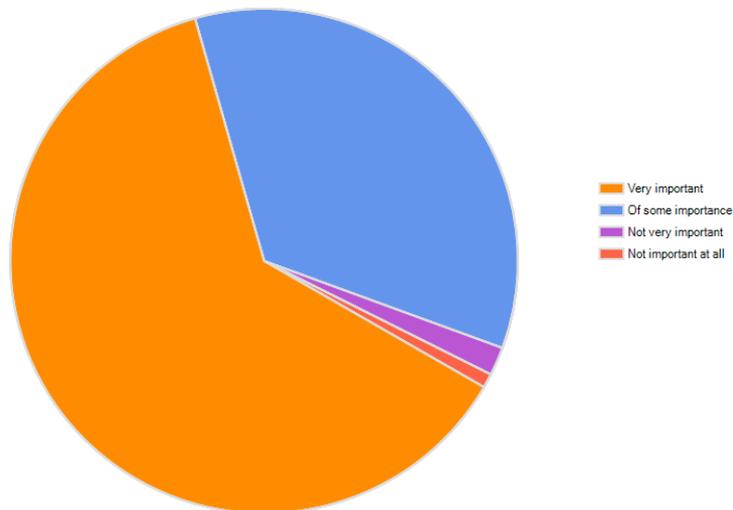
- Social workers overwhelming regard age as important when determining the most appropriate form of permanence for looked after children. While social workers recognise the suitability of fostering for adoption for younger children – they believe it is unlikely or very unlikely to result in a good outcome for a child who is aged 10 or over. The Government's focus on fostering for adoption is therefore not meeting the needs of all children in the care system.
- The majority of respondents regard the current provision for adoption as good or very good, however have concerns over the provision of support for kinship care and special guardianships – this imbalance needs to be urgently addressed to meet the needs of all children in the care system.
- While the overwhelming majority regard working directly with children before recommending a permanence arrangement as very important – over a quarter do not spend any time with children. Tis focus on administration needs to be urgently addressed (we have some very good quotes to back this up)
- Social workers have a broad understanding of the 'due regard to ethnicity' provision – this is not just about matching, but ensuring that prospective adopters /carers have the resilience to respond to questions of ethnicity, culture and religion relating to identity.
- The majority of social workers are already working to the 26 week time limit and have views on its application so far (build up a series of points from the comments)
- Returning home from care – majority regard it as sufficient or poor – ditto provision of training.

- Early intervention – majority regard as sufficient or poor – however majority have seen improvements over the last three years – TCSW believes that the Government has a duty to connect the issues affecting the child protection system with the care system.

To what extent would you regard the age of the child as a factor when determining the most appropriate form of permanence for looked after children?

- Very important: 63 per cent
- Of some importance: 35 per cent

To what extent would you regard the age of the child as a factor when determining the most appropriate form of permanence for looked after children?



Thinking about the best outcomes for children, in your experience how suitable is fostering for adoption for each of the following age groups?

- Children under the age of 1: 80 per cent respondents believe is very likely to result in a good outcome for the child
- Children between the ages of 1 and 4: 96 per cent respondents believe is likely or very likely to result in a good outcome for the child
- Children between the ages of 10 and 14: 63 per cent of respondents believe is unlikely or very unlikely to result in a good outcome for the child
- Young people between the ages of 15 and 17: 79 per cent of respondents believe is unlikely or very unlikely to result in a good outcome for the child.

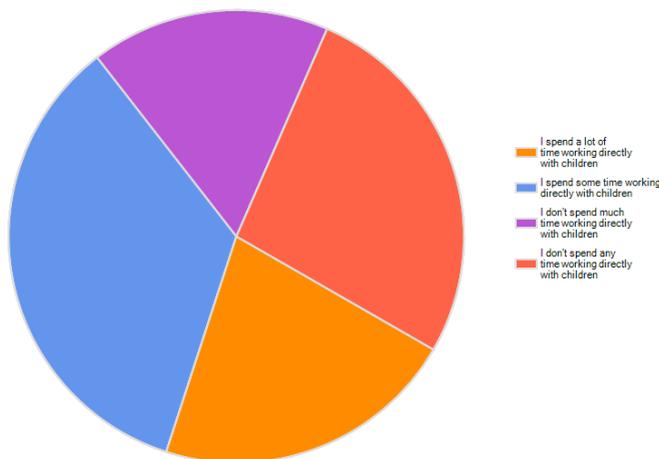
How would you rate the provision of support given in your area to children and their families and/or carers placed in each of the following permanence arrangements?

- Adoption: 40 per cent good and 20 per cent very good
- Special guardianships: 35 per cent sufficient and 33 per cent poor
- Long term fostering: 40 per cent good and 38 per cent good
- Kinship care: 34 per cent poor and 33 per cent sufficient
- Return to birth parents: 35 per cent sufficient and 25 per cent poor

How much time do you spend working directly with children before recommending a permanence arrangement?

- I spend a lot of time working directly with children: 22 per cent
- I spend some time working directly with children: 35 per cent
- I don't spend much time working directly with children: 17 per cent
- I don't spend any time working directly with children: 27 per cent

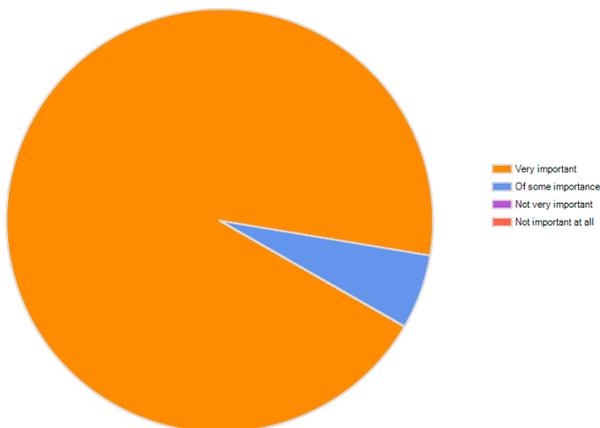
How much time do you spend working directly with children before recommending a permanence arrangement?



How important do you think it is to spend time working directly with children before recommending a permanence placement?

- Very important: 94 per cent
- Of some importance: 6 per cent

How important do you think it is to spend time working directly with children before recommending a permanence placement?



Responses:

“It is crucial that the allocated social worker is able to undertake direct work with children on their caseload to understand their individual personalities and needs in order to identify the correct

match/placement type, as well as to help the child/young person in preparation for permanency.”

“I think it is vital that the child's view is listened to, and taken into account. Having just retired after 34 years in childcare social work, I continue to be dismayed by evidence at panels of disruptions because children were not asked their views regarding their future.”

“It is crucial to understanding what a child's hopes, dreams, fears and trigger issues are and these are often not apparent superficially.”

“It would be really difficult to establish how each individual child young person would react to a permanent placement or the prospect of a permanent placement without getting to know them well and establishing what their needs are and how they respond to situations and events.”

“A permanence plan is the equivalent to the blueprint for that child's life from the point of placing up their majority. Social Workers therefore have a moral as well as professional obligation to ensure that any permanence planning takes each child's individual needs fully into consideration.”

“Age appropriate information for children provided within a social work relationship is essential to enable them to ask questions, understand their situation and express their wishes and feelings. Direct work enables a full assessment of a child's attachments to immediate and wider family and friend members. It gives them a story of their life on which they can build. Communication in words, pictures, observation are all vital.”

“Even if the child is very young or a toddler, time spent with the child, and the various stakeholders is not wasted, in fact I think often this part is rushed due to government / court / management pressures. When actually spending time at the placement to look at the settling in period, and the subtleties could often prevent breakdown in later years, also I think carers should often need to access a wider variety of support and have to attend 'support sessions' 4-6 to look at how they can manage placements especially of slightly older children / children who are placed together with more complex needs.”

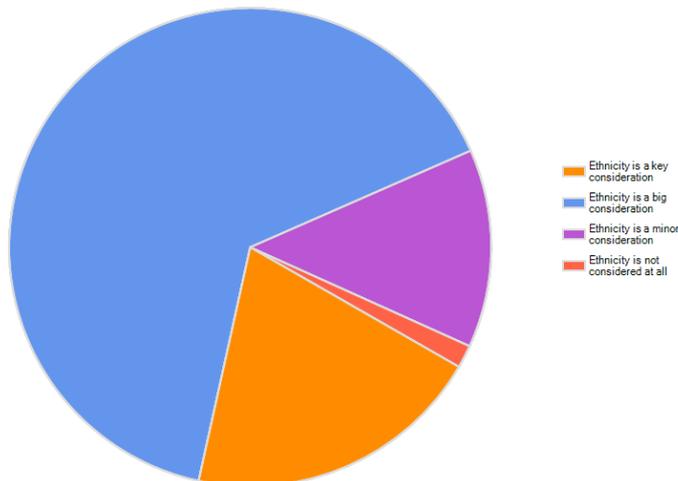
“Unfortunately due to time spent on the computer recording data and trying to keep up with performance targets I did not have enough time to spend with the children I work with. I recently left my job because of how dissatisfied I felt with the disservice this meant for the children and families I worked with.”

“It is important to get to know a child, even pre-verbal to understand their needs. Without this how can the most important decision that will affect that child for the rest of their life be made?”

To what extent does a child's ethnicity influence your decision when determining permanence arrangements for looked after children?

Ethnicity is a key consideration: 20 per cent
Ethnicity is a big consideration: 65 per cent.
Ethnicity is a minor consideration: 13 per cent

To what extent does a child's ethnicity influence your decision when determining permanence arrangements for looked after children?



The Government is proposing repealing the requirement to give due consideration to ethnicity when placing a child for adoption. What do you think of the proposals?

Mixed response: 35 per cent were somewhat concerned because they thought the proposals could negatively affect outcomes for these children; on the other hand 31 per cent were somewhat supportive because they thought the proposals could improve outcomes for these children.

"I think that in reality our practice is that we look wider than just a child's ethnic and cultural needs."

"Positive understanding of a child's cultural identity is vital to their positive self image whilst growing up. This doesn't mean same ethnicity /culture placement but a positive and strong understanding of the child's individual culture and how to positively promote this."

"Ethnicity is important. However, given the shortage of families able to offer a similar ethnic match, sometimes you have to think laterally."

"The key phrase is 'due consideration', it is very important. Repealing would give lazy councils and professionals an excuse for not doing their jobs properly."

"This is a complex issue around which there are many myths beliefs and assumptions. Broadly I do not consider that a requirement to achieve an ethnic match is in itself a major cause of delay. However my experience in over 30 years of working with children and families is that placing black children with white carers tends not to have positive outcomes generally. This is not universally the case however and ethnicity itself is not the only factor."

"It really depends on the complexity of a child's ethnic background , demographic of area where child likely to be placed and impact on child's ability to form secure attachments if waiting for extended periods of time for exact match."

"I have previously placed a young person with a family who did not share the young persons ethnicity but the young person met the proposed carer and felt perfectly comfortable whereas the previously ethnically matched placement didn't suit the young person at all. The young person feedback that their experience of different cultural norms and habits was something which greatly

enriched their life and the family were able to learn something of the young persons culture too!"

"Ethnicity is a part of a child's individuality and identity. It should never be a bar to permanent placement, but attention must be paid to the implications of ethnicity and needs of a child throughout childhood and into young adulthood. Adopters must be supported to address the child's needs and resources provided by agencies. A failed adoption in teenage years is profoundly damaging."

"Ethnicity is not essential, but should not be ignored. It is a valid part of someone's identity. However while some families not part of the same ethnic group are aware and sensitive and don't feel rejected when a child explores into this aspect of their history and identity at a later time, others say they can manage, but further questioning can prove this may not be the case, and they need to think about it more."

"Current practice is to consider how well a proposed family can promote the ethnicity of the child - the selection of family is NOT governed by matching ethnicity however promotion and positive attitudes to ethnicity are important for positive development of identity."

"I think the government should focus on recruiting adopters from diverse backgrounds and consider how important ethnicity is for a child. I think placing children with adopters that are not a cultural match could have negative outcomes for a child's emotional well being."

"Its not just about race but about children being placed with people who really understand 'difference' and the impact of racism and prejudice. However, children should not languish in care just because we can't find a 'perfect' match."

"Very few Social Workers ever made a decision about placement based on a child's ethnicity. Most Social Workers I know will give significant consideration to 'how adopters will meet the cultural needs of a child'. I think the government repealing the requirement shows a lack of understanding on their part to the needs of children and overestimates how this was done in the past. I think the government are effectively trying to be managerialist where they should let Social Workers be trusted to asses and make decisions; as they say they will in other areas of child care."

"This is a step back. We will have future generations again with identity issues and placement breakdowns. It needs to be seriously considered with practitioners being creative. It should not be seen as a reason to not place children. I have seen this occur."

The Government is looking to put into legislation a 26-week time limit for child care proceedings. Has your organisation already put plans to incorporate this time limit in place?

- Yes: 62 per cent
- No: 11 per cent
- Unsure: 22 per cent

What consequences do you think a 26 week time limit for care proceedings will have for you?

"I hope that this will bring even sharper focus on the need for pre-proceedings planning and also for timely completion of tasks identified within the court/LAC process, thereby achieving more expedient outcomes for children. However I am concerned that there is a risk that due to the focus

on moving quickly, certain factors may not be duly considered, and that the court's scrutiny may not be as close. I feel that in this circumstance there should be a strengthening of IRO responsibilities/authorities/status to compensate for the reduced time spent in court."

"Time limit clearly focuses a case - however, if the matter is complicated, i.e.: multiple family members putting themselves forward, finding of fact on an injury, need for assessment of mental health or specific issue, 26 weeks can be limiting and does not allow for issues to be tested prior to disposal."

"Drug rehabilitation programs (primary, secondary and tertiary stages) can take up to 9 months. Parents then need to demonstrate they have ability to maintain abstinence whilst living in the community for a further 6 months minimum. How will this work?"

"It is good to have a guideline but it should not be rigidly followed if this jeopardises effective decision making and planning. Timescales should be monitored but flexibility is needed. Drift should be avoided but decisions should not be forced into a time frame."

"Our judges are practising it and it is leading to shorter assessment times - meaning not all checks and thinking through happens - and obsessing about time frames and not the child's needs!! There are some sensible ideas - not over-assessing parents with 3 different assessors, and not just going on forever as something new (but that doesn't need to be considered by the court) comes up, but at the moment the case almost must be closed before we take it to court and this won't work as families often only agree to work with us once in court. A time limit is good to structure proceedings, but not to limit thorough thinking of decisions about a child's life."

"It will be essential to undertake some of the 'exploring' prior to undertaking the court process my concern is that children will be left in vulnerable situations due to workload and capacity of individual teams as they will not want to miss these deadlines."

"Less directed work for the local authority. Children coming to long term teams with less settled care plans."

"Assessment is an on-going process, circumstances change and the time limit should not in itself become the goal. If it does then the child's welfare may cease to be paramount."

"I think LAs will be looking to place more children for adoption earlier. This could mean that members of the extended family are not explored fully as part of the assessment. I have been involved in the past supporting children / Young people with the trauma of adoption breakdowns and the realisation that not all kinship care options were considered fully by social workers before making adoption applications."

"Unless measures are taken to make the legislative process less adversarial and more focused on casework, the necessary direct work will give way to admin requirements, with an increase in inappropriate & disrupted placements."

"It will create a great deal of pressure and stress. These timescales are only possible with the right resources which include numbers of social workers and I fear that reports such as Child permanency Reports will suffer and time spent with children as social workers will be running around trying to get assessments completed."

"In my local authority, there are excellent resources and services that focus on prevention and

early intervention. In my experience the issues are likely to have become very entrenched and very concerning by the time that care proceedings are initiated. My experience of working alongside current care proceedings is that issues become protracted, the focus on the child becomes diluted and availability of court time and experts become dominant features in determining timescales.”

“Less time working with the family and more time pressures on social workers. - Better outcomes for young children as the timeframe suits their developmental needs better. # - Families will be in shock as for the most part, the reality of the situation does not hit home until we issue proceedings- even with all the front loading, it will still be a shock to them- no matter how clear the social worker is.”

In your experience, what is the likelihood of care proceedings lasting longer than the allotted 26 week time limit?

- Very likely: 33 per cent
- Likely: 41 per cent
- Unlikely 13 per cent
- Unsure: 11 per cent

The Government is also proposing an 8-week extension for child care proceedings which can be applied at the discretion of the judge. Can you envisage any particular circumstances where you would apply for an extension?

“Large sibling groups in which there are competing needs and different plans; complex finding of fact hearings where experts are required.”

“Where parents are undergoing residential rehab for long-term substance misuse problems and require a further testing period.”

“Assessments on family members requiring more work or if a rehab plan was to take place after a piece of work.”

“Completing Connected Person's assessments - there are times when a family member comes forward late in the proceedings and when checks are not back (medical, police, school) that we know are crucial.”

“Where relatives put themselves forward at the last minute.”

“Difficult to identify/prove emotional abuse cases may need further assessment/work/opportunities for both the parent and or the worker.”

“In particularly difficult circumstances where a child has perhaps a medical need which means a specialist placement needs to be sought. I also think that there is currently a problem where special guardianship orders are requested and these require a CRB check but these often take months to be issued and we would be hesitant to place children under SGO orders when there is no clear CRB so potentially this could be a reason for delay.”

“This may be required where particular specialist assessments are required / where a parent is in the early stages of responding well to intervention/ additional significant information comes to light.”

“As stated previously an 8 week extension would assist in respect of children who might be

rehabilitated to the care of their parents. It gives the parents a longer time to make any necessary changes and for the changes to start to be maintained.”

“Where alternative carers are put forward very late in the proceedings. While it will be made clear to parents that they need to come up with alternatives as early as possible, very few will do that until they realise that losing their children is becoming real for them. Very few Courts will actually rule out assessing alternative family and friends carers / prospective carers simply because they were put forward late.”

“To complete further assessments such as kinship assessments.”

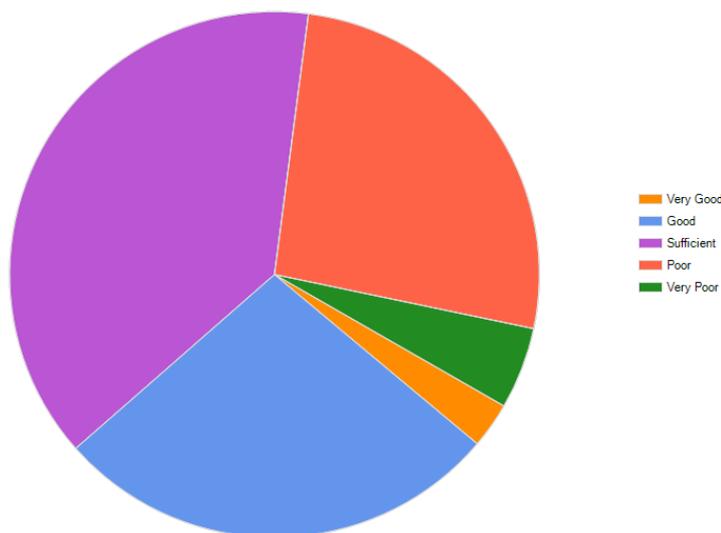
“Complex assessments including of kinship carers, possibly living abroad, time for parents to make and consolidate changes, to consider children's views including sibling relationships”

“In complex legal proceedings - where a raft of family members come forward to offer Kinship/Family and Friend placements.”

How would you rate the provision of support for children and their families who are returning home from care in your area?

- Very good: 3 per cent
- Good: 28 per cent
- Sufficient: 39 per cent
- Poor: 26 per cent
- Very poor: 5 per cent

How would you rate the provision of support for children and their families who are returning home from care in your area?

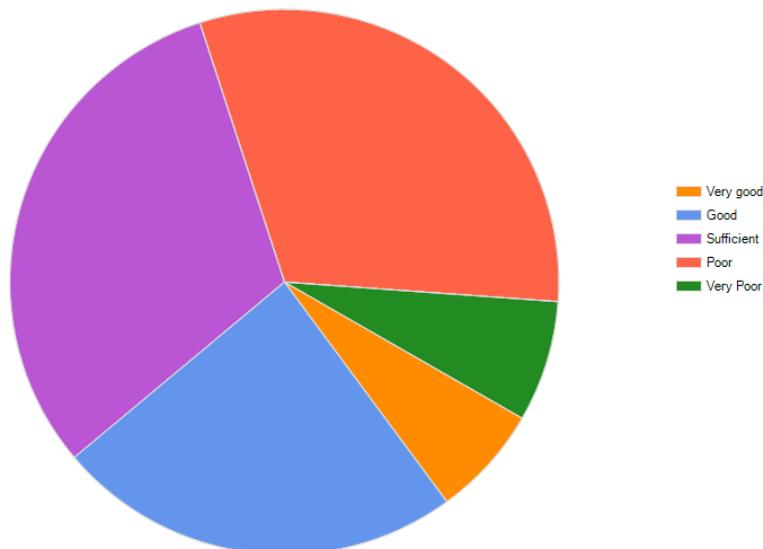


How would you rate the level of training and supervision you've received regarding assessing and supporting children returning to their birth family from care?

- Very good: 7 per cent
- Good: 24 per cent
- Sufficient: 31 per cent

- Poor: 31 per cent
- Very poor: 7 per cent

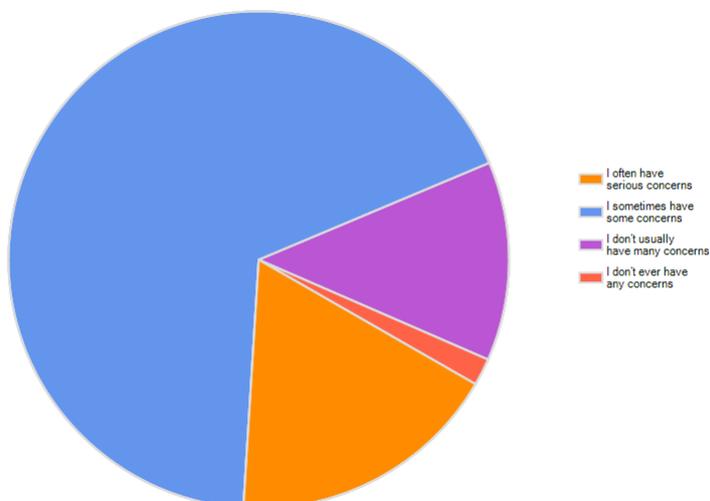
How would you rate the level of training and supervision you've received regarding assessing and supporting children returning to their birth family from care?



Do you ever have any concerns regarding the child's welfare when helping them return to their birth family from care?

- I often have serious concerns: 18 per cent
- I sometimes have some concerns: 67 per cent
- I don't usually have many concerns: 13 per cent
- I don't have any concerns: 2 per cent

Do you ever have any concerns regarding the child's welfare when helping them return to their birth family from care?



Responses:

"If the Local Authority Care Plan is insufficient I will raise this in my report prior to the final hearing and look for amendments to be made / a revised care plan to be submitted."

"Unless there has been a dramatic change in circumstances there are likely to be repeated questions."

"I only observe these areas of practice and think provision is very poor and training is very poor as this is not an outcome for children we consider enough - distracted as we are by child protection and risk assessment."

"The local authority is very tight with ensuring the support plan is within the SMART criteria."

"If there were concerns then I would have to consider if a return home was the right course of action. There will always be an element of risk involved in reunifying after any significant harm event or family breakdown but in my experience good planning and foresight should enable any reunification plan the best opportunity to succeed."

"It would be misguided not to be vigilant when any child returns home or is placed elsewhere. Complacency leads to professional neglect. Good support from and communication with other agencies is essential."

"There are some concerns due to the issues that have previously arisen, however it is vital to ensure the safety of the children and that relevant work is undertaken with the families to ensure safe transition."

"Sometimes everyone knows it is the wrong decision however you have absolutely no evidence to state otherwise it leaves you feeling very unsafe and uncomfortable, also management often see them as safer children after a few weeks back and so their is not enough time to visit, no family support workers available to assist with visiting etc."

"The LA are now beginning to use IROs to review such situations."

"Where there have been serious enough concerns to warrant removal, the disruption involved will inevitably make things even harder without massive support - which is not resourced."

"Obviously the parents could relapse in terms of any improvements they have made. It is important for the Local Authority to continue to provide the correct level of support."

"If the child has been separated from their family, they need support to be returned and reform that attachment - sometimes the care they have received has been 'better' than what they would have had at home - because the foster carers are provided with financial support and are usually financially secure, so they can provide the child with things they might not have had at home and this might then become an expectation. Especially if a child is removed S20 prior to assessments and placing before the court to meet the 26 week deadline."

"In my experience the level and intensity of support reduces quickly after the case is no longer under the scrutiny of the Courts."

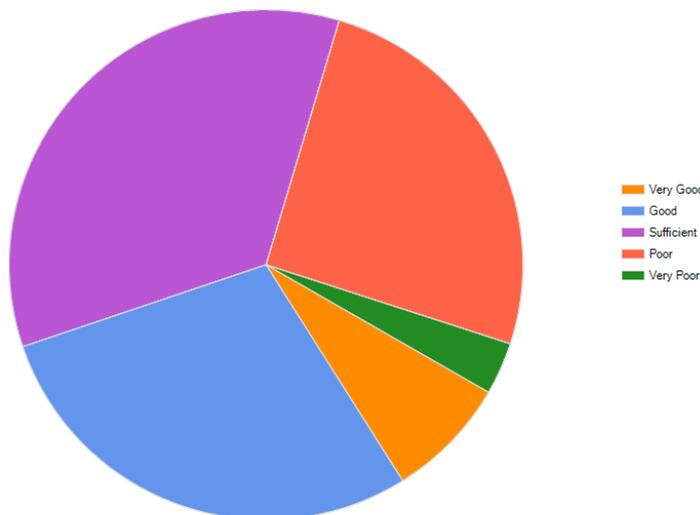
“It is difficult to assess the situation without returning the child despite assessments by various professionals. Also one has to work with the families’ and child’s grief at loss/ separation from the family and guilt of the parent(s) not being always able to offer the same amount of quality care that the other caregivers have given. If there are different standards of care the child can become confused. Also as foster carers have generous grants for caring for children plus grants for birthdays and Christmas etc. - the natural parents cannot always live up to this so there is potential for setting them up to fail.”

“It is the skills and training of staff that often concerns me. I trained excellent family support workers but was often concerned at the lack of support and supervision of them and the expectations of them in carrying out assessments (say of child development or risk) which a skilled professional needed to be carrying out.”

How would you rate the provision of early intervention services for children and their families in your area?

Majority of respondents rate as sufficient (34 per cent) and poor (26 per cent). 28 per cent rate as Good.

How would you rate the provision of early intervention services for children and their families in your area?



How has the provision for early intervention services for children and their families in your area changed in the last three years?

- Significantly improved: 24 per cent
- Slightly improved: 28 per cent
- Stayed the same: 16 per cent
- Slightly worsened: 19 per cent
- Significantly worsened: 14 per cent

How would you rate the quality of partnership working between social services and each of the following universal services in your area?

- Sure Start: Good 38 per cent, sufficient 34 per cent
- Early years support: Good 42 per cent, sufficient 35 per cent

- Health: Sufficient 38 per cent, good 34 per cent
- Health visitors: Good 37 per cent, sufficient 30 per cent
- Education: Sufficient 37 per cent, good 37 per cent