



# Reading in foster families

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## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	7
Executive Summary .....	8
Introduction and method.....	8
Literature review .....	8
Research findings .....	9
Conclusions and recommendations .....	12
1. Introduction and methodology.....	14
1.1 Aims of the research .....	14
1.2 Literature review .....	14
1.3 Online survey of foster carers.....	15
1.4 Online survey of foster children .....	17
1.5 Interviews with foster carers and foster children .....	17
1.6 Ethics and quality assurance .....	18
1.7 Survey respondents and interviewees.....	18
1.7.1 Foster carer survey demographics .....	18
1.7.2 Fostering arrangements (foster carer survey).....	20
1.7.3 Foster children (foster carer survey) .....	21
1.7.4 Children's survey demographics .....	22
1.7.5 Interviews .....	22
2. Literature review .....	24
2.1 An overview of fostering in the UK .....	24
2.2 Educational outcomes for children who are looked-after.....	25
2.3 Factors influencing the poorer educational outcomes of children who are looked-after .....	25
2.4 The importance of reading.....	26
2.4.1 Looked-after children and reading .....	27
2.4.2 The wider social and emotional benefits of reading for children in foster care ...	28
2.5 Reading interventions for children in foster care .....	29
2.6 Increasing reading amongst children who are looked-after.....	31
2.7 Summary .....	333
3. Research findings .....	35
3.1 Foster carers' reading habits .....	35
3.1.1 Current reading practices.....	35
3.1.2 Foster carers' reading practices as children.....	36
3.2 Foster children's reading habits .....	37
3.2.1 Frequency of reading .....	37

3.2.2 Materials read .....	39
3.3 Foster children's current reading level .....	41
3.4 Foster carers' influence on child's reading .....	42
3.5 Influence of fostering and care arrangements on a child's reading practices .....	43
3.6 Foster carers' views about reading .....	44
3.6.1 Factors influencing carers' views about reading .....	45
3.7 Foster children's views about reading .....	45
3.8 Benefits of reading .....	48
3.8.1 Other influences on perceived benefits of reading .....	50
3.9 Barriers and challenges to reading .....	51
3.9.1 Other influences on reading barriers and challenges .....	54
3.10 Support .....	55
3.10.1 Support received .....	55
3.10.2 Impact of received support .....	57
3.10.3 Future support .....	59
3.11 Summary of findings .....	59
4. Conclusion and recommendations .....	62
4.1. General conclusion .....	62
4.2. Recommendations .....	63
Appendix A - Survey demographics .....	68
Appendix B - Analysis plan .....	70
Appendix C- Summary of statistically significant findings .....	78
Appendix D - Detail of statistically significant findings .....	80



## List of tables

Table 1: Foster carers' ethnicity (survey) .....	19
Table 2: Reading level of foster child (reported by foster carer).....	41
Table 3: The benefits of reading for children .....	48
Table 4: Places providing support .....	56
Table 5: Type of support received.....	56
Table 6: usefulness of support .....	57
Table 1: Correlations between the frequency a foster carer reads certain materials and the frequency that their foster child reads the same material .....	80
Table 2: Independent-sample t-test results for gender and reading when younger .....	80
Table 3: Correlations between the frequency a foster carer reads with their foster child and perceived benefits of reading .....	80

## List of figures

Figure 1: Gender of foster carers.....	18
Figure 2: Employment status foster carers (survey) .....	19
Figure 3: Educational attainment of foster carers (survey).....	20
Figure 4: Types of fostering arrangements (survey) .....	21
Figure 5: Age of foster children.....	22
Figure 6. Reading interventions for looked-after children.....	29
Figure 7: Frequency foster carers read different materials.....	35
Figure 8: Foster carers reading practices as a child .....	36
Figure 9: Frequency foster carer reads with foster child .....	38
Figure 10: Frequency foster children read by themselves, with their carer, and with another member of their foster family .....	38
Figure 11: Frequencies carers read certain materials with their foster children .....	40
Figure 12: Materials foster children read .....	41
Figure 13: How reading made foster children feel .....	46
Figure 14: Factors that would help foster children to read more .....	46
Figure 15: Access to books to increase a foster child's reading .....	47
Figure 16: Reasons why foster children do not want to read more.....	47
Figure 17: Barriers to reading with their foster child (N = 344).....	52
Figure 18: Reasons why carers never or hardly ever read with their foster children (n=142).....	53
Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents living in England by region.....	68
Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents living in Wales by region .....	68
Figure 3: Breakdown of respondents living in Scotland by region.....	69
Figure 4: Breakdown of respondents living in Northern Ireland by region.....	69



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction and method

NCB were commissioned by BookTrust in June 2016, in order to explore reading in foster families and how **carers across the United Kingdom can be better supported to engage in reading with their children**.

The main research objectives were to understand how foster carers currently support their children to engage with reading, how this may be affected by other factors (e.g. region, age, personal experience, foster carers' experience), and what additional help could be given to foster carers to increase this.

In order to do this, we carried out the following:

- A detailed literature review to understand what previous research has shown about reading in foster families.
- An online survey of foster carers ( $N = 598$ ) and foster children ( $N = 35$ )<sup>1</sup> across the UK. Descriptive and inferential statistics<sup>2</sup> were conducted on the survey responses to consider how variables, such as length of time in care, may relate to each other.
- Telephone interviews with 18 foster carers and 15 interviews with foster children via Skype, Facetime and telephone.

It is possible that the sample for the survey and interviews was somewhat biased towards foster carers who do engage in higher levels of reading with their foster children, due to the self-selecting nature of the sample. This should be considered as a caveat throughout this report.

All our research followed the NCB ethical checklist, as well as adhering to the Social Research Association's guidelines. Before children took part in the survey, they were asked to seek permission from their foster carer, and foster carers were asked to check with the child's social worker before either participated in interviews.

## Literature review

The **literature review** highlighted a range of key points, including:

- Fostering is the most common care received by looked-after children in the UK, with 75 – 86% of looked-after children in such placements (The Fostering Network, 2015).
- Research focusing on educational outcomes for looked-after children suggests there is an achievement gap between those who have been in care and those who have not been in care (e.g. Vinnerljung et al., 2010). This achievement gap tends to be related to impacts of placement instability, and difficulties in forming secure relationships (e.g. Levy & Orlans, 1998, Maxwell et al., 2006).
- In one of the few studies to examine reading skills of school-aged foster children, Fantuzzo and Perlman (2007) suggested children in foster care show markedly poorer reading skills than their peers as early as second grade.
- Early reading skills are an important predictor of later academic achievement and behaviour regulation (Pears et al., 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> The main focus of the quantitative element was to obtain the views of foster carers and the dissemination strategy focused on this aspect, hence the low level response to the foster child survey.

<sup>2</sup> Inferential statistics refer to statistical tests which compare the relationship between variables or the effect of one or more variables on another. Any results which are significant have been reported. Significant results are those with a very small probability that the result occurred by chance.

- Studies indicate the need to encourage reading, and the importance of quality time with children to develop reading skills and prevent attention problems, all of which can help with educational achievement (e.g. Poulton, 2012; Sullivan and Brown, 2013 and 2015; and Hansen et al., 2010). The school and home environments play complementary roles in promoting children's literacy development (Wilkins and Terlitsky, 2016).
- Previous scoping and/or systematic reviews have pointed to the promising nature of reading interventions such as Paired Reading, the Letterbox Club, Reading Rich, Wriggle and Roar, and the Young Reader's Programme (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liablo et al., 2012).

## Research findings

The main findings from our **survey and interviews with foster carers and foster children** are presented below.

### Carers' reading habits

- The majority of foster carers reported they **enjoyed** reading, and most commonly read websites or blogs, or fiction books.

"I love it. It's a way of escaping. It's a way of winding down. It's relaxing. It's educational. I can escape from any worries I may have and get totally focused into a story, and then I'm just living the story."

Foster carer

- However, foster carers who were interviewed said they **do not have the time** to read for pleasure as frequently as they would like to anymore.

"I think as a single parent, single carer, we have a really busy life, we've got lots of extra-curricular activities – it almost feels quite indulgent to sit down at the end of the day and pick up a novel."

Foster carer

- Foster carers were asked about their frequency of reading when they were children. Over half reported reading by themselves very often as children. However, less than 4% read with their parents when they were aged 11 to 16 years old.

### Foster children's reading habits

- Carers and foster children reported **high frequencies** of reading together; half of the carers reported their foster child read at least once a day. Interestingly, there were 16.5% of foster carers that never or hardly ever read with their foster children. Data from the survey and interviews indicated foster children tended to be more independent with their reading as they became older and were less likely to read frequently with their carer.
- Carers most commonly read fiction and non-fiction books with their foster children.
- Foster carers encouraged children to read by prioritizing this activity over others, for example, televisions and computers were turned off at a certain time. Reading often occurred around bedtime to help with relaxation.

### Foster children's reading levels

- Carers were asked about foster children's current reading levels. Nearly half of foster children were considered to be **below average** in their reading levels by their foster carers.
- Statistical analysis revealed that as the age of the child increases, so too does their reading level in comparison to the average for their age. In other words, the older the foster child the more likely they are to have an average, or above average, reading level. This may be explained by the biased sample in this research. The sample was self-selecting and may have appealed to carers who were already reading with their foster

children and understood the benefits. It is possible that this sample of carers have put more time and energy into supporting the child to read than the foster carer population as a whole.

- Linked to this was the finding that the longer a child had been in care and in their current placement the higher their reading level. This indicates better placement stability could lead to improved reading abilities.

### Carers' influence on child's reading

- The more frequently a carer reads a certain material (e.g. fiction book or newspaper) the more frequently the foster child reads that material. This indicates the important role a carer has in shaping a foster child's reading habits and views.
- Carers who spent more time reading with an adult when they were aged 11 to 16 years old were more likely to read magazines, newspapers, audio books and non-fiction books with their foster child.
- The **less frequently** a foster carer read with an adult when aged 10 years and younger, the more likely they are now to read with their foster child. It is possible that the foster carer remembers reading by themselves more than with someone because they were competent readers or they could be compensating for opportunities they themselves did not have.
- Carers believed they had a responsibility to be a good role model and read in front of their foster children. Children would often ask what they were reading and it was a way of encouraging them to read.

### Fostering and care arrangements

- The longer a child had been in their current placement the more frequently the carer and the foster child read together.
- The type of foster placement impacted on how frequently carers and foster children read together. Those who were fostering to adopt read more frequently than those carers providing emergency or long term placements. This may be linked to the age of the child as children in fostering to adopt placements are generally young, whereas, those providing long term placements are more likely to have older children.
- Survey findings highlighted several differences in the frequency carers read with their foster child and the type of fostering arrangement. For example, children in fostering to adopt placements and short term placements were read to more frequently than children in long-term or permanent placements. Carers who were interviewed indicated that during respite and short term placements it was potentially harder to start a reading routine with their foster child. However, this was not always the case if the household already had a set reading routine for other children. This shows differences between the survey and interview findings for short term placements. It is possible this type of placement may be more challenging at the start of the placement, and depending on the length of the placement carers may not be in position to start a reading routine properly.

### Foster carers' views about reading

- Foster carers generally reported that they enjoyed reading; with female carers enjoying reading slightly more.
- Carers were confident in reading silently to themselves. However, confidence levels were slightly lower when it came to reading aloud to someone else.
- Statistical analyses highlighted carers with higher **educational attainment** were more likely to report higher levels of confidence.

### Foster children's views about reading

- Over two-thirds of children in the survey reported that reading made them feel **happy**,

and those who were interviewed were asked whether this had changed since living with their foster carer. In some cases, foster children reported that they had always felt positive about reading, but others explained that an increase in reading with their foster carer had both improved their **skills and enjoyment**.

"In a word - amazing."

Foster child

### Benefits of reading

- When asked about the benefits of reading for foster children, most reported that it helps to **widen a child's vocabulary and feed imagination**. Over 90% of survey respondents also believed it helps with **school work and builds communication skills**. However, Welsh carers were slightly less likely to believe that reading helped to build a child's communication skills than the rest of the sample.
- Foster children who were interviewed frequently made reference to the importance of reading for their school work and learning.

"I think it's really important to read because you can learn more."

Foster child

- Foster carers who were interviewed, highlighted the positive impacts of reading on children's behaviour. Carers commented on the foster child having increased confidence and self-esteem and that reading had a calming effect on the foster child.

"It does seem to calm them...it's just a lovely togetherness end to the day."

Foster carer

- Reading was described as an opportunity for children to hear about and discuss relevant issues affecting their own lives in an enjoyable and non-threatening way.
- Reading together was beneficial to develop a bond between the carer and foster child - this was highlighted in the literature and the research. Interviewed foster carers discussed the importance of building a relationship and over 90% of foster carers that read with their foster child reported that reading had made a **positive difference to their relationship** with their foster child. The more frequently a carer read with their foster child, the greater the positive influence on their relationship.

"To build a relationship, to build trust, to show them that people do want to spend time with them...and to build their self-worth I guess, that you know, people do want to help them and be interested in what they want to be interested in."

Foster carer

- When considering the benefits of reading, foster carers who **agreed** with benefits, reported **more frequent** reading with their foster children.

### Barriers and challenges to reading

- Half of the carers found their foster child's lack of concentration a challenge when it came to reading together, followed by a third of carers stating their foster child found reading difficult.
- For carers who stated they rarely read with their foster child they were asked the reasons for this. Nearly half of the foster carers said this was because the **child preferred to read on their own**. Of those that selected this as a reason, over half of the children were in long term placements. This could be related to the age of the child. Older foster children who were interviewed said they preferred to read on their own, and that it was "babyish" to continue reading with their foster carer. It is likely that this is related to our sample as many of those children interviewed were aged over eight years.
- In the interviews, carers described how some foster children were reluctant to spend time

reading. This related to a number of reasons. For example, the foster child was more interested in doing other things or they struggled with reading and did not enjoy reading with their carer.

"A lot of it is not wanting to come away from what they're doing."

Foster carer

- A lack of appropriate books was another issue. Nearly half of the foster children had a below average reading ability and carers stated how difficult it was to find books at the right reading ability that would maintain the foster child's interest and motivation to read.
- The age of the foster child could be a challenge. If a child had already formed negative views of reading, which generally only happened with the older children, then it became very difficult for the carer to change these views.
- Carers with a lower enjoyment of reading were more likely to believe that their foster child was not interested in books.
- A third of children in the survey said they **would like to read more**, but that this was difficult with **a lack of free time**. Those who said they did not want to read any more than they currently do said that this was because **they read enough**. In interviews, foster children tended to mention that they found some words challenging when reading and that this could sometimes put them off reading for pleasure.

## Support

- Less than half of the carers had received help with supporting their foster child to read and this support was mainly provided by schools and local authorities. Carers were less likely to feel they needed support if their foster child was able to read well.
- When asked about the support they had received to read with their foster child, those foster carers who were interviewed made reference to a range of sources including **libraries, the Letterbox Club, and Pathways to Fostering**.
- **Libraries** were considered a highly useful source of support (mostly for choosing books), followed by local authorities and schools. Carers who had received support from their foster child's school and had found this support useful, were more likely to say that their child was interested in books. This suggests schools can be good at providing books for the child but there may not be consistency across them in terms of the support they provide for reluctant non-readers.
- There were various areas of support that carers thought would be helpful. These included strategies of how to encourage reluctant older readers; better access to appropriate books; training courses for carers about supporting children with reading (including using phonics but also other systems); and better signposting.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This research shows most carers and foster children have a positive attitude towards reading. They are aware of the benefits of reading together or independently for the foster child. Key findings highlighted that the frequency of reading together was significantly associated with how long a child had been living with their foster carer, and the type of placement, with respite placements linked to less frequent reading. However, our findings demonstrated incredibly positive views of reading in foster families, and suggest that additional support would be gratefully received.

Some specific recommendations from this report include:

- Advice should be provided on how foster carers of shorter term placements can integrate reading into their time with the children, particularly when other more profound issues may, understandably, take greater priority.
- There is scope to increase confidence in foster carers, as this may in turn help children

with their reading levels. Furthermore, foster carers who were interviewed, did highlight their own reading as an area where they would like to receive more support.

- Any additional support provided by BookTrust, should be done so across the United Kingdom, without specific support in each country. However, delivery mechanisms may need to be adapted to suit the local context.
- There may be scope to conduct more research to find out about the types of books required in Wales, and an exploration of why the impacts of reading on communication is seen as a lesser benefit than in other countries.
- BookTrust may wish to consider providing different types of support to foster families with children of different ages. In particular, carers highlighted the need to boost reading at a younger age when children are potentially more open to this support. BookTrust could widen the Letterbox Club to younger age groups to meet this demand.
- It is important to ensure that any books provided are of a suitable content and level to ensure that children of a lower level of reading, are not dissuaded by the type of story they are sent to read. Related to this, but more widely, there is a need for increased availability of high interest but low ability books.
- More support could be provided to schools, in terms of making it clear how they could help foster families, or providing books of a suitable level. Where they do offer support, there is potentially work that can be done to ensure that this process takes place at a faster pace.
- Libraries play an important role in some foster families, and given the current decline in library numbers, this may be an important topic to consider more closely.
- Foster carers reported that they would value further support and suggested potential ways of doing this, such as through their foster carer training. As such, there is scope for BookTrust to work with local authorities to integrate some of the aspects mentioned in this report.

# 1. Introduction and methodology

## 1.1 Aims of the research

The overarching aim of this research was to develop further understanding of how **foster carers in the United Kingdom can be better supported to engage in reading with their children**.

Our main research objectives were to understand how foster carers currently support their children to engage with reading, how this may vary with other factors (e.g. region, age, personal experience, foster carers' experience), and what additional support could be given to foster carers to help them with reading with their child. These aspects specifically relate to:

- Increasing the amount of time children spend reading for pleasure and writing.
- Improving children's literacy.
- Improving children's confidence and self-esteem in relation to both reading and more generally.
- Understanding how carers' own experiences (e.g. education, reading) and confidence may relate to their reading patterns and the activities they engage in with their children.
- Understanding how foster carers' and children's engagement with reading may influence their relationship with each other.

## 1.2 Literature review

The first part of this research involved a **literature review to summarise previous research** and inform the current study. This specifically focused on:

- An overview of fostering in the UK.
- Educational outcomes for looked after children, and the factors affecting these.
- The benefits of reading for children in foster care.
- Reading interventions for children in foster care.
- Increasing reading amongst looked after children.

Our work on the literature review consisted of four key stages:

### 1. Identification and retrieval of Letterbox Club related information

We began by identifying all available sources of information and using published findings from Letterbox Club<sup>3</sup> as a starting point. From this we made use of key findings relating to support for foster carers and followed-up on references in this literature.

### 2. A search and retrieval strategy for other sources

We also conducted an extensive online search of other useful material. We made use of a range of sources when conducting searches, including:

- General database search, such as sources found by using Social Policy and Practice, Social Care Online, NFER, Ingentaconnect, British Education Index, ERIC, and Google Scholar, and a range of academic databases.
- Work carried out by fostering agencies and networks, such as the Fostering Network, Barnardo's and Action for Children.
- Regulatory and statutory sources across the UK.

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<sup>3</sup> Letterbox Club is described further in the literature review.

- Wider repositories of relevant research and information, including the Early Intervention Foundation, the LGA Knowledge Hub, SCIE, ESRC, ChiMat and NICE.
- Sources from 'grey literature', such as conference proceedings, unpublished manuscripts and working papers.
- Relevant internal documents from NCB itself.

We developed a comprehensive list of search terms which allowed us to identify literature related to:

- The importance of home-reading in childhood and relevant approaches.
- Experiences in different types of fostering (e.g. short-term, long-term, respite) and how these may relate to reading and education.
- Education and reading experiences of foster carers.
- The role of other factors in foster families' experiences, reading attitudes and behaviours (e.g. children's age).
- Interventions increasing reading and other important skills for looked-after children.
- The experiences of foster families where there are additional needs.
- The impact of home-reading and home-support on a range of outcomes, including relationships, educational attainment, well-being and self-esteem.

### 3. Synthesising and summarising literature and other sources of information

After retrieving full texts, the focus was on three main activities: to describe the selected papers / studies in general; to summarise their findings; and to consider how these findings might be interpreted and applied. The review was organised in a thematic framework using Microsoft Excel, which enabled some degree of flexibility for reordering or restructuring the evidence summaries under different headings.

### 4. Drafting the literature review and informing the surveys and interviews

Evidence from the reviews was written up into one literature review, which has been included in the next section, and used to inform the surveys and interviews.

## 1.3 Online survey of foster carers

Informed by the literature review, we conducted an **online survey** of foster carers, using SNAP software. We received 598 responses. Questions in the survey focused on:

- Demographic information such as: country and region of residence; length of time as a foster carer; type of placements; and demographics of children currently fostering (or previous children if carers did not have a current placement).
- Foster carers' own experiences of reading, as a child and as an adult.
- Foster children's reading level.
- Details of reading together with their foster child, including frequency and type of reading material.
- Effects of reading together on their fostering relationship.
- Perceptions of the benefits of reading for children.
- Barriers to reading with their foster child.
- Support that carers have received related to reading with their foster child.
- Support that would be useful to help them with their foster child's reading and literacy.

Foster carers were also asked whether they and their foster child may be willing to take part in an interview as part of the research. They were asked to provide an email address if this was the case.

The survey was distributed via a snowball sample. Relevant organisations were contacted and asked to circulate the survey on our behalf. Organisations contacted included both private and voluntary agencies, as well as local authorities, to ensure that a large number and wide range of foster carers were included. We distributed the survey across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to ensure representation across the United Kingdom. In addition, we requested support from a range of organisations to include the survey link in membership bulletins or information, or distribute to specific groups of foster carers. Examples of these can be seen below.

We also worked closely with the NCB Communications Team to advertise the survey via social media and online.

#### **Membership organisations**

Local Government Agency (England & Wales)  
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities  
Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trust

#### **NCB Newsletters and Bulletins**

Early Years' Bulletin  
Membership Newsletter  
Health and Social Care Bulletin  
Research Centre Newsletter

#### **Charities and agencies (UK-wide)**

Fostering Network  
Fostering through Social Enterprise  
Barnardo's  
Action for Children  
CoramBAAF  
Fostering Associates  
TACT

#### **Country-specific agencies (examples)**

Kindercare Fostering (England)  
Swiss Foster care (England and Scotland)  
Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (England / Wales)  
Care Visions Fostering (Scotland)  
Fostering for Achievement (Northern Ireland)

Our survey of foster carers was analysed using both general descriptive statistics, as well as running inferential statistical analyses, in order to understand how different factors may affect reading practices in foster families. These factors included, but were not limited to, the following:

- country
- foster carer and foster child gender
- foster carer and foster child ethnicity
- educational status of foster carer
- employment status of foster carer
- additional needs of foster child
- length of time of fostering
- length of placement
- type of placement
- child's age

A detailed analysis plan can be seen in Appendix B<sup>4</sup>. Throughout this report, we have used general description to explain the findings, but have also presented statistical terminology in terms of the

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<sup>4</sup> Please note, missing values were excluded throughout analysis and only statistically significant results have been reported. Statistical significance refers to findings where there is low probability that it occurred by chance - as such, it indicates an association between two variables and can tell us more about how factors relate to each other. Strictly speaking, statistical tests such as those used in this report are designed for random probability surveys, whereas this study used a snowball sample approach for reasons of practicality. We have borrowed from random probability approaches in carrying out the statistical analysis in this report.

test used, effect sizes and significance values, for information purposes.

It is possible that our survey sample was somewhat biased towards foster carers and children who engage in higher levels of reading with their foster children, due to the self-selecting nature of the sample. There also appeared to be a higher proportion of early-years professionals, teachers and others with experience of supporting children to read (e.g. librarians) in this sample compared with national averages. These should be considered as a caveat throughout this report.

## 1.4 Online survey of foster children

In addition to our survey of foster carers, we conducted an online survey with foster children; they were asked about:

- The type of materials they read.
- How reading made them feel.
- How often they read and if they would like to spend more time reading.
- What would encourage them to read more.
- Reasons for not wanting to read more.

We received 35 responses to the children's survey<sup>5</sup>. The children's survey was advertised via the same methods as the foster carers' survey. A link to the children's survey was included at the end of the foster carers' survey, and vice versa. Respondents who answered the survey first were asked to input a code and pass this onto their foster child/carer. The second respondent was then asked to input the same code into their survey. This allowed the carer and foster child's data to be matched for comparative purposes of some questions. In the report, general descriptive information has been provided for the 35 children who responded. It was possible to directly compare answers from foster carers and foster children in 25 cases, and this has been presented.

## 1.5 Interviews with foster carers and foster children

To complement the surveys and gather more detailed information, we also conducted **18 telephone interviews** with foster carers in which they were asked about:

- The context around their foster caring.
- Their own reading habits.
- Their experience of reading with their foster children.
- Their views of reading with foster children and potential benefits of reading.
- Support for carers to help them to engage with reading with their foster children.

Of the 18 telephone interviews conducted, five of these were with foster carers without current placements.

We also conducted **13 interviews** with children and young people in foster care, which were conducted over the telephone, Skype and Facetime. They were asked about:

- Context around their fostering arrangements.
- Their reading habits.
- Their experiences of reading with their foster carers and others.
- Benefits and challenges of reading.
- Past experiences of reading.

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<sup>5</sup> The main focus of the quantitative element was to obtain the views of foster carers and the dissemination strategy focused on this aspect, hence the low number of responses to the foster child survey.

Views from one foster child with additional needs were collected via a survey format, presented by their foster carer (written by NCB). Therefore, the views of 14 foster children were collected in total. All those who participated in interviews received a £10 high street voucher as a thank you for taking part. Again, it is possible (even likely) that our interviews were somewhat biased towards foster carers who engage in higher levels of reading with their foster children compared to the overall population of foster carers, due to the self-selecting nature of the sample. This should be considered as a caveat throughout this report.

## 1.6 Ethics and quality assurance

Across all our research, our internal NCB ethical guidelines were followed, as well as Social Research Association ethical procedures. This involved ensuring that the child had sought permission to complete their survey, and that the foster carer had ensured that the social worker was aware of the child taking part in an interview. Across all the methods employed, foster carers and children had the right to withdraw from the research and were required to provide signed consent forms.

Throughout our research, we consulted our Family Research Advisory Group (FRAG), and our Young Research Advisors (YRAs) on our tools to check their suitability. This included piloting our interview topic guides and Skype methods with our YRAs. In addition, BookTrust provided invaluable feedback throughout the process.

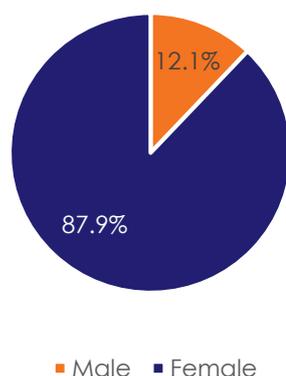
## 1.7 Survey respondents and interviewees

This section outlines demographic information for those who took part in our surveys and interviews.

### 1.7.1 Foster carer survey demographics

- A total of 598 foster carers responded to the online survey. 87.9% of the respondents were female and 12.1% were male (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Gender of foster carers**



- Of the 598 carers who answered this question, the majority (94.7%) classified themselves as White British, Irish or from any other white background; black or black British carers were the next largest ethnic group (1.9%).<sup>6</sup> This was generally representative of other research conducted with foster carers in the UK (McDermid, Holmes, Kirton, and Signoretta, 2012).

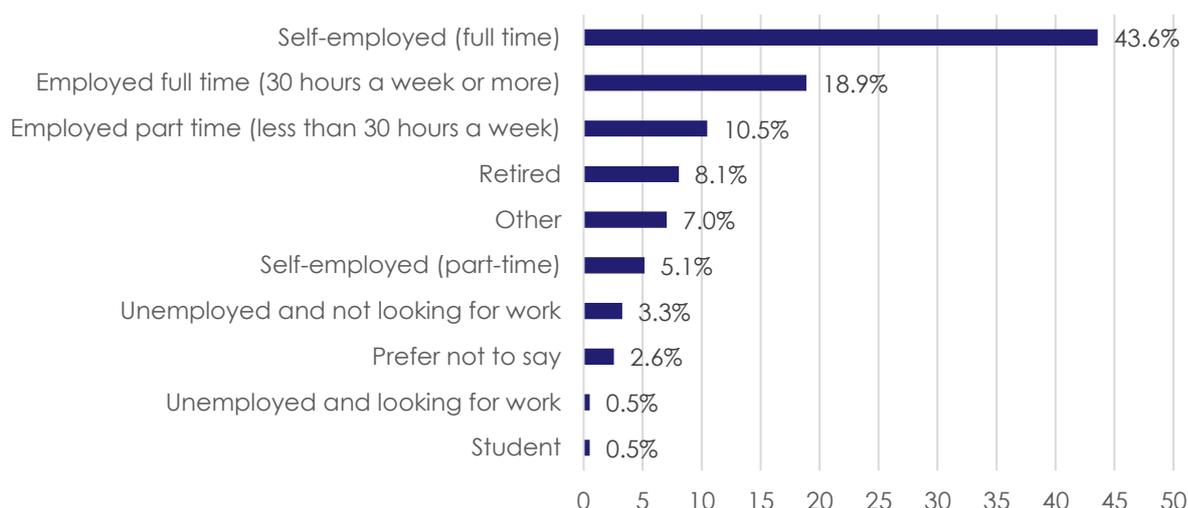
<sup>6</sup> To allow meaningful analysis of ethnicity as a factor that may influence foster children's reading this variable was recoded into just two categories: white (95.7%,  $n = 580$ ) and black and minority ethnicities (4.3%). Those who said they preferred not to say were excluded from this analysis.

**Table 1: Foster carers' ethnicity (survey)**

	<b>Percent</b>
White	94.7
Black or Black British	1.9
Other	1.4
Prefer not to say	1.0
Mixed	0.7
Asian or Asian British	0.3

- 79.8% of carers lived in England, 10.9% in Wales, 7.4% in Scotland and 1.9% in Northern Ireland<sup>7</sup>. A full breakdown of the regions within each country where the carers lived can be found in Appendix A.
- 43.6% of carers were self-employed and 29.4% were employed (either full time or part time). Of the 7.0% of carers who selected 'other', 34% of these stated they were full time carers<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 2: Employment status foster carers (survey)**

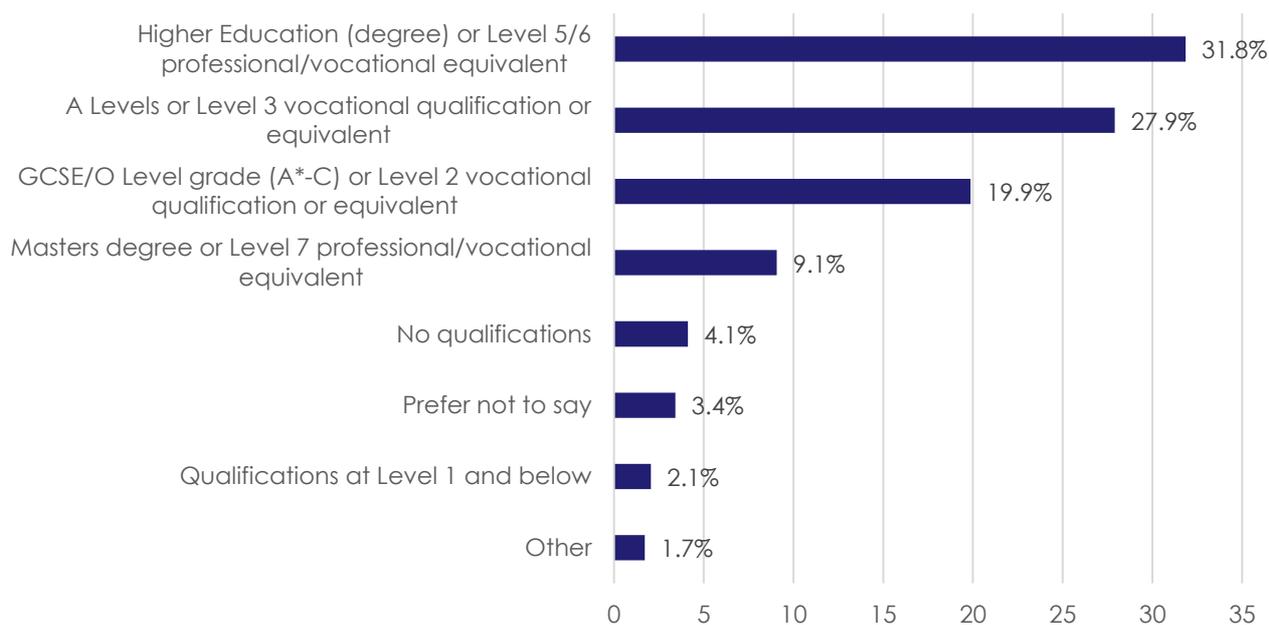


- 40.9% of foster carers were educated to degree level or higher (31.8% Higher Education and 9.1% Master's degree), and 27.9% were educated to A-level or equivalent.<sup>9</sup> This study's sample of foster carers may be slightly more educated than the entire population of foster carers across the UK. Data from other sources found that only 34% of foster carers were educated to degree level or above (Brannen et al., 2007, cited in McDermid et al., 2012), but more recent data showed that 38% are educated to this level (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012, cited in McDermid et al., 2012). However, data from Scotland showed that 41% of foster carers have no educational qualifications (Scotland's Census, 2011), while only 4.1% of our sample had no educational qualifications.

<sup>7</sup> To allow comparisons between the countries two new variables were created: carers who lived in England versus the rest of the sample; and carers who lived in Wales versus the rest of the sample.

<sup>8</sup> For statistical analysis this variable was recoded into just three categories: Employed (80.1%, n= 568), unemployed (3.9%) and other, including retired (16.0%).

<sup>9</sup> This variable was recoded into three categories: Higher Education, Level 5 and above (43.1%, n= 554), GCSE and A-Level / Levels 2 and 3 (50.4%) and Level 1 or below and no qualifications (6.5%).

**Figure 3: Educational attainment of foster carers (survey)**

- 80.6% of carers indicated that they had a partner or spouse.
- 83.4% of partners were employed, 1.1% were unemployed and 15.5% were retired or classified as other. Of the respondents that selected other, 3.2% stated that their partner was a full time foster carer.
- In terms of education, a third of partners were educated to Level 5 or above (33.3%, N=144), half had GCSEs or A-Levels (52.2%), and the remainder had Level 1 or below or no qualifications (14.5%).
- Nearly half of all carers (47.8%) indicated that they had at least one non-foster child living in their household, and 1.2% had five or more non-foster children.

### 1.7.2 Fostering arrangements (foster carer survey)

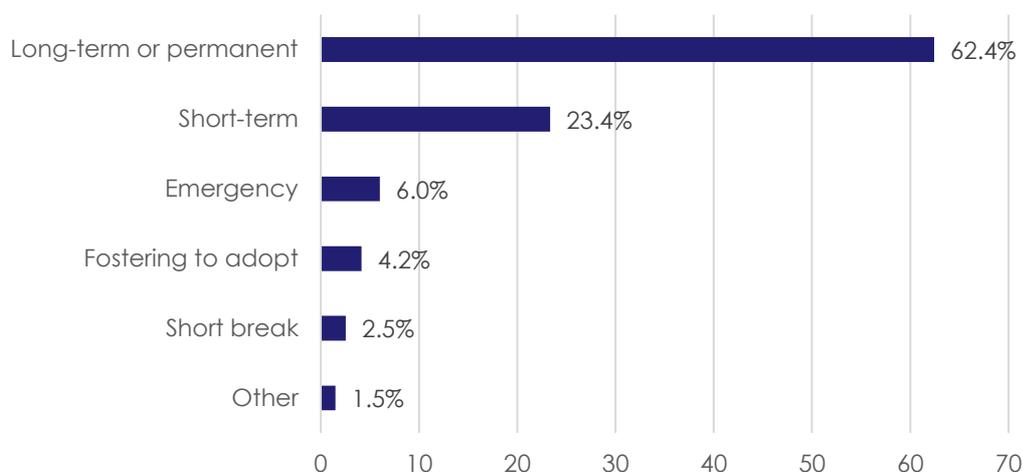
- 91.6% of foster carers ( $n = 596$ ) reported they were currently fostering.
- Of those not currently fostering (8.4%), 72.0% ( $n = 50$ ) reported they had had placements in the last six months.
- For those with current placements, 50.9% were looking after one child and 30.1% were looking after two children. Of the 50 who reported having placements in the last six months, 34 had looked after one child and 13 had looked after two children in their last placement.
- The total length of time respondents had been a foster carer ranged from less than a year to 40 years, with the majority (51.0%,  $n=595$ ) being a foster carer for five years or less. Based on data from 2003-2004, this generally reflects the picture of foster carers nationally, with half having fostered for five years or less, in research conducted by Sinclair et al., (2004, cited in McDermid et al., 2012), and 43% having fostered for five years or less, in research conducted by Kirton, Beecham and Ogilvie (2003, cited in McDermid et al., 2012).

In the survey, carers who indicated they were currently fostering, or provided information about previous placements, were asked to provide information about up to two of the children they

fostered. This data was combined to produce a new dataset which included **884** foster children<sup>10</sup>.

- Of these, two-thirds of the foster children had been in their current or most recent placement for three years or less (67.8%) and the longest placements were for over 16 years. 38.9% of children had been in their placement for less than 12 months.
- 80.9% of children were in a local authority placement, 9.1% were placed by an independent or voluntary organisation, 5.3% were in private fostering, and 4.5% were in kinship or connected persons' care.
- 62.4% of foster children were in long-term or permanent placements, and nearly a quarter (23.4%) in short term placements.
- Over a quarter of foster children had been in care for a year or less (27.0%) and nearly half between one and five years (46.3%).

**Figure 4: Types of fostering arrangements (survey)**

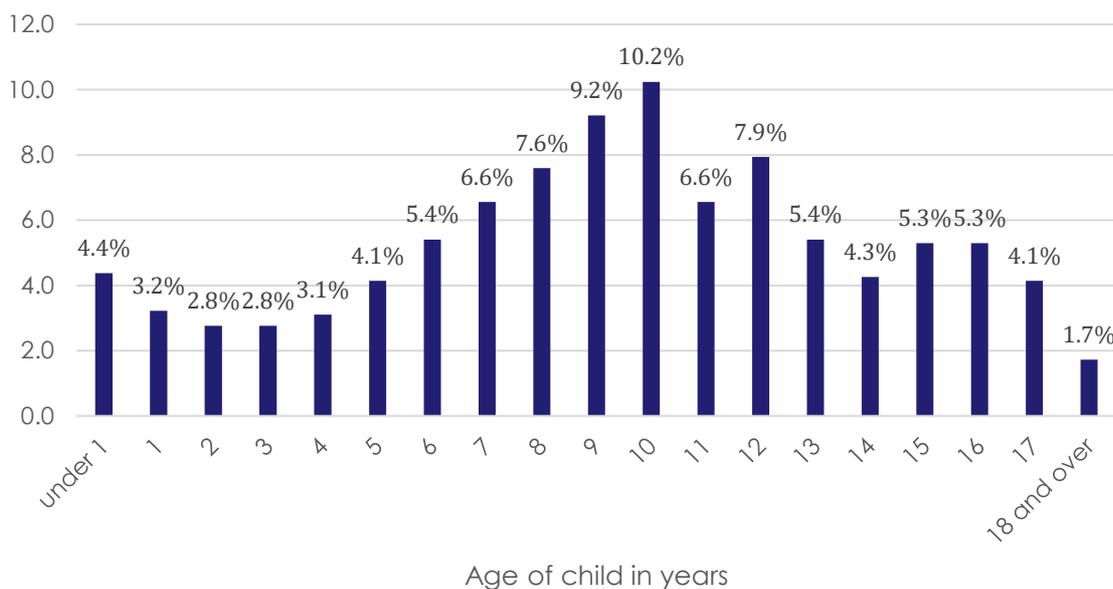


### 1.7.3 Foster children (foster carer survey)

- Of the 884 foster children, all were aged between birth and 24<sup>11</sup> years old with 59.1% between the ages of six and 13.

<sup>10</sup> By restructuring the dataset in this way it meant that some foster carers' data appeared twice in the new dataset if they completed the survey for two children.

<sup>11</sup> There was no specified age limit for the foster children to be included in the survey. The age range could be explained through disabled young people still being in foster care, or staying put arrangements.

**Figure 5: Age of foster children**

- 84.7% of children were white and 7.1% were mixed. 4.5% were black or black British, 2.0% reported as 'other', 1.0% as Asian or Asian British, and 0.7% preferred not to say. This variable was recoded into two categories with 85.3% ( $n=862$ ) being white and 14.7% from black and minority ethnicities for further analysis purposes.
- Foster carers were asked if the child they fostered had any additional needs. 391 foster carers answered this question, and of these, 79.8% said that their foster child had a special educational need, 14.6% said they had a physical disability, and 10.2% that they had an 'other' additional need. Whilst this appears high, it should be noted that a large proportion of respondents did not answer this question, and this may be because they did not have foster children with additional needs.

### 1.7.4 Children's survey demographics

- There were 35 responses to the children's survey, with 19 boys and 16 girls completing the survey. They were aged between six and 16 years old, with half of them aged 10 and under.
- There were 25 matched cases for both the carer and the foster child, 16 boys and nine girls. Ages ranged from seven to 16 with 19 of the foster children aged 10 or under.
- Of the matched foster children, 22 were white and the remaining three from black and minority ethnic groups. 16 of the matched foster children lived in England, seven in Wales and two in Northern Ireland; there were no foster children's surveys from Scotland.
- Of the 25 matched responses, 23 were local authority placements and 23 were long-term placements. Just three of the foster children had been in care for less than a year, and eight had been in care between four and seven years.
- Twelve of the 25 foster children were also reported to have an additional need such as special educational need ( $n=11$ ) and physical disability ( $n=2$ ).

### 1.7.5 Interviews

- A total of 18 foster carers took part in interviews about reading with their foster children. Of these foster carers, all but one were female.
- Foster carers provided a variety of placements, sometimes within individual families and across the sample as a whole; including long-term care, short term and respite care.

- The ages of the children that the foster carers talked about ranged from 8 months to 17 years old.
- Of the 13 foster children that we spoke to, 10 were male and three were female. They ranged between seven and 11 years old.

## 2. Literature review

This literature review provides an overview of research on fostering and reading, specifically related to:

- The context of foster care in the UK
- Educational outcomes for children who are looked-after
- The importance and benefits of reading for children who are looked-after
- Reading interventions for children in foster care
- Methods of increasing home-reading for children who are looked-after.

The purpose of this review was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to broaden BookTrust's knowledge of this area, to support their work with children who are looked-after. Secondly it helped to highlight gaps in the evidence to inform the questions presented to foster carers and children in the surveys and interviews conducted by NCB as part of this research.

### 2.1 An overview of fostering in the UK

Fostering is one of a number of care options that offers children a home when they are unable to live with their birth family (Fostering Network, 2016). There are almost 55,000 foster families in the UK and the majority of children who are looked-after live with foster carers (75 – 86%, The Fostering Network, 2015). Foster carers choose to bring children or young people they may not know into their home (NCB, 2011). An important part of the foster carer's task is living alongside a child or young person and providing role models of nurturing and listening, parenting and care. They promote the overall well-being of the child or young person, helping them to enjoy their childhood and grow towards a fulfilling adult life (NCB, 2011).

There are a number of different types of fostering arrangements in the UK, including:

**Emergency:** Children need somewhere safe to stay for a few nights.

**Short-term:** Children are looked after by a foster carer for a few weeks or months.

**Short breaks / respite:** Children who are disabled, or who have special needs, regularly stay with foster carers on short breaks, but normally live with their birth parents.

**Remand:** Young people who are remanded by a court are looked after by a specially-trained foster carer.

**Fostering for adoption:** Babies or young children stay with foster carers who may then go on to adopt them.

**Long-term:** Long-term fostering care, but without plans for the child to be adopted by their foster carers.

**Family and friends or 'kinship':** A child in the care of the local authority goes to live with someone they already know, usually a family member.

**Special Guardianship:** A permanent placement of the child with a guardian (who may already have a relationship to the child) while preserving the child's link to their birth family

**Specialist therapeutic:** where children and young people have very complex needs and/or challenging behaviour.

(Adapted from the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website)

Many children who are looked-after move around the system and have experienced several types of fostering placement. Selwyn et al. (2014) suggests that only 0.3% of children who are adopted have experienced one stable care placement prior to joining their adoptive families, indicating that others have experienced a range of care placements. As such, it is likely that this impacts upon the development of secure attachments and relationships which are so beneficial for children. While there has been some research suggesting the type of care influences reading (Roy and Rutter, 2006), there is an absence of research into how the type of foster placement may affect reading. Our study offers an opportunity to explore this further.

## 2.2 Educational outcomes for children who are looked-after

Children in care have poorer educational outcomes when compared to the general population. This pattern has been found even after controlling for other relevant confounding variables, such as socio-economic factors (e.g. Vinnerljung et al., 2010). Studies have also shown that the achievement gap widens as children become older (Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Sebba et al., 2015). Some evidence suggests that the gap has decreased in recent years. However, children and young people who have been in care still perform at a lower academic level than children who have never been in care (National Audit Office, 2014; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland, 2015; DfE 2015; The Scottish Government, 2015; Welsh Government, 2015). This can also be seen in data from end of key stage assessments in England:

- At the end of Key Stage 1 (aged 7 years), 71% of children in care achieved the expected level in reading; in writing the figure was 61%; and in maths, 72% (DfE, 2014). This compares with 90%, 86% and 92% of all children respectively (Sebba et al., 2015).
- At the end of Key Stage 2 (aged 11 years), 52% of children in care achieved age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, compared with 80% of all children (DfE, 2015).
- At the end of Key Stage 4 (aged 16 years), 14% of children in care achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C or equivalent, including English and Maths, compared with 53% of all children (DfE, 2015).

The trend of children who are in care, or who have been in care, having poorer educational outcomes when compared to the general population is not unique to the UK, with research also demonstrating these findings across a range of countries including the USA (Trout et al., 2008), Canada (Brownell et al., 2015) and Sweden (Torden et al., 2014). However, attempting to explain this attainment gap is a complex task and more research is needed on the causal links between having been in care and children's educational outcomes (Vinnerljung et al., 2005).

## 2.3 Factors influencing the poorer educational outcomes of children who are looked-after

A recurring explanation for the lower attainment of children who are looked-after is the impact of placement instability (i.e. Maxwell et al., 2006; The Fostering Network, 2006; Allen and Vacca, 2010). Researchers have suggested that a stable placement supports consistency in school attendance and participation in other school activities or courses. For instance, Davey and Pithouse (2008) found that 'achievers' in Wales (foster children who gained a SATs result) had received the most stable care placement *and* greatest attendance at school, when compared with those who did not take the SATs exams. Similarly, Pecora (2006) considered the numbers of children and young people dropping out of school or college. Not only did fewer placement changes mediate the school and college experience, but extracurricular activities and teaching on independent living helped to reduce the school drop-out rate.

However, whilst the number of changes in foster placements and schools was correlated with an increase in behaviour problems for children and young people, there was no significant relationship between the number of school changes and educational attainment (Sullivan et al., 2010). It seems that the relationship between placement instability and educational achievement is a

complex one and that the lower attainment in looked-after children may be an indirect outcome of other factors. For instance, lower educational attainment for looked-after children has been closely linked to their independent behaviour (Dumaret et al., 2011), and future psychosocial problems among youths who leave foster care (Berlin et al., 2011). The Fostering Network (2006) attributes lower educational attainment amongst foster children to a range of factors such as a lack of ambition, school exclusion, lack of specialist support for SEND, and an over-emphasis on leaving care and living independently at a crucial stage of learning.

Maddern (2010) writes that one factor affecting the achievement of looked-after children is foster carers not being expected to help the learning and development of children in their care. While foster carers have an important role to play in supporting children's learning, formal responsibility for looked-after children's education lies with the local authority (Children's Act 1989, Section 22 (3A)). As such, the relationship that foster carers have with their children's social worker and with their school can make a significant difference. Ward and Sanders (2014) report that some foster carers are excluded from meetings about their child's schooling. Studies also find that foster carers may lack confidence in supporting the reading or educational development of children in their care, which is influenced by their own educational background (The Fostering Network, 2006). This leads to varying levels of involvement, support and encouragement in this area (Osborne et al., 2010; Mooney et al., 2016). Wilkins and Terlitsky (2016) argue that more needs to be done to help foster carers understand that their contribution is a key component in the future success of the child and does not require a background in education or hours of work at home. They recommend greater involvement of foster carers in schools, including regular communication with teachers, and more encouragement and support from teachers to develop a home literacy environment focused on the academic growth of fostered children.

Indeed, other research has suggested that there is a need to provide further support to foster children's academic needs (McCrae et al., 2010). Vacca (2008) presented a range of ways in which schools could help to improve the academic outcomes for those in foster care, such as improved communication with welfare agencies, enriched curriculum for those in foster care, and providing a caring environment. The introduction of Virtual School Heads in England (Children and Families Act, 2014), Key Education Workers in Northern Ireland (Perry, 2014), and the statutory requirement to include education in Personal Education Plans across England, Scotland and Wales (Perry, 2014) demonstrated the commitment to raising the profile of educational attainment amongst children in care (Ofsted, 2012). Therefore, providing additional support focused on the role foster carers play in home-reading and reading for pleasure can only enhance the positive influence that they have upon their foster children, and relate more specifically to encouraging educational achievements and attainment.

Placement type may also be a factor in determining the educational outcomes of looked-after children. Researchers have shown that fostering can have a positive impact upon children and young people's view of school and education and influence their academic achievement, compared to being looked-after at home or placed in residential care (McClung and Gayle, 2010). When looking at changes in attitude since moving into fostering, Hedin et al. (2011) found that young people placed with a foster carer self-reported that succeeding at school helped to give them both hope for the future and a sense of pride, which many stated was inspired by their foster carers.

## 2.4 The importance of reading

Reading is closely linked to academic attainment, with early reading skills being an important predictor of academic attainment and behavioural adjustment (Poulton, 2012; Pears et al., 2011). For children aged 10-16 years the impact of reading for pleasure was more important in improving vocabulary, arithmetic and spelling than having a parent with degree and was a stronger predictor than a parent's social and economic status (British Cohort Study data – Sullivan and Brown 2013, 2015). In addition, research has shown that children who have been read to daily tend to achieve more in the first year of primary school, not only in language and literacy, but across all other areas of learning and development (Hansen et al., 2010).

There are a number of studies of the general population which illustrate the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational attainment and personal development (summarised in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Research has also explored the link between reading and behaviour (notably attention difficulties). A recent report by the Social Market Foundation (2016), using data from the Millennium Cohort Study, found that after controlling for income, parental education, and parental age, children who never read for enjoyment had lower test scores at age 11 years and made poorer progress between ages 5 and 11 years. Clark and Rumbold's (2006) literature review found that reading for pleasure is positively associated with positive reading attitudes and linked with increased:

- reading attainment and writing ability
- text comprehension and grammar
- breadth of vocabulary
- self-confidence as a reader
- general knowledge
- understanding of other cultures
- community participation
- insight into human nature and decision-making
- reading for pleasure in later life

Evidence suggests the need to encourage reading, and the importance of quality time with children to develop reading skills and prevent attention problems, all of which can help with educational achievement. The school and home environments play complementary roles in promoting children's literacy development (Wilkins and Terlitsky, 2016). A study by Strommen and Mates (2004) found reading for pleasure more frequently (for at least 30 minutes on a 'typical' day) was connected to having more experiences of reading outside of school. As well as developing reading for pleasure, the home literacy environment is significant in developing children's early competencies in reading and spelling and their precursors (e.g. Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994; Burgess et al., 2002; Davidse et al., 2011). Parental involvement and interest in their child's reading and education, as well as their own views and experiences of reading, are important in developing a literacy-rich environment at home that can reduce reading problems (Wilkins and Terlitsky, 2016).

Early reading skills are an important predictor of later academic achievement and behaviour regulation (Pears *et al.*, 2011). Poor reading skills have been linked to behavioural difficulties at school with a strong association between reading problems and hyperactivity (Meltzer et al., 2003). Both early reading delay and inattention have been found to have long-term implications for educational achievement (Hodges and Tizard, 1989; Fergusson et al., 1997). These issues may also increase the likelihood of behavioural problems, such as antisocial behaviour and youth offending (Halonen et al., 2006). Bywater et al. (2010) note that the incidence of conduct disorder in young children is much higher for fostered children (37%) than for the general population (10%). Over half of looked-after children have a behavioural, emotional or social difficulty compared to just over a quarter of those not in need or looked after (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). It is therefore important that early reading problems are identified and appropriate support provided to address any educational or behavioural issues.

## 2.4.1 Looked-after children and reading

There are links between poor reading levels and low educational attainment (Jackson, 1987, 1998; Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998), with good reading skills as core competencies in children's readiness to learn from around age five years (Pears et al., 2011). For literacy skills in particular, there is wide-ranging research showing that children in care are more likely to experience difficulties than their peers (i.e. Bald et al., 1995; Hibbert, 2003; Leslie and Allen, 1999). It is important, therefore, to encourage reading amongst children in care to attempt to achieve better educational outcomes.

Roy and Rutter (2006), however, found that poor reading attainment is not an inevitable conclusion

for looked-after children. Placement in institutional care carried a likelihood of having a more significant reading delay when compared to those placed in family foster care. They attributed this to the quality of time and day-to-day context in which support is offered (Roy and Rutter, 2006). Furthermore, it is thought that the generally lower academic attainment of looked-after children may be due to the lack of a key adult who takes an interest in and actively supports their education (Harker et al., 2003).

The hypothesis that foster carers can have a substantial impact on children's reading abilities is encouraging as it suggests that negative effects of frequent changes in school and home placements can be reduced with the support of an engaged carer (Osborne et al., 2010). However, it is well documented that carers themselves may not feel completely confident in their ability to support the education of the children in their care. Finn (2008) stated that foster carers would welcome support in engaging their children in reading, most notably around knowing what books to choose and how to share the reading experience, especially with older foster children. It is particularly important that foster carers feel they have control over their participation in supporting the educational attainment of children in their care and they should not be made to feel anxious or inexperienced (Ghate and Hazel, 2002).

Understanding how foster carers can be better supported to engage in reading with the children in their care may therefore be integral to reducing the gap in looked-after children's educational achievement in comparison to their peers.

## 2.4.2 The wider social and emotional benefits of reading for children in foster care

Foster carers reading together with children also offers the opportunity to develop relationships and bonds (Seden, 2009; Osborne et al., 2010) and helps to increase general self-esteem and confidence in children (Stevens et al., 2008; Osborne et al., 2010). In a study of paired reading, carers reported that children's confidence and motivation for reading increased, while carers enjoyed sharing the one-to-one time with their child (Osborne et al., 2010). The researchers speculate that such quality time may have additional benefits in developing a closer relationship between child and carer, resulting in greater placement stability.

The Fostering Network note the significance of stories to childhood, with "the feeling of safety and security that comes from spending time with a close and caring adult and talking about the experience you share when a story is told" (2012, p3) being an important experience. Stories can help build bonds between foster carers and the child in their care, which, in turn, will enhance the social and emotional development of vulnerable children (Seden, 2009). The influence of the relationship between carer and child on reading and vice versa will be useful to explore through our research.

Reading is said to offer the reader insight into themselves through characters in the story and an opportunity to escape their problems through fantasy (Morning, 2008; Brennan, 2010; The Fostering Network, 2012). Stories allow exploration of neglect, abuse and family trauma (Brennan, 2010; The Fostering Network, 2012). This is of particular value to children in foster care who are separated from their birth family and may have experienced such issues. Seden also notes that "vicarious experiences, through books, develop empathy and emotional awareness and contribute to moral development and the formation of values" (2009, p144).

In an exploration of a storytelling project with children in residential care in Scotland, Stevens et al. (2008) found that the actual process of storytelling can have a calming effect and allow residents to feel closer to each other. Furthermore, they believe that storytelling can be a powerful therapeutic tool to allow looked-after children who have experienced loss and trauma to reconnect with their past. There is therefore potential for behavioural and emotional issues to be addressed through reading and the storytelling connected to this.

There is also an opportunity for foster children with specific learning disabilities to read books with characters that help them better understand their own feelings and experiences and what it

means to live with special needs (Miller, 2012). A high proportion of children who are looked-after have a special educational need or disability: Sebba et al. reported in 2015 that 30.3% of children who in long-term care have a statement of special educational needs compared to 3.4% of non-looked-after children. Therefore, it is important to tailor reading to the needs of the child.

## 2.5 Reading interventions for children in foster care

A number of interventions have been developed over the years specifically to support the development of literacy skills through enjoyment of reading for looked-after children (Finn, 2008; Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo et al., 2012; Osborne et al., 2010, Tordön et al., 2014; Vinnerljung et al., 2014). Paired reading is the favoured approach for many interventions, both in the general population and for fostered children. This approach has been found to be particularly effective as a way for foster families to interact and develop relationships, though additional support is needed for this to be a positive experience rather than a stressful or disciplinary one (Greig et al., 2008; Finn, 2008; Osborne et al., 2010). A number of studies have also highlighted the importance of child-led activities for developing literacy at home, such as the Letterbox Club (Griffiths et al., 2008; Griffiths et al., 2009; Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010).

Figure 6 outlines some examples of reading interventions for children who are looked-after:

**Figure 6. Reading interventions for looked-after children**

### Paired Reading

Paired reading (Morgan, 1976) was not originally designed for looked-after children, but the general aim of increasing reading enjoyment and ability. However, specific evaluations have considered the effects of paired reading for looked-after children (discussed below.) In paired reading, there are a number of stages:

1. Child and parent/carer read together so the child is provided with a model of competent reading.
2. As the child becomes more confident in their reading, they are given the option of reading alone.
3. If the child makes a mistake when reading alone and struggles to correct themselves, the parent/carer helps them to pronounce the word and continues to read with the child again.
- 4.

This cycle of reading has been shown to be effective for increasing literacy in the general population (Topping and Lindsay, 1992; Brooks, 2007). It is also beginning to receive an evidence base for its effectiveness with looked-after children specifically (Menmuir, 1994; Osborne et al., 2010). Osborne et al. (2010) found an average improvement in reading age of 12 months during the 16-week paired reading programme, with poorer readers showing the greatest gains in reading age. During a replication of this programme in Sweden, similar results were found where children showed an average increase in reading age of 11 months (Vinnerljung et al., 2014). Osborne et al. (2010) also found increased confidence and enthusiasm for reading amongst foster children, and a positive effect on the relationship between the foster carer and child.

### Big Book Bash

The Big Book Bash (Valios, 2007) is an annual event organised by Derbyshire Council to bring together looked-after children, fostering families and professionals with children's authors and illustrators to celebrate the joy of reading.

### **The Letterbox Club**

The Letterbox Club consists of monthly, personalised parcels, addressed and sent to children aged 5-13 years in foster care (Winter et al., 2011). The parcels are large brightly coloured envelopes containing two books (including a mix of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry carefully selected by an independent panel), stationery and maths games. The packages are sent once a month for six months; at the end of the programme children will have built up a home library of twelve books. The parcels are all age-appropriate and do not rely on the participation of foster carers, although the intervention aims to encourage carer involvement in reading and playing with the children in their care.

The Letterbox Club has been extensively evaluated throughout the UK, with positive effects on literacy and maths found in England (Griffiths et al., 2008; Griffiths et al., 2009; Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010), Wales (Griffiths and Comber, 2011), and Northern Ireland (Winter et al., 2011), as well as being replicated internationally, such as in the Bookworm Club in Canada (Brady, 2013). Evaluations have revealed increases in literacy and maths scores, most notably at periods such as the school holidays, when children's skills are normally expected to remain stagnant or even regress (Winter et al., 2011). The Letterbox Club has also been found to have a number of wider benefits such as building family routines. Children appear to enjoy sharing their parcels with their foster families and this has been found to have a positive impact on their self-esteem and confidence.

Despite the impressive evidence base for the Letterbox Club across the UK, all of the studies have a common limitation; none employed the use of a comparison group (Winter et al., 2011). In 2016, Mooney, Winter and Connolly (2016) conducted the first randomised controlled trial in Northern Ireland. In this study, the Letterbox Club did not show impact on foster children's reading skills (reading accuracy, comprehension and rate) or attitudes to reading or school. In order to shed further light on the outcomes, a process evaluation was simultaneously conducted which suggested the programme would benefit from a clearer role for foster carers. The involvement and engagement of foster carers in the Letterbox Club has been found to vary between families, as carers vary in their confidence and knowledge of how to best use the parcels (Hancock and Leslie, 2014; Mooney et al., 2016). Despite this, carers seemed to value children sharing the parcels with them and they highlighted the increased bonding time this gave them. It should be noted the delivery model for Letterbox Club in Northern Ireland, where this randomised controlled trial was conducted, is different to that in England and Wales. This study provides valuable learning but it needs to be translated appropriately, and explored through further research, in order to apply findings across the UK.

### **Fostering Education Training Programme**

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF, now CoramBAAF) have also had success in improving reading accuracy of foster children as part of their 'Fostering Education' training programme. The course sees groups of eight to 12 foster carers, with children aged between five and 10, attend weekly, four-hour sessions for 10 weeks. The course, designed and run by social workers, helps foster carers improve their reading and learning with children in their care. It does this through looking at foster carers' own experiences of education and teaching them to empathise with the education experience of children in their care. The course also teaches paired reading, which proved to be one of the most popular parts of the course (Stothart, 2011).

### Wriggle and Roar

This group started in Lambeth in 2008 as a multi-agency approach to supporting looked-after children under five and their foster carers (Conway and Godden, 2012).

Group activities are designed to help encourage positive interaction between child and carer. These activities include twice-weekly structured sessions with free play, hellos, singing, story times, craft activities, attention and listening games, song choosing and goodbyes. Carers are also able to access support and advice from a range of professionals at the centre to help promote successful placements and avoid placement breakdown.

Conway and Godden (2012) note that evaluations have found positive outcomes. These include improvements in: children's interactions, early development and communication skills, carers' access to support networks, development of friendships, and carers' confidence to support their child's development.

### Reading Rich

This consisted of a series of literacy interventions in Scotland (Finn, 2008) which aimed to promote a reading-rich environment for looked-after children and young people. Interventions involved several features including establishing home libraries, contact with a published author and connections with local libraries.

Carers were provided with information and training days to equip them with the skills to help the children in their care develop a reading habit at home. Findings from the evaluation suggested that the children and young people involved had improved literacy skills and tools for reading. Young people were also said to find enjoyment from reading and the project had helped to inspire them and raise self-esteem. However, not all interventions were successful. Reasons for this included placement instability (e.g. young people being moved to a new placement before the end of the intervention), and residential care staff unable to find the time to work closely with the young people.

Previous scoping and/or systematic reviews have pointed to the promising nature of the interventions shown in Figure 6 (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liablo et al., 2012). Indeed, Forsman and Vinnerljung (2012) concluded that all of the studies in their review of reading interventions appeared to have a positive impact on looked-after children's educational attainment. This was irrespective of type, form or location. There are weaknesses in these studies, however, as the majority of the evaluation literature makes use of small sample sizes and many are locally focused 'single shot' studies that have not been replicated (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012). Therefore, the effectiveness of interventions aiming to increase looked-after children's literacy levels is hard to determine.

## 2.6 Increasing reading amongst children who are looked-after

In addition to the interventions presented above, Greig et al. (2006) make reference to studies of early reading and literacy of the general population, which suggest links between parent behaviour in a reading situation, security of the infant in terms of attachment, and the quality of the experience. Those with insecure relationships read less frequently and reading may be more

frequently interrupted by disciplining. In one such study, Bus and van Ijzendoorn (1995) assume that interest in reading is evoked by the pleasure of sharing a book with a parent and, as a result, children become interested in reading because of parental efforts to support this interest. The attachment relationship between children and parents (or other caregivers) is, therefore, suggested as an important influence on reading, a finding supported by Strommen and Mates (2004) amongst others. Bus and van Ijzendoorn (2005) recommended an interactive reading model to help develop children's enjoyment of reading and literacy. While these studies were not with looked-after children, they do indicate the types of issues that may occur when a caregiver is reading with a child and what can affect the experience.

In terms of support required by the caregiver, Finn's (2008) study of Scotland's Reading Rich scheme found that foster carers lacked confidence in reading with the children in their care and wanted further knowledge of suitable literature, guidance on how to share reading (especially with older children); and development of their own reading habits. Seden (2009) notes that providing more books is no guarantee that anyone will read them, nor that providing incentives to read will make it an enjoyable process. Instead, practitioner and volunteer support in a range of settings is needed, including working collaboratively with communities to enhance literacy opportunities (such as book clubs).

Children can be resistant to engaging in formal learning activities outside school (Holmes, 2009). Foster carers need support in finding different ways to engage children in reading. Greig et al. (2008) note that children who have poor relationship histories, which may include looked-after children, are more likely to have an insecure attachment style and to have unhappy experiences of reading, including finding reading a stressful experience. Children who are securely attached are found to have better outcomes over time (Levy and Orlans, 1998). Shared reading has the potential to provide a supportive and safe space to develop relationships and reading skills (Osborne et al., 2010; The Fostering Network, 2012). The Fostering Network (2006) notes that foster carers need help, advice and training from a range of education experts on how best to support the children in their care.

As with educational achievement, placement stability for foster children also has an inevitable impact on their reading (Holmes, 2009). Finn (2008) found one issue with the Reading Rich scheme, which relied on young people attending appointments at the library, was changes in placements leading to cancelled meetings, non-attendance and difficulties in maintaining contact. As noted above, if reading together is employed at an early stage, this might help develop relationships in foster families and improve placement stability. The Fostering Network (2006) have previously noted that biological sons and daughters of foster carers have a crucial role to play in ensuring the placement is a success, yet there have been no studies exploring the relationship between reading as a foster family or reading between children in a foster family.

Miller (2012) argues that fiction offers the opportunity for children to explore their (and others') identity as well as develop reading motivation and literacy. Reading aloud to young children has also been found to have significant benefits in terms of promoting the development of language and other emergent literacy skills (Duursma et al., 2008). This suggests that age is no barrier to benefitting from reading, whether it be to improve literacy or to explore identity and develop self-confidence. Evidence indicates that reading for pleasure is linked to both age and gender, however, with girls more likely to read than boys and reading for pleasure declining in adolescence and early adulthood before a resurgence later in life (Strommen and Mates, 2004; Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Our research will explore whether this also holds true for foster children.

There are a number of factors that influence the experience of looked-after children when reading which this study can help address. Focusing on the level of support provided by the foster carer to the child when reading, the involvement of the wider family, how children are encouraged to read, and who supports carers with this, will add to our understanding of these influences.

## 2.7 Summary

This literature review has provided an overview of foster care in the UK, and summarised the available evidence relating to: the attainment of looked-after children; the benefits of reading; interventions to increase the reading of looked-after children; and the factors that may influence reading amongst looked-after children. While there are a number of studies which explore the effect of reading on the general population, very few, apart from evaluations of specific interventions, address reading for pleasure amongst children in foster care.

This literature review has highlighted:

- **Foster care is the most common care received** by looked-after children in the UK, with 75 – 86% of looked-after children in such placements (The Fostering Network, 2015).
- **The differences in types of fostering arrangements**, from emergency or short-term placements to long-term placements with and without the intention to adopt. Foster carers may be unknown to children in their care, or may be a relation or friend of the family. Though Roy and Rutter (2006) have looked at differences in early reading for children in residential and foster care, there is an absence of research on how the type of foster care placement may affect reading. As such, our research offers an important opportunity to explore this.
- **Looked-after children generally achieve lower educational outcomes** than children who are not in care (Sebba et al., 2015). Reasons for this difference included placement instability (e.g. Maxwell et al., 2006 and Allen and Vacca, 2010); the lack of clarity around the role of the foster carer in supporting the learning and development of children in their care (Maddern, 2010); and an over-emphasis on leaving care and living independently at a crucial stage of learning (Fostering Network, 2006). It was noted, however, that **foster care has the potential to improve attitudes towards education** when compared with other types of care (Hedin et al., 2011), though some foster carers may sometimes place lower importance on education given the challenges faced by children in their care.
- **The importance of children reading for pleasure and the beneficial effect of a rich home literacy environment** (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Wilkins and Terlitsky, 2016). Studies show links between early reading and later academic attainment and behaviour issues (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998; Pears et al., 2011), which are important considerations given the greater number of looked-after children who have social, emotional and behavioural needs (Bywater et al., 2010; Sebba et al., 2015). The benefits of home reading and reading for pleasure in addressing these educational and behavioural issues, as well as improving relationships between foster carers and their children, were explored. Finally, the potentially therapeutic benefits of reading, where characters enable discussions of traumatic experiences or exploration of identity, and tailoring reading to the (learning) needs of the child have been discussed (Morning, 2008; Brennan, 2010; The Fostering Network, 2012; Miller, 2012).
- Different **interventions for increasing engagement with reading for looked-after children**. Evaluations of these interventions identified the importance of encouraging the active involvement of foster carers in engaging with children's reading (Mooney et al., 2016), and providing support for carers to help them engage their children in reading, including what books to choose and how to share the reading experience (Finn, 2008). Foster carers need to feel they have control over their participation when supporting the educational attainment of children in their care (Ghate and Hazel, 2002). Our study will explore in more detail what support is currently provided to foster carers to read with their children and what further support may be needed.
- The importance of **supportive factors for increasing reading for pleasure** amongst looked-after children. These included learning the pleasure of reading from a caregiver, the direct involvement of caregivers in reading for pleasure, and placement stability. Children need to feel safe and supported when learning to read or when finding reading challenging (Greig et al. 2006; Seden, 2009). Developing their interest in reading through

selecting appropriate books, engaging in literacy activities, reading aloud or identifying with characters is vital if they are to read for pleasure (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008; Miller, 2012).

These factors will be examined further in our survey and interviews with foster carers and children in order to understand how to support foster carers further in reading with their foster children.

### 3. Research findings

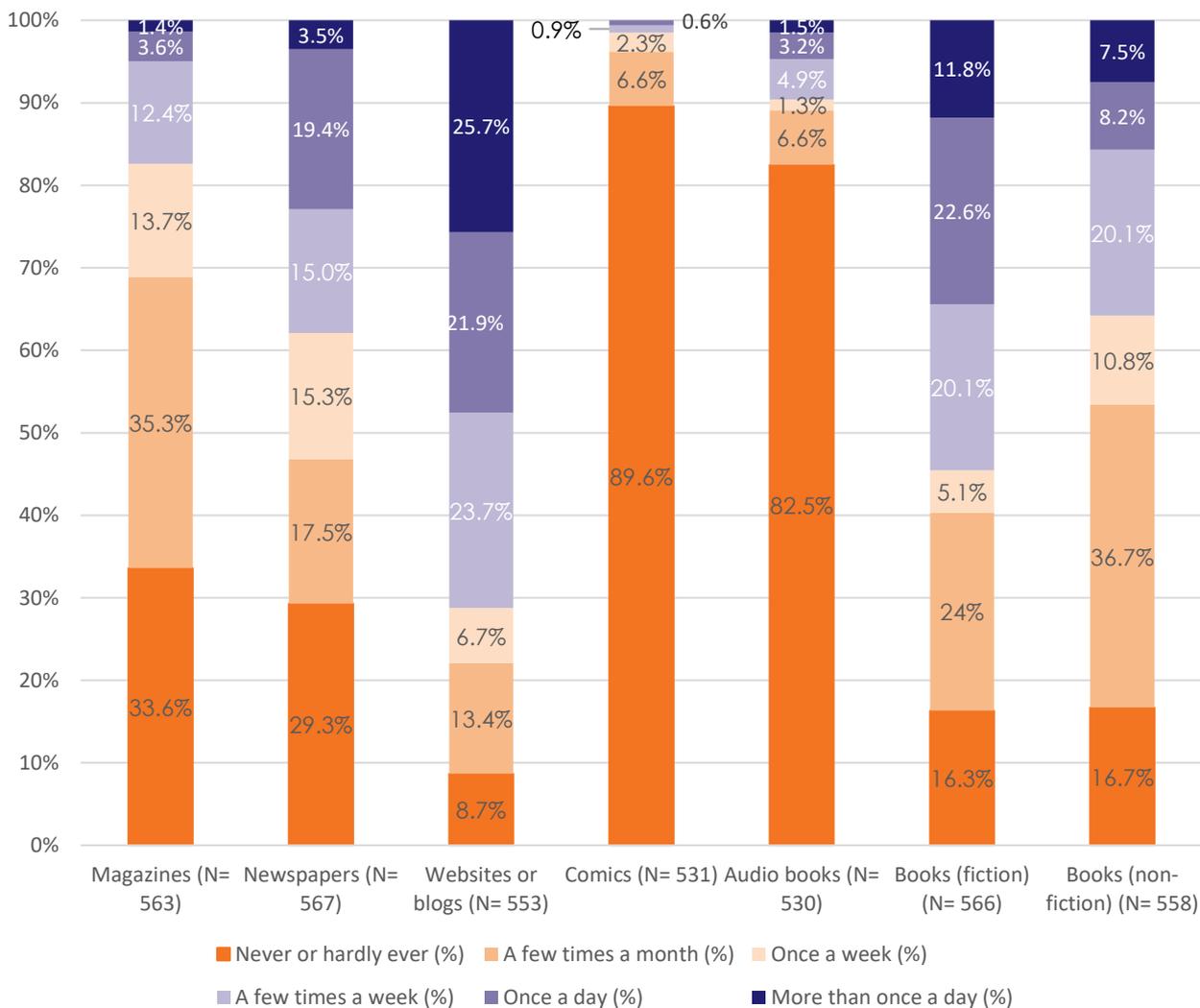
The following sections present the findings from the foster carer and foster children's surveys, and interviews. As explained in Section 1, the analyses of foster carer survey responses include both descriptive information, and statistical significance tests to see how different variables and responses may relate to each other. Only findings that were found to be statistically significant (were unlikely to have occurred by chance) have been reported.

#### 3.1 Foster carers' reading habits

##### 3.1.1 Current reading practices

Foster carers were asked in the survey about the materials they currently read themselves. Findings showed websites or blogs were read most frequently with 47.6% of carers reading these at least once a day. Some carers also reported reading fiction (34.4%) and non-fiction books (15.7%) at least once a day.

Figure 7: Frequency foster carers read different materials



Statistical analyses were conducted on the foster carer survey to consider the effect of other variables on the foster carers reading habits.

- There was a significant difference between **how frequently foster carers reported reading**

**non-fiction books and which country they lived in**<sup>12</sup>. Post-hoc tests showed that foster carers based in Wales were more likely to report higher levels of reading non-fiction books when compared with the rest of the sample.

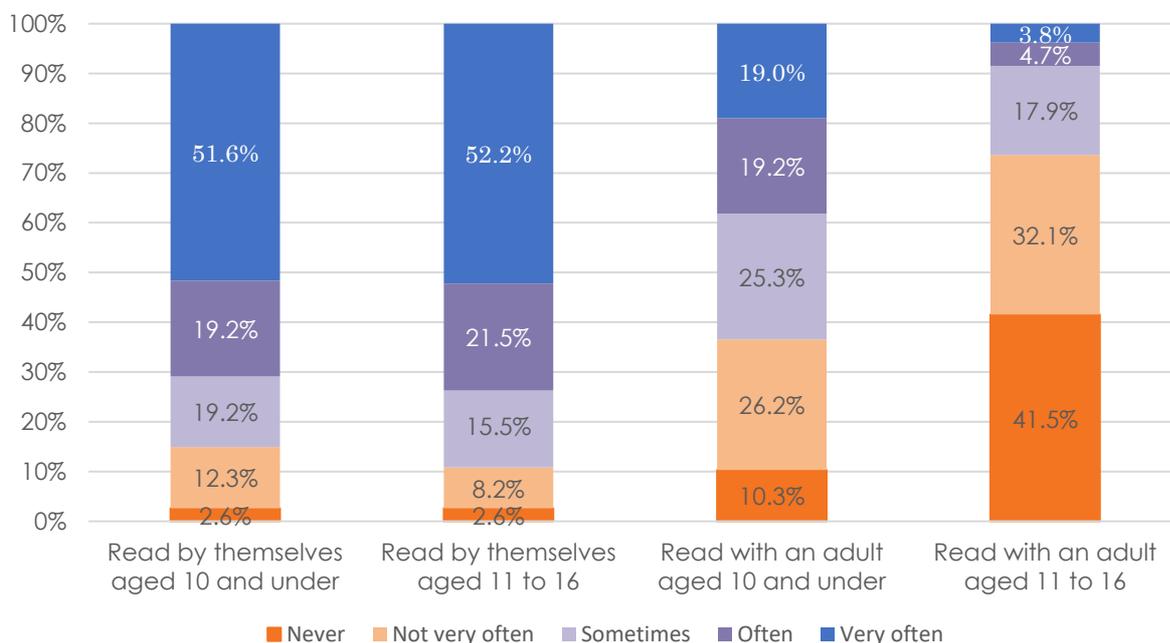
- **Gender** was also significant with males less likely to read fiction than females<sup>13</sup>.

Foster carers were asked more about their current reading habits in interviews. As with the findings from the survey, foster carers enjoyed reading fiction and non-fiction books, either online or in paper format. One carer also enjoyed reading the newspaper online, whereas another stated that they found reading newspapers too depressing. Many carers used their reading time to broaden their understanding and knowledge, particularly about issues affecting the children that they foster. The majority of carers said that they did not read as much as they would like to, due to a lack of time. Some carers used audio books as a means of still reading while completing other tasks, while others only read on holiday or once the children were in bed. However, carers reported that they felt too tired and unable to concentrate by the evening and this reduced their ability to read more. Some carers also noted other distractions which reduced the amount of time that they read, such as watching television and playing computer games.

### 3.1.2 Foster carers' reading practices as children

Foster carers were asked how often they read, both by themselves and with an adult when they were aged 10 years or younger and when they were aged between 11 and 16 years. In terms of reading by themselves, there was little difference between the two age groups, with just over half reporting that they read independently very often at both ages. However, carers were more likely to have read with an adult when they were aged 10 or younger, with 63.5% stating that they read sometimes, often or very often with an adult at this age, compared with only 26.4% when they were aged 11 to 16 (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Foster carers reading practices as a child**



There were several significant results in terms of understanding how socio-demographic factors were related a foster carer's reading as a child.

<sup>12</sup>  $t(553)=2.136, p < .03, \eta^2 = .008$ ; Wales:  $M=3.26, SD=1.54$ ; Rest of the sample:  $M=2.83, SD=1.48$

<sup>13</sup>  $t(561)=3.03, p=.003, \eta^2 = .016$ ; Males:  $M=2.87, SD=1.66$ , Females:  $M=3.53, SD=1.68$

- There was a significant difference between males and females, **with female carers tending to read more frequently, either by themselves or with an adult, as children.** However, these significant differences only revealed a small-sized effect (a breakdown of these results can be seen in Appendix D).
- On average, carers living in England tended to read more frequently with an adult at the age of 10 years and younger<sup>14</sup> compared with the rest of the carers.

There were also some significant findings in terms of the frequency a carer read as a child, both by themselves and with an adult, and their qualification level:

- Foster carers with a **lower level of qualification** (level 1 qualification or below or no qualification) **did not read as frequently with an adult when they were aged 10 and under** compared with carers with higher levels of education: GCSE/A-Levels and higher education and above<sup>15</sup>.
- **Carers with a lower level of qualification** (level 1 or below or no qualifications) **reported only sometimes reading by themselves at age 10 or younger** while carers who achieved GCSE/A-levels or higher education and above read more frequently by themselves<sup>16</sup>.
- Finally, **foster carers who had the highest level of qualification** (higher education and above) **were more likely to read by themselves often when aged 11 to 16 compared with those with the lowest level of qualification** (level 1 or no qualifications) who were more likely to only read sometimes by themselves at the same age<sup>17</sup>.

These findings could indicate the important impact of reading when young on the qualifications a person achieves later in life.

Data from interviews suggested nearly all foster carers had enjoyed reading as children and had positive memories of being read to. Foster carers saw it as a special time to spend with their parents. However, there were two examples where foster carers had not enjoyed reading as children, because they had found it difficult or stressful. This did not seem to impact upon their current reading practices with their foster children as they understood the importance of reading with children.

## 3.2 Foster children's reading habits

### 3.2.1 Frequency of reading

As shown in Figure 9, half of the foster carers responding to the survey reported reading at least once a day with the children they foster. Interestingly, 16.5% of foster carers never or hardly ever read with their foster children. Barriers to reading with children are covered in more depth in section 3.9.

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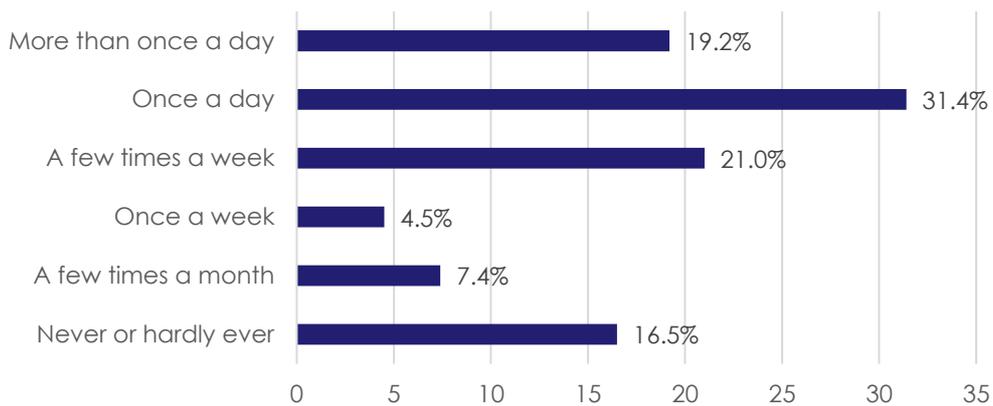
<sup>14</sup>  $t(548)=2.76, p=.006, \eta^2 = .014$ ; England:  $M=3.18, SD=1.27$ ; Rest of the sample:  $M=2.82, SD=1.26$

<sup>15</sup>  $F(2, 84.830)=4.459, p=.014, \eta^2 = 0.016$ ; Lower level qualification:  $M=2.52, SD=1.18$ ; GCSE/A-Levels:  $M=3.10, SD=1.21$ ; and higher education and above:  $M=3.20, SD=1.31$

<sup>16</sup>  $F(2, 86.395)=5.214, p=.007, \eta^2 = .024$ ; Lower level qualification:  $M=3.42, SD=1.39$ ; GCSE/A-Levels:  $M=4.01, SD=1.16$  and higher education and above:  $M=4.19, SD=1.12$

<sup>17</sup>  $F(2, 542)=3.175, p=.043, \eta^2 = .011$ ; Lower level qualification:  $M=3.77, SD=1.19$ ; higher education and above:  $M=4.24, SD=1.04$

**Figure 9: Frequency foster carer reads with foster child**

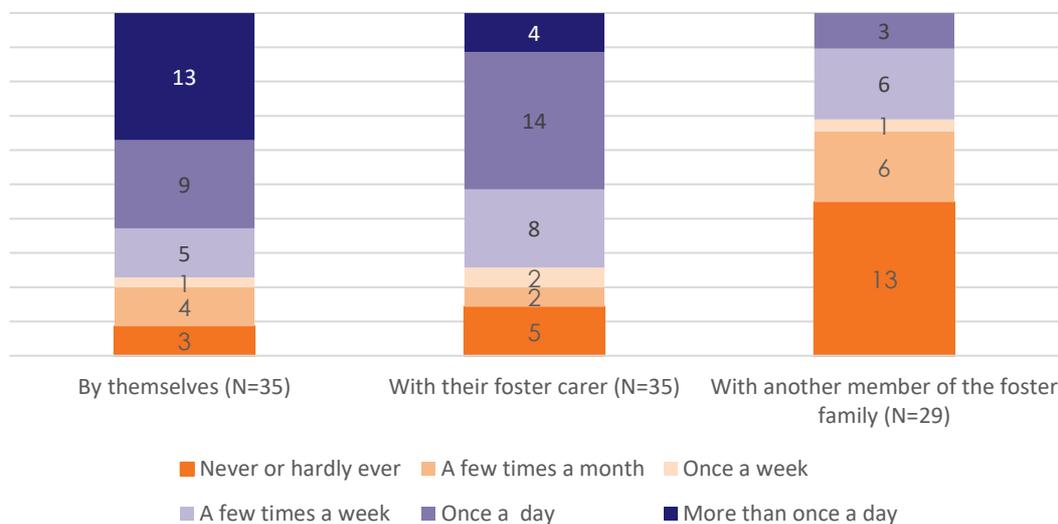


(N=866)

Further analysis showed a significant moderate relationship<sup>18</sup> between the age of the foster child and the frequency carers read with their child. **As the child gets older the frequency the foster carer and the child read together decreases.**

Foster children were also asked about their reading habits in the children's survey. Figure 10 shows the frequency that foster children read by themselves, with their carer, and with another member of their foster family. Of the 35 children responding to the survey, 22 children said that they read by themselves at least once a day and 18 read with their carer at least once a day.

**Figure 10: Frequency foster children read by themselves, with their carer, and with another member of their foster family<sup>19</sup>**



(n=35)

The responses from foster carers and foster children were directly compared for the 25 surveys, where matching was possible. In 14 cases, the responses from the foster carers, matched those from the foster children, in 10 cases the foster carers said that they read more frequently together than the foster child did, and in one case the foster child said that they read more frequently with their foster carer than the foster carer stated. It is therefore possible that there was some element of

<sup>18</sup>  $r=.629, p=.000$

<sup>19</sup> Figures are frequencies due to small sample size

exaggeration from foster carers, or there may have been differences between foster children's and carers' interpretations of the process.

The frequency of reading was also addressed in interviews with foster carers and foster children. Interviewees explained they would try and encourage reading at least a few times a week. Reading sessions usually lasted at least fifteen minutes each time. Most foster carers said that it was part of their daily routine to read together and often happened around bedtime to create a relaxing atmosphere before sleep. In some cases, the foster carers' partner and wider family read with the foster child.

As foster children became older, they generally become more independent readers. Foster children who were engaged with reading often wanted to read by themselves by the time they were around nine years old. There were a variety of reasons for this. Foster children who had the ability to read by themselves generally enjoyed spending time reading. Some carers and young people described how they no longer wanted to read with their carer as this was not a "cool" thing to do.

"It makes me feel embarrassed to read with my foster carer because it makes me feel babyish."

Foster child

However, some carers still read with their foster child even once they were able to read by themselves, albeit less frequently or for less time. Carers believed that the foster children enjoyed this time together as they found reading quite difficult but still enjoyed the experience of "getting lost in a book".

Reading routines tended to be quite different for foster children in their current placement compared with before they were taken into care. This often led to the children reporting that they enjoyed reading more now compared to previously. Carers also thought that most of the foster children had had no or little exposure to books prior to their current placement. For some foster children this resulted in no interest in books. However, there were some children that carers believed had a real love for books, perhaps from having some exposure at school.

How foster children were motivated to engage with reading was also discussed. Foster carers described how important it was to find the right book to inspire children to read. Once a child was inspired it generally became much easier to keep that motivation and delight in reading going. A recurring theme also related to the idea of praise for the foster child. One foster carer felt that praise had been a key motivator for the children in their care as, previously it may not have been something that they received very often. This gave the child an opportunity to feel good about themselves even through some difficult times.

"I sometimes wonder whether they've clung to that [reading] as a way of praise through everything that went on."

Foster carer

Foster carers prioritized reading over other activities at least some of the time. For example, carers described how computers and televisions were turned off at a set time each night and books chosen for the carer to read to the child.

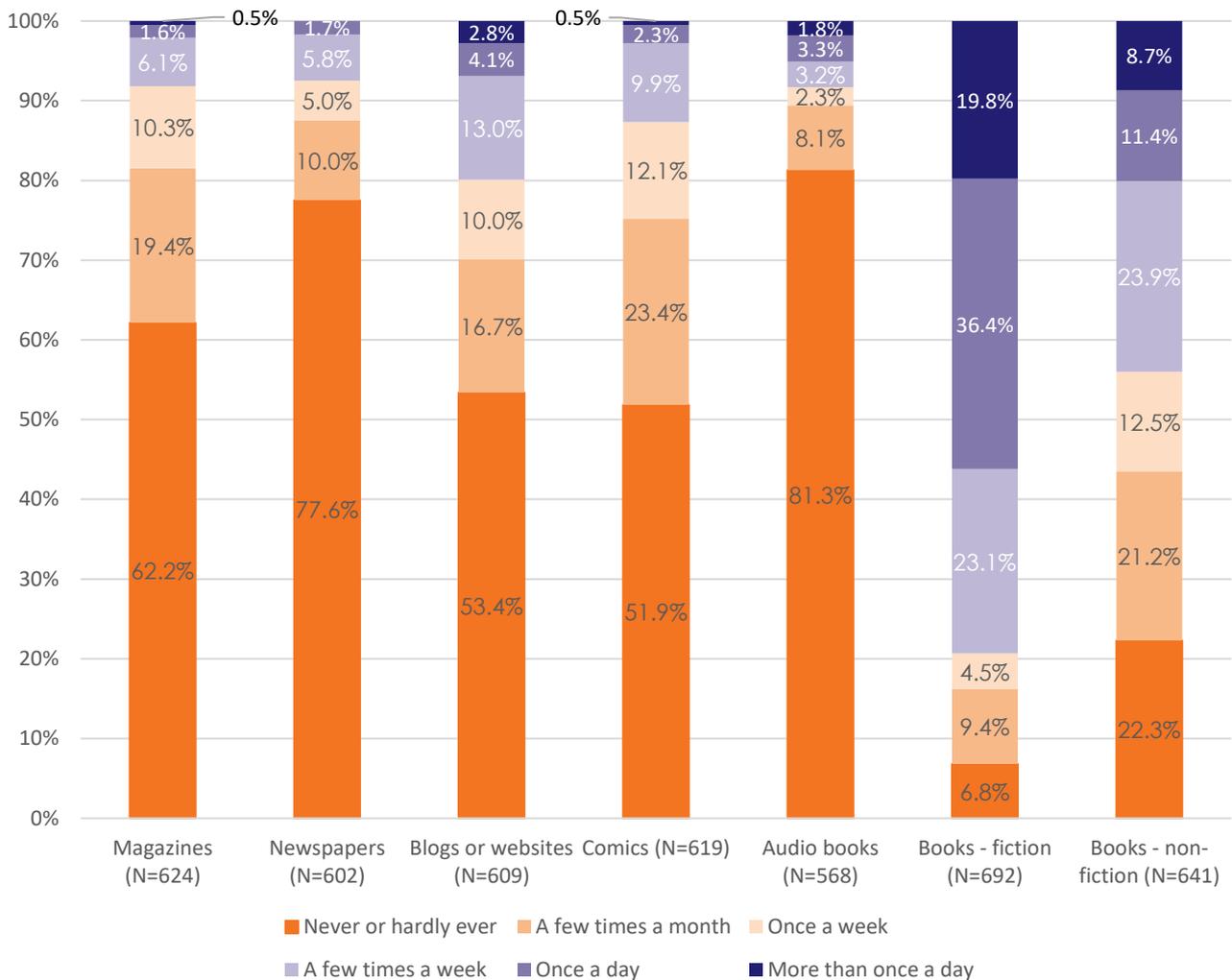
However, it is important to recognise individual differences in reading with children generally. For instance, one foster carer reported one foster child turning into an avid reader, whereas with the other it was like "pulling teeth sometimes". This highlights that the same techniques and perseverance from the foster carer did not always result in the same outcomes, suggesting that foster carers need to be adaptable and provide targeted support when they have a child who simply is not interested or willing to engage with reading.

### 3.2.2 Materials read

Children and foster carers were asked about the types of reading materials the children read. Specifically, foster carers were asked, via the survey, how frequently they read different materials

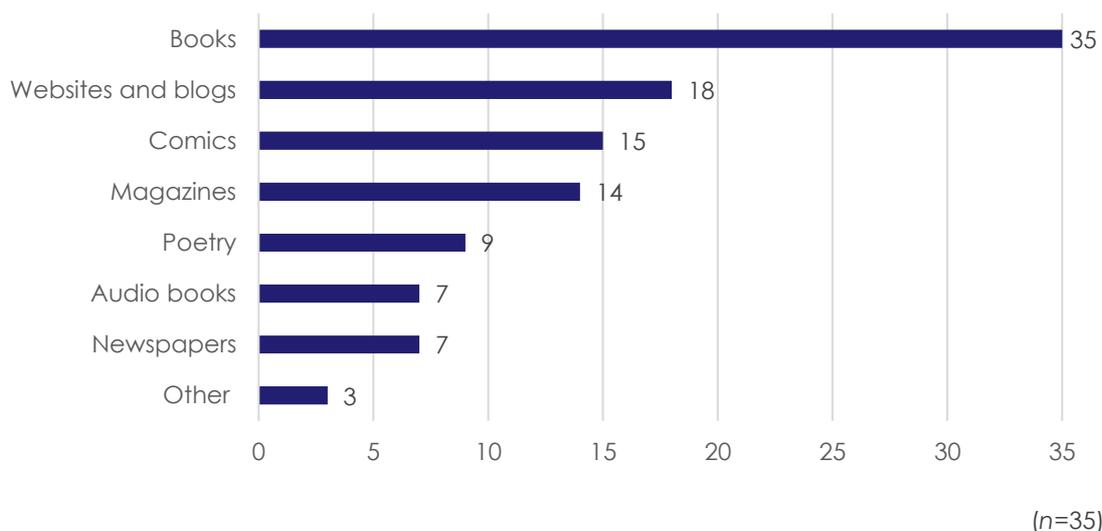
together (Figure 11). The most commonly read materials were fiction books, with over 50% reading these at least once a day with their children. Just over 20% of foster carers reported reading non-fiction books at least once a day with their children.

**Figure 11: Frequencies carers read certain materials with their foster children**



Foster children were also asked how often they read certain materials; which could have been by themselves or with their foster carer (Figure 12). All of the foster children that responded to our survey read books, and half read websites or blogs. However, over half (53.4%) of foster carers stated that they never or hardly ever read websites or blogs with their foster children suggesting foster children may spend more time reading these media by themselves.

**Figure 12: Materials foster children read**



Understanding the types of materials read was also covered in the interviews with foster carers and foster children. Findings showed that children mostly read books, and in the case of younger children, picture books. Foster carers often commented they would try to follow up on areas or activities that their foster children had shown an interest in, and try to get a book on the topic, to encourage this. There were different ways that books were chosen. In some cases, this was led by the child, but in others the foster carer would decide on the book, or they would make use of school books. Libraries were seen as particularly useful resource, with foster carers visiting in order to choose books with their foster children.

### 3.3 Foster children's current reading level

Almost half of foster carers (43.0%) reported their foster child's reading level was below average (Table 2).

**Table 2: Reading level of foster child (reported by foster carer)**

Level	Percent
Above average	21.6
Average	35.4
Below average	43.0

(n = 769)

Statistical analyses were conducted to see whether other factors were related to foster children's reported reading levels<sup>20</sup>. Findings showed:

- There was a significant but weak association between a child's reading level (compared to the average level) and their age<sup>21</sup>. This indicates **as age increases so does the reading level of the foster child compared to the average level**. This finding is different to national evidence on attainment where the attainment gap between children in care and the rest of the cohort tends to widen. This could be attributed to, in part, the biased sample of the survey of predominately foster carers that **did read** with their foster children. It might also be due to nearly two-thirds of the sample being long term placements, therefore

<sup>20</sup> Additional needs were found to be related to reading level, and therefore these were controlled for in analyses

<sup>21</sup>  $r = -.127, p = .000$

having time to have a positive impact on a child's reading ability.

- There were also weak associations between the reported reading level of the child and the frequency that they read magazines<sup>22</sup>; blogs and websites<sup>23</sup>; and non-fiction<sup>24</sup>. This indicates that **foster children with a below average reading level were less likely to read magazines, blogs and websites, and non-fiction with their carers.**
- There was a weak relationship between the length of time a respondent had been a foster carer and the foster child's reading level<sup>25</sup>. This suggests that **the less time a respondent had been a foster carer the more likely the foster child will be to have a reading ability below average** (as reported by foster carers). Further research would be necessary to understand the reasons for this finding.
- There were weak relationships between the length of time a child had been in care<sup>26</sup>, the length of time they had been with their foster carer<sup>27</sup> and their reading level compared to the average for their age. **The longer a child had been in care, and the longer they had lived with their foster carer the better the foster child's reading level compared to average for their age.** This could indicate that better placement stability (i.e. spending more time with just one carer) leads to improved reading abilities for children.

### 3.4 Foster carers' influence on child's reading

#### Foster carers' current reading practices

Statistical analyses were run on the carer survey responses to consider the possible relationships between foster carers' current reading practices and foster children's reading.

- Correlation analysis revealed a weak positive relationship between the frequency a foster carer reads fiction books and the frequency they read with their foster child<sup>28</sup>. There was also a weak positive relationship between the frequency a foster carer reads magazines and how frequently they read with their foster child<sup>29</sup>. These findings suggest that **the more time foster carers spend reading fiction and magazines, the more frequently they read with their foster children.**
- In addition, there were also significant moderate positive relationships between **the frequency a foster carer reads certain materials and the frequency the foster child reads the same materials.** This highlights the importance of foster carers as role models and the effect their own reading habits have on the reading practices of the foster child. Specifically, the more frequently carers read magazines, newspapers, websites and blogs, comics, audio books, fiction books and non-fiction books, the more often their children read these materials (detailed correlations can be found in Appendix D).

#### Foster carers' reading practices as children

The reading practices of foster carers when they were younger also seem to be related to the **frequency that the foster child reads certain materials with their foster carer.** For instance:

- The more frequently carers read with adults at 11 to 16 years, the more frequently they read the following materials with their foster child: non-fiction<sup>30</sup>; newspapers<sup>31</sup>;

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<sup>22</sup>  $r = -.130, p = .002$

<sup>23</sup>  $r = -.095, p = .028$

<sup>24</sup>  $r = -.157, p = .000$

<sup>25</sup>  $r = .084, p = .020$

<sup>26</sup>  $r = .126, p = .001$

<sup>27</sup>  $r = .150, p = .000$

<sup>28</sup>  $r = .130, p = .000$

<sup>29</sup>  $r = .093, p = .007$

<sup>30</sup>  $r = .118, p = .003$

<sup>31</sup>  $r = .115, p = .006$

magazines<sup>32</sup>; and audio books<sup>33</sup>.

- The more frequently a foster carer read by themselves when they were aged 11 to 16, the more frequently they read non-fiction books<sup>34</sup> and fiction books<sup>35</sup> with their foster child.
- The less frequently a foster carer read with an adult when they were aged 10 years and younger, the more frequently they read with their foster child<sup>36</sup>. This could be because foster carers were capable readers by ten years old so did not spend much time reading with an adult, or because they found reading difficult or did not enjoy it but understood the importance of reading and so made the effort with their foster children.

### Role of the foster carer

Interviewed carers discussed the need for them to make reading fun, interactive and enjoyable in order to encourage foster children to read. Foster carers had to be creative in how they engaged children to read. This included having a variety of accessible books available for children to choose from; using books in a variety of formats (e.g. books and e-books); visiting the library; and incorporating reading into everyday activities such as reading recipes and shopping lists.

Carers also believed they had a responsibility to be a good role model by reading in front of their foster children. This was thought to be beneficial as when children see their carer reading they become interested and want to know what the carer is reading. The children also see their carer enjoying themselves, and they want to have the same level of enjoyment when they read.

"Being a good role model in reading is one of the best things you can actually do."

Foster carer

## 3.5 Influence of fostering and care arrangements on a child's reading practices

- There was a significant positive association between how long the child had been in care with the foster carer, and how frequently they read together<sup>37</sup>. **The longer a child had been in their current placement the more the child and the foster carer read together.**
- The **type of foster placement** also seemed to impact on how frequently foster children and foster carers read together<sup>38</sup>. Specifically, those fostering to adopt read more frequently than those who had children in emergency, long term or permanent placements; and those in short term placements read more frequently than those in long term or permanent placements. This may be linked with the age of the child. For carers who are fostering to adopt this predominately happens with younger children and, as already discussed, reading was used with this age group as part of the bedtime routine. The children in long term and permanent placements will cover a broader age range and include those children who are already reading independently.

Carers were asked in the interviews about their views on different placements and reading. Generally, those offering **respite care and short term placements** suggested it was potentially harder to start a routine and develop an interest in books. This shows a difference between findings from the survey and interviews in terms of short term placements. In the interviews, carers reported they might be faced with more resistance to reading from the child if this was a change to their

<sup>32</sup>  $r=.105, p=.010$

<sup>33</sup>  $r=.103, p=.017$

<sup>34</sup>  $r=.087, p=.029$

<sup>35</sup>  $r=.083, p=.031$

<sup>36</sup>  $r=-.081, p=.021$

<sup>37</sup>  $r=.806, p<.000$

<sup>38</sup>  $F(5) = 11.128, p < .000, \eta^2 = 0.06$ ; fostering to adopt:  $M = 1.74, SD = 1.01$ ; short term placements:  $M = 2.51, SD = 1.61$ ; emergency care:  $M = 3.06, SD = 1.77$ ; long term or permanent:  $M = 3.24, SD = 1.70$

normal routine or something completely new to them. Carers acknowledged it took time for reading together to become a regular activity. However, carers also explained how short term placements were not always particularly short in the length of time a foster child stayed in the placement. There were examples in the interviews of foster children being in their current short term placement for over a year, while a longer term placement was found for the child. This time enabled carers to start a regular reading routine. Interviewed carers providing short term placements also looked after younger foster children perhaps enabling them to engage in a reading routine more readily than carers providing short term placements to older children.

Interviewed carers also spoke very positively about reading with children in respite and short term placements. Routines were already established in foster homes and other children were already enjoying being read to, making it easier for the respite child to accept this as part of the routine. Other interviewed carers provided respite and short term placements to younger children and they believed they were unlikely to have any negative views about reading at that age and more likely to enjoy the time spent reading together.

Carers also discussed the impact of a child's care history on their reading ability. Views were mixed. Some carers felt that if a child came into care at a young age and had been in relatively stable placements, then being in care would not have had a negative impact on their reading abilities. However, if a child had experienced multiple placements then this could have a negative impact on their reading ability as they may not have had someone consistently spending time reading with them.

Nevertheless, the quality of the placement in terms of the carers' views towards the importance of reading, and whether they prioritised reading over other activities, was seen as the most important factor influencing a child's reading ability.

### **3.6 Foster carers' views about reading**

In the survey, carers were asked a range of questions to understand their views about reading. The findings are discussed below:

- The majority of carers reported that they enjoyed reading with 57.9% giving it a score of nine or 10 on a scale where one meant not at all and 10 a lot. Only 1.4% reported their enjoyment of reading as a one or two.
- Most carers felt very confident (85.7%) reading silently to themselves. However, confidence levels dropped slightly when it came to reading aloud to someone else (60.4%); and discussing books and stories with others (55.0%).

Carers were asked to provide comments in relation to their confidence about reading. Several carers explained they had professional experience relating to teaching children to read, for example working as teachers or librarians, which increased their confidence. Others explained that they found it easier and less stressful reading aloud to children than to adults. For those carers that felt less confident with their reading abilities, some said there were specific conditions which contributed to this such as being dyslexic or having a stammer.

In the interviews, foster carers were also asked about their confidence levels. Generally, carers felt confident with reading to their foster children. This was often attributed to being read to as a child and being keen readers themselves. One carer explained that they felt confident reading to a baby or pre-school child, but their confidence would decrease if they had to read to an older child as they would struggle to read the words and discuss their meaning.

Carers also expressed their enjoyment of reading. It provided them with an opportunity to escape from their everyday lives and concerns and make themselves feel better. Reading also provided a chance to develop their imagination. For some, spending time reading was almost seen as a guilty pleasure due to other demands on their time, but for others it was a time to relax and unwind. They were also very aware of the importance of reading in terms of education and the opportunity to broaden their own knowledge and views.

"I love it. It's a way of escaping. It's a way of winding down. It's relaxing. It's educational. I can escape from any worries I may have and get totally focused into a story, and then I'm just living the story."

Foster carer

"It just transports you to other places and opens your mind to other people's situations and places and circumstances."

Foster carer

### 3.6.1 Factors influencing carers' views about reading

To see if any other factors influenced carers' views about reading, various statistical tests were run:

- There was a relatively small though statistically significant difference between male carers' and female carers' enjoyment of reading with **female carers enjoying reading slightly more**.<sup>39</sup>
- There were significant differences between **carers with different levels of educational attainment** and their **confidence** in reading aloud to someone<sup>40</sup>; and discussing books and stories with others after reading<sup>41</sup>. Carers with higher education were significantly different in their confidence level when reading aloud to someone than carers with lower or no qualifications. **This indicates the higher the educational attainment of the carer the more confident they are when reading aloud**. There was also a significant difference in confidence discussing books with others between carers with higher attainment and carers with lower attainment.

## 3.7 Foster children's views about reading

Foster children were asked **how reading made them feel** via the survey and generally most of the respondents were positive, with 25 out of 35 saying it made them feel happy, 21 calm and 20 curious (Figure 13).

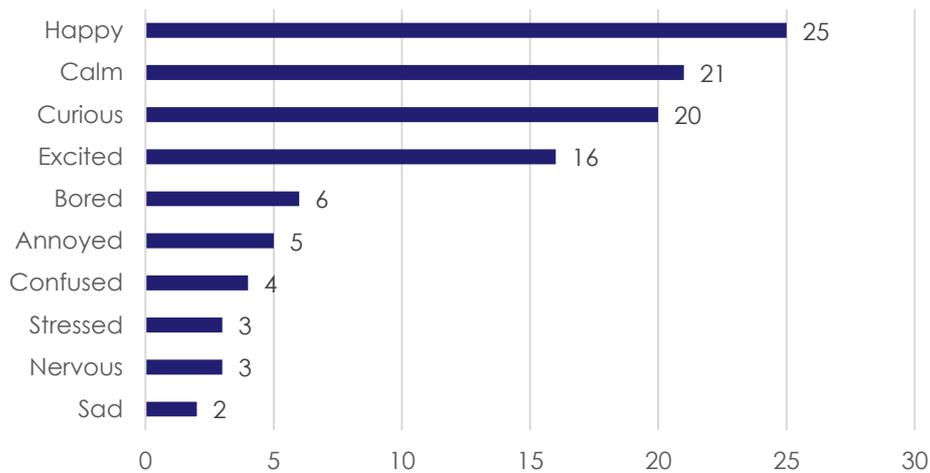
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<sup>39</sup>  $t(-3.04) = .782, p = .002, \eta^2 = .001$ ; Male:  $M = 7.80, SD = 1.90$ ; Female:  $M = 8.54, SD = 1.92$

<sup>40</sup>  $F(2, 93.44) = 17.90, p = .000, \eta^2 = 0.06$ ; higher education:  $M = 4.65, SD = .638$ ; GCSE/A-levels:  $M = 4.28, SD = .944$ ; Level 1 to no qualification:  $M = 4.06, SD = .984$

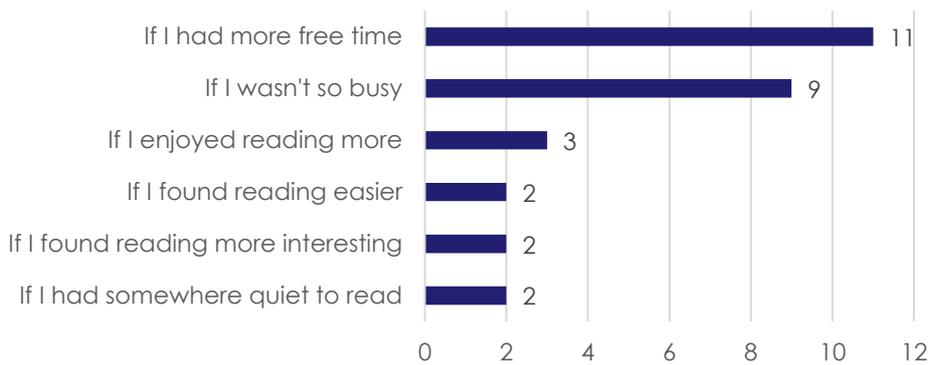
<sup>41</sup>  $F(2, 95.23) = 5.32, p = .006, \eta^2 = 0.02$ ; higher education:  $M = 4.46, SD = .778$ ; GCSE/A-Levels:  $M = 4.21, SD = .970$

**Figure 13: How reading made foster children feel<sup>42</sup>**



When asked if they would like to spend more time reading 13 responded that they would. 13 said no and nine were unsure, and were asked what would help them to read more. Many of the foster children highlighted a lack of free time (n=11) and being too busy (n=9) to read as barriers (Figure 14). Similar comments were made by children in interviews.

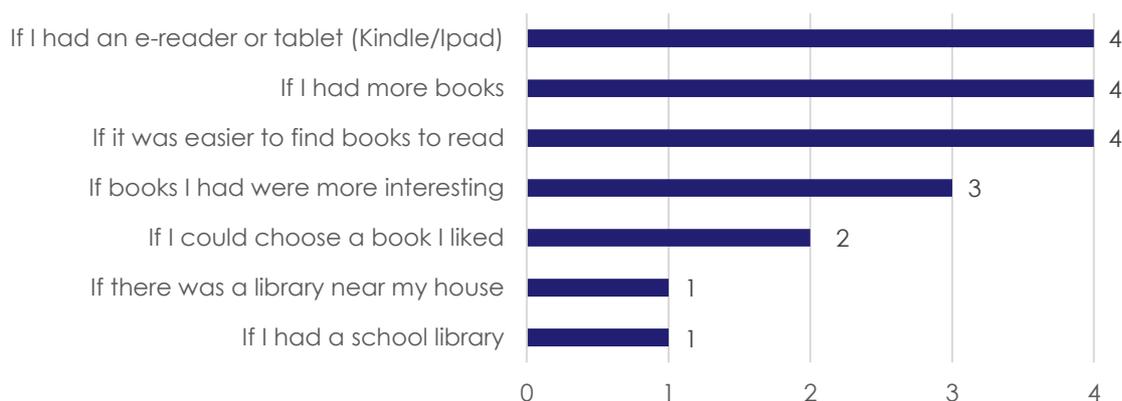
**Figure 14: Factors that would help foster children to read more**



Having **better access to books** was seen as important to increase their reading, with some foster children stating they would like an e-reader or tablet (n=4), more books (n=4), and easier access to books (n=4) (Figure 15).

<sup>42</sup> n=35, figures are frequencies due to the small sample size

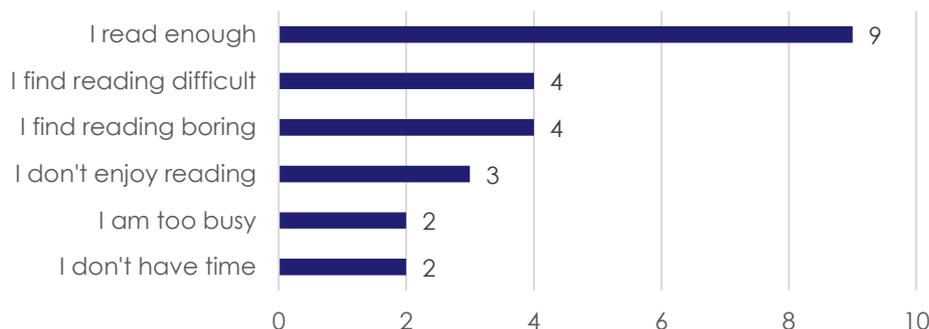
**Figure 15: Access to books to increase a foster child's reading<sup>43</sup>**



When asked, in the survey, how the influence of others may increase their reading, some foster children thought they would like adults to read with them more ( $n=5$ ) and also thought if their friends were more interested in reading it would help them to read more ( $n=3$ ).

The foster children who said **they did not want to read more** were asked why. The most frequent reason given was that they felt they read enough ( $n=9$ ) or that they thought reading was difficult or boring ( $n=4$ ) (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Reasons why foster children do not want to read more<sup>44</sup>**



In order to complement survey findings, foster children were asked for their overall views about reading in their interviews. Across the majority of children interviewed, their views on reading were very positive. Foster children expressed how reading made them feel happy and relaxed.

"In a word - amazing."

Foster child

Specifically, when asked about reading with someone else, foster children reported positive feelings such as happiness, increased confidence, and a feeling that someone was listening to them and cared for them.

"It makes me feel really nice."

Foster child

Some children saw reading to their foster carer as an opportunity to learn new words, **get help with their reading** and show the carer how hard they were working at improving their reading. They described how reading gave them an opportunity to learn about new things. It was also important

<sup>43</sup>  $n=15$ , figures are frequencies due to the small sample

<sup>44</sup>  $n=13$ , figures are frequencies due to the small sample

for some as a means of feeding **their imagination**.

"I just like it when you're reading big chapter books, you get sucked into it and you start thinking of what it would be like as that person sometimes, and you just get hooked into the book itself."

Foster child

Children were also asked about whether their views of reading had changed since reading with their foster carer. Whilst some children commented that they had always felt positive about reading, others attributed a change in their attitudes towards reading to their foster carer, explaining that they had not read much, or enjoyed reading, prior to engaging in this process with their foster carer. Foster children also commented on their improved reading skills, which have meant that they are able to read harder books, as well as reading at a faster pace, as a result of reading with their foster carer.

### 3.8 Benefits of reading

Foster carers and foster children were asked about the benefits of reading across interviews and surveys. Firstly, foster carers in the survey were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a list of potential benefits of reading for children. The majority of the foster carers agreed with the listed benefits. In particular, around three-quarters of carers strongly agreed that reading helps to **widen a child's vocabulary** (79.3%), **feeds imagination** (78.5%), **helps with school work** (75.3%) and **builds communication skills** (71.6%) (Table 3).

**Table 3: The benefits of reading for children**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Widens children's vocabulary (N=585)	6.2%	0.3%	0.5%	13.7%	79.3%
Feeds children's imagination (N=586)	6.3%	0.2%	1.2%	13.8%	78.5%
Helps with school work (N=583)	6.0%	0.2%	0.3%	18.2%	75.3%
Builds communication skills (N=587)	6.1%	0.3%	1.2%	20.8%	71.6%
Increases children's self-esteem / confidence (N=583)	6.3%	0.9%	4.3%	23.7%	64.8%
Improves understanding of other people / cultures (N=583)	5.8%	1.4%	6.9%	30.7%	55.2%
Improves relationships (N=581)	5.7%	0.7%	13.1%	27.4%	53.2%
Reduces stress or anxiety (N=575)	6.3%	1.9%	15.8%	32.2%	43.8%

These findings were echoed in the interviews. Carers described the importance of reading to **improve language and writing skills and provide essential tools for learning**. Reading was also seen as a way of increasing understanding and imagination of children. Carers believed that these skills would ultimately improve the life chances of their foster children. The aim for many was to inspire children to read and develop a lifelong love of books.

"I think that reading is the most important thing a foster carer can do, with the management of behaviour and then obviously trying to set them up for the future."

Foster carer

Foster children who were interviewed saw the educational benefits of reading.

"Reading is quite important because reading also makes you, like smarter, it makes you have more knowledge, it makes you aware of things."

Foster child

"I think it's really important to read because you can learn more."

Foster child

One foster carer described how they had encouraged a foster child to read and now they were very keen to attend school and enjoyed learning. The change in the child was attributed to their improved reading skills. However, other foster carers were unsure about the impact reading had on their foster children's school work, with some commenting that they had not seen a specific change as a result of increased reading. Regardless of whether it helped with children's performance at school, reading was associated with encouraging children with their school work and homework.

"It should encourage them with their school work and we don't have any problems with them now getting them to sit down and do their homework and reading. Whether there is a causal link between the two is debatable."

Foster carer

Foster carers generally felt that reading had **positive effects on their foster children's behaviour**. In particular, they highlighted increased confidence and self-esteem in the children as they were able to achieve something. Reading was also said to calm and relax them. This was particularly important when reading was completed as part of a bedtime routine or after a child had lost their temper to help calm them down.

"If there has been a tantrum, you can use a book once everything's calmed down - let's sit down and have a story, you know that has worked really well and helped to calm them down even more once you start to read to them."

Foster carer

Reading was seen as an opportunity for children **to hear about issues in their own lives in an enjoyable non-threatening way**. This helped the foster children to understand how they felt and not to feel so isolated. It also allowed carers to tackle issues in a way that meant the child would be able to understand and opened up conversations naturally, allowing the carer to understand how the child might feel about things without having to ask them direct questions. As with the carers, reading for children was an important means of escaping the everyday worries in their lives.

"He can get lost in the book, rather than thinking perhaps as he would if we were doing something else, about things going on in his life."

Foster carer

"It does seem to calm them...it's just a lovely togetherness end to the day."

Foster carer

One carer also believed that learning to read had helped one child to express themselves more clearly. With improved reading skills and increased vocabulary they wrote down how they felt about issues. This then helped them to be more confident and happy.

In the survey, foster carers were generally very positive about the impact of reading on their **relationships with their child**. Nine out of ten (90.4%) carers who read with their foster children thought reading together had made a positive difference to their relationship. 0.9% reported that it had made a negative difference, and 8.7% said it had not made any difference.

Findings from the interviews highlight the importance of reading as one-to-one time between the

carer and foster child which helps to establish a bond. Children were said to thrive on the attention and quality adult interaction that resulted from reading together. For some carers, it was the one-to-one interaction which was more important than the actual reading, but reading provided the perfect activity to allow them to spend this quality time together.

"To build a relationship, to build trust, to show them that people do want to spent time with them...and to build their self-worth I guess, that you know, people do want to help them and be interested in what they want to be interested in."

Foster carer

"...definitely to build a relationship with him because that was kind of our close, quiet time where we were together, without any other distractions."

Foster carer

In some cases, foster carers highlighted the importance of physical closeness. Sitting together and sharing a book helped to create a very positive bond between the carer and the child. However, some carers highlighted they were restricted in being physically close as they were not permitted to sit with the child on their bed. Most adapted their routine and sat on the sofa reading with the child before going to bed.

"It's partly physical actually, because there are four of them and they're cuddling around to do the reading in the first place."

Foster carer

"To be honest, reading with the children in my experience is more to do with physical closeness, an emotional bond time...time together when nothing interrupts it. You are actually sitting down together and doing something so it's kind of more about the relationship than the actual task of reading."

Foster carer

Reading with the foster child at the end of the day was also seen as a way of reinforcing a positive relationship even when there had been difficult situations dealt with during the day. It gave a carer the opportunity to reconnect with the child and spend quality time with them. Having a set reading routine, no matter what has happened during the day, was thought to help settle children and make them feel loved, which resulted in happier children.

"...it signified the end of the day and did not matter if there was upset or behaviour issues which there was loads of...we could still do it ... and it was nice to do that at the end of the day to show that we still cared about them no matter what had happened that day."

Foster carer

Whilst a couple of foster children who were interviewed felt that reading together had not made any difference to their relationship, some commented that it made them feel closer to their foster carers. In addition, foster carers explained that talking about the books and stories they have read has allowed them to further strengthen their relationships through these conversations. This was a view that was shared by some foster children.

"I think the good things are that I get a big opportunity to try and, like, try and show her what I have learnt at school and like, new words."

Foster child

### 3.8.1 Other influences on perceived benefits of reading

A range of statistical analyses were run to consider the effects of other variables on the perceived benefits of reading from the foster carers' survey.

- There was a significant difference between carers living in Wales and the rest of the sample for believing reading with your foster child builds communication skills with those

living in Wales believing that the benefit, on average, is marginally less<sup>45</sup>.

- The **educational status** of the carer was related to their views about reading reducing stress and anxiety. There were significant differences between carers with higher education, level 5 or above and carers with GCSE/A-levels<sup>46</sup>. **Carers with higher education were more likely to believe that reading helped to reduce stress and anxiety.**
- Correlation analysis showed a weak relationship between the frequency a carer read with their foster child and the difference this made to the relationship<sup>47</sup>, meaning that the **more frequently they read with their foster child, the more they were to believe that reading had a positive influence on their relationship.** There was also a weak relationship between the frequency carers read fiction books with their foster children and the impact of reading on their relationship<sup>48</sup>.
- The **more frequently carers read to their child the more likely they were to agree with the benefits of reading**, including building communication skills and feeding a child's imagination. A breakdown of these results can be seen in Appendix D.

### 3.9 Barriers and challenges to reading

As shown in Figure 17, over half of foster carers in the survey stated that their foster child struggled to concentrate when reading (55.8%). A third felt their foster child found reading difficult (34.9%), and almost three out of ten carers said it was hard to find books the child would enjoy (29.4%) or that their children did not enjoy reading (28.5%).

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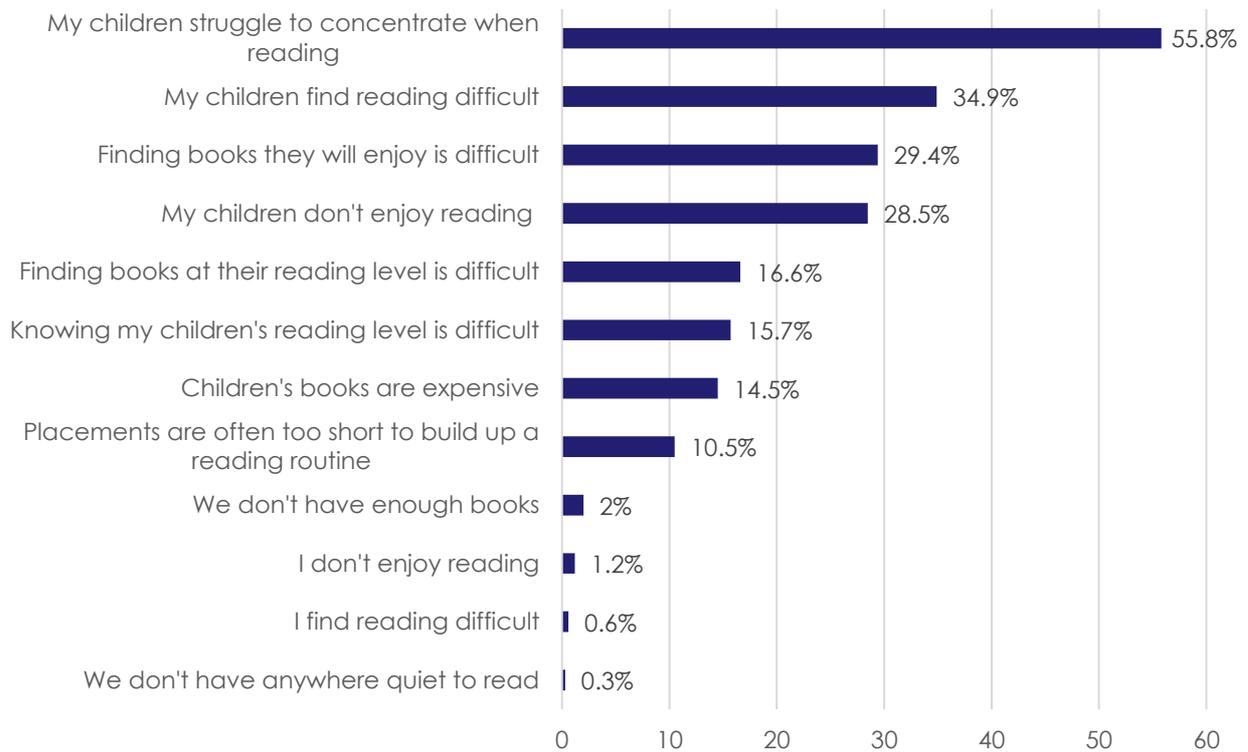
<sup>45</sup>  $t(96.41) = 2.20, p = .03, \eta^2 = 0.008$ ; Wales:  $M = 4.72, SD = 0.761$ ; rest of the sample:  $M = 4.49, SD = 1.033$

<sup>46</sup>  $F(2, 540) = 3.89, p = .021, \eta^2 = 0.014$ ; higher education:  $M = 4.22, SD = 1.04$ ; GCSE/A-Levels  $M = 3.96, SD = 1.15$

<sup>47</sup>  $r = .164, p = .000$

<sup>48</sup>  $r = .182, p = .000$

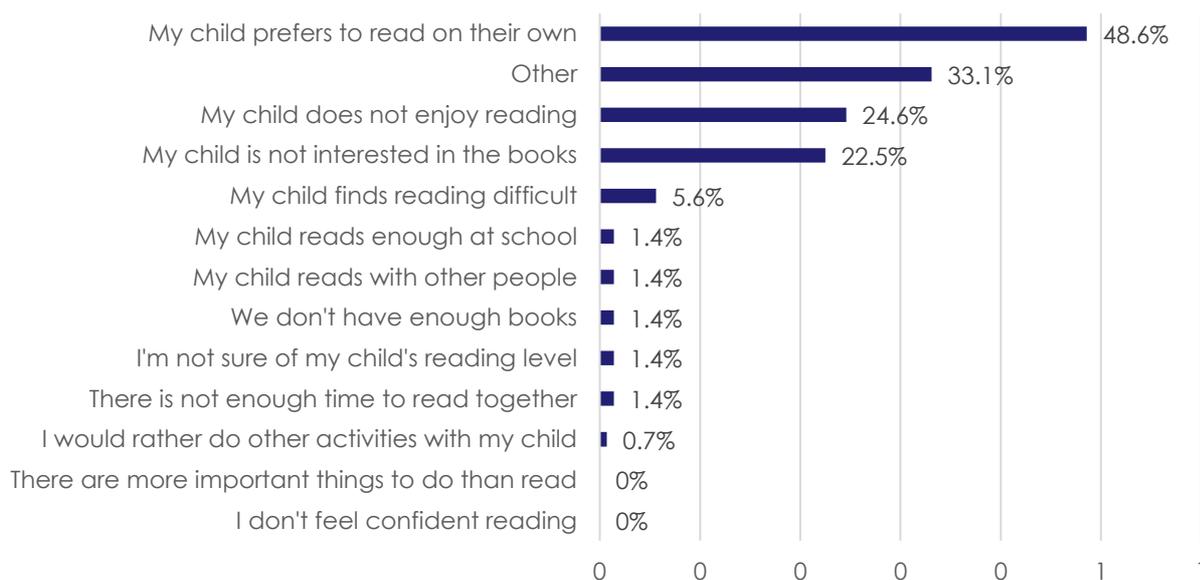
**Figure 17: Barriers to reading with their foster child (N = 344)**



Interestingly there was a significant difference between carers who stated their foster child found reading difficult and the foster carers' confidence in reading silently to themselves<sup>49</sup>. On average, **carers who thought their foster child found reading difficult were more confident reading silently to themselves**. This could indicate that with their confidence came an understanding of how a child might be struggling to read.

Carers who stated that they rarely read with their foster children were asked the reasons for this (Figure 18). Nearly half (48.6%) of the carers said that this was because the foster child preferred to read on their own and a quarter (24.6%) stated that their foster child did not enjoy reading. Interestingly, no carers reported a lack of confidence in their own skills to read with their foster children or that there were more important things to do. A third of carers (33.1%) selected 'other' and reasons stated for this included the child being old enough to read on their own and the type of placement (e.g. short term or emergency) being prohibitive in developing a reading routine with the child.

<sup>49</sup>  $t(133)=-4.11, p=.000, \eta^2 = 0.11$ : foster child found reading difficult:  $M=5.00, SD=.00$ ; foster child did not find reading difficult:  $M=4.83, SD.18$

**Figure 18: Reasons why carers never or hardly ever read with their foster children (n=142)**

In terms of the reasons why carers never or hardly ever read with their foster children, there was a moderate significant relationship between the nature of the placement and the fact that the foster child **preferred to read on their own**<sup>50</sup>. Of those that selected this as a reason ( $n=68$ ) over half (55.4%) had children in long-term placements.

A number of barriers and challenges associated with reading were highlighted in the interviews. One issue raised was that foster children were reluctant to spend time reading. There were a variety of reasons for this, including children wanting to do other things, such as watch television and feeling frustrated that they are not able to read. Some children were thought to lack enough concentration to be able to read and this was seen as another reason why they might not want to spend time reading. Other children had a fear of reading so it was not an enjoyable activity for them.

Another barrier that carers highlighted in the interviews was a lack of appropriate books for children. This was because some children were reported to have a below average reading level and the books for their age group were too difficult, but the books at their reading level were on subjects that did not interest the child.

Reading about relevant issues affecting children was seen as a good way to get them to open up and understand how they are feeling. However, carers felt there was a lack of appropriate books about foster care, limiting the potential for discussing it with the children. Choosing the right books in terms of topics covered could also be challenging for some carers. They were aware that they did not know all of the child's life history and did not want to choose subjects that may trigger unhappy memories.

The age of the foster child could also be a potential challenge. Carers that looked after younger children were aware that in many ways they were helping to form a positive view about reading for that child. However, carers who were looking after older children were aware the child could already have negative views about reading and these were very hard to overcome. Foster carers referred to the persistence they had to show in encouraging their foster child to read especially in this situation.

The foster carers view towards the importance of reading could also be a barrier. Some children needed their reading sessions to be very interactive to make them fun and accessible. This took

<sup>50</sup>  $\chi^2 (4, n=141)=9.59, p=.000, phi = .26$

some carers out of their comfort zone. Carers need to put in a lot of time to make a difference and this was a challenge for some. Although they knew the benefits of reading, finding the time needed could be difficult when the child was involved in other activities. For a child in care, their free time can be sparse as they may have meetings with professionals and their birth families.

For some foster carers, the child's school was a barrier to encouraging children to read. In some cases carers reported that the school had sent children home with books below the child's level. In others, participation in reading schemes at school had led to damaged self-esteem for children.

"It's [Accelerated Reader] another stick to beat the children up with. So if you're not top of the reading mountain, they're probably down at the bottom. And that's another thing for their peers to laugh at them about."

Foster carer

Having additional pressure placed on the child to read every day was seen as particularly unhelpful when the carer was making some progress, albeit slow, in getting the child to read. One carer described how they wanted to take time building up the child's reading abilities so as not to frighten them but to nurture them into being a good reader. However, the child's school took a different approach by requiring a certain number of books to be read each week. This resulted in the child not wanting to spend any time reading. If carers forced their child to read, this could lead to negative behaviour and cause problems in their relationship.

"When I first started, books were just going across the table, torn books where they didn't want to do it and when struggling."

Foster carer

In interviews, foster children also commented on challenges they experience in reading, particularly focusing on longer or challenging words causing them difficulties. In some cases, they also commented on the genre of the book, explaining that if it was boring, it could make them feel angry or not want to read.

### 3.9.1 Other influences on reading barriers and challenges

Statistical analyses were run to see whether other variables were related to the barriers reported by foster carers. Significant findings showed that:

- There was a significant difference between carers who thought their child did not enjoy reading and those who thought their children did enjoy reading in terms of the frequency with which the carer and child read together<sup>51</sup>. This result indicates that **carers who looked after children who did not enjoy reading, on average, read to their foster children slightly less frequently than those carers who fostered children who enjoyed reading.**
- **Carers who believed the cost of books was a barrier to reading more frequently with their foster child, read slightly more frequently with their foster children** than carers who had not selected this as a barrier<sup>52</sup>. This may suggest carers who read more frequently with their foster child are looking to buy more books than those carers who read less frequently.
- A foster carer's enjoyment of reading was associated with their views about their child being interested in books<sup>53</sup>. **Foster carers with lower enjoyment of reading were more likely to think that their foster child was not interested in books.** This highlights the importance of

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<sup>51</sup>  $t(237.6)=6.66, p=.000, \eta^2 = 0.08$ : children did not enjoy reading:  $M=3.83, SD=1.737$ , children did enjoy reading:  $M=2.74, SD=1.49$

<sup>52</sup>  $t(126)=-4.32, p=.000, \eta^2 = 0.04$ : cost of books is a barrier:  $M=2.44, SD=1.29$ ; cost of books is not a barrier:  $M=3.17, SD=1.67$

<sup>53</sup>  $t(40.5)=-2.6, p=.013, \eta^2 = 0.05$ : child not interested in books:  $M=7.72, SD=2.30$ ; child interested in books:  $M=8.85, SD=1.62$

the foster carer's views about reading with children.

- There was a significant association between **where carers lived and difficulty finding books children will enjoy**<sup>54</sup>. Nearly a quarter of carers living in England (24.9%) selected this as a barrier compared with 44.9% of the rest of the sample. This suggests carers in England potentially have better access to books and/or better knowledge of books children will enjoy compared with carers living elsewhere in the UK.
- **Welsh carers were more likely to report not having access to suitable books** compared to the rest of the sample<sup>55</sup>. Nearly one in ten (7.7%) of the Welsh carers selected this as barrier compared with just 1.3% of the rest of the sample.
- **Carers' gender was also related to two of the barriers: children's books are expensive**<sup>56</sup>; **and placements are often too short to build up a reading routine**<sup>57</sup>. Only 4.2% of male carers thought that children's books were expensive compared with 16.3% of female carers. While 20.4% of male carers believed placements were too short to build a reading routine, just 8.8% of female carers felt this way.
- There was a significant association between a **carer's employment status** and **having difficulty finding books at the appropriate reading level for their child**<sup>58</sup>. Nearly a third of carers classified as 'other including retired' thought this was a barrier (28.8%) compared with just 15.3% of those carers who were employed.

## 3.10 Support

As already discussed, foster carers reported feeling quite confident in reading with their foster children. In most cases, they reported they were well educated and did not find reading personally challenging. However, foster carers still commented on the support they received, and in many cases, were keen to receive more.

### 3.10.1 Support received

Nearly half of the foster carers had received support with helping their foster child to read (46.4%, N=586). As shown in Table 4, two-thirds had been given support from their foster child's school (68.0%) and half from the local authority (50.0%). Several carers selected 'other', with particular mention from several carers (n=7) of the Letterbox Club run by BookTrust. Interestingly, carers in Wales were more likely to receive support from family and friends than carers living in England.

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<sup>54</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=342)=9.78, p=.002, \phi=.177$

<sup>55</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=342)=4.18, p=.041, \phi=-.143$

<sup>56</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=344)=4.09, p=.043, \phi=.121$

<sup>57</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=344)=4.86, p=.028, \phi=-.132$

<sup>58</sup>  $\chi^2 (2, n=328)=6.67, p=.036, \phi=-.143$

**Table 4: Places providing support**

Support provided	All sample (n =272) Percent	England sample (n =228) Percent	Wales sample (n =24) Percent
School	68.0	69.7	79.2
Local authority	50.0	52.2	54.2
Library	28.3	28.9	33.3
Fostering agency	20.6	18.9	16.7
Family/friends	19.1	18.0	37.5
Other	8.5	7.5	12.5
Charity	5.1	3.9	8.3

When asked about the support they had received, over half (56.4%) of foster carers reported the support had been in the form of better access to books, and a third had received information about reading (34.2%) or advice (34.2%) (Table 5). Carers in Wales were more likely to receive advice than carers living in England, which could be as a result of more of them receiving support from family and friends.

**Table 5: Type of support received**

	All sample (n =266) Percent	England sample (n =223) Percent	Wales sample n =23) Percent
Access to books	56.4	57.8	56.5
Information about reading	34.2	35.4	34.8
Advice	34.2	34.5	47.8
Tutoring for children	30.8	31.4	34.8
Workshops	22.6	22.0	21.7
Other	14.3	13.5	17.4
Access to audio books	8.3	7.6	13.0
Tutoring for carers	5.6	5.8	8.7

However, some carers stated that they had not received any support in helping their foster child to read (46.4%, n =586). Of those, just over a third (37.1%, n=307) said that they would like additional support.

There was a significant relationship between children preferring to read on their own and carers accessing support<sup>59</sup>. Just over half of the carers (52.2%) who stated their child preferred to read on their own had accessed support, compared to less than a third of carers who did not state this. This suggests that **carers are more likely to access support if their child prefers to read on their own.**

Interviewed foster carers made reference to a range of different types of support they had received, including: from libraries (both public and in schools), the Letterbox Club, and the Fostering Achievement Program in Northern Ireland. Often, this support provided appropriate books for the child to read, with libraries in particular ordering books that the foster child or carer requested.

"The library staff continue to support the children with different books and know the children's interests and the children ask to go to the library now to order books or change them."

Foster carer

<sup>59</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, n=141)=5.94, p=.015, \phi=-.220$

### 3.10.2 Impact of received support

Carers were asked how useful they had found the support they received (Table 6). 88.0% found support from family and friends useful or very useful. Of more formal types of support, the library provided the most useful (86.8%), followed by schools (83.8%), and the local authority (82.3%).

**Table 6: usefulness of support**

	Not at all useful	Not very useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful
Other (N=23)	-	-	-	17.4%	82.6%
Family/friends (N=50)	2.0%	-	10.0%	30.0%	58.0%
Library (N=76)	-	1.3%	11.8%	35.5%	51.3%
School (N=185)	-	1.1%	15.1%	39.5%	44.3%
Local authority (N=135)	0.7%	2.2%	14.8%	35.6%	46.7%
Fostering agency (N=54)	-	3.7%	16.7%	27.8%	51.9%
Charity (N=14)	-	-	21.4%	42.9%	35.7%

A range of statistical analyses considered how support carers received may relate to other factors:

- On average, carers who reported that their foster child was not interested in books had found the support they received from school less useful<sup>60</sup>. This indicates schools may face challenges in encouraging and engaging reluctant readers. There were similar results for children who did not enjoy reading compared with those who did<sup>61</sup>; for children who did not enjoy reading, carers found the support given by schools less useful.
- Correlation analysis showed that there were positive relationships between the **usefulness of the school support** and the **frequency foster carers read fiction books**<sup>62</sup> and **non-fiction books**<sup>63</sup> with their foster children. Foster carers who read more frequently with their foster children had found the support they received from school more useful.
- The usefulness of the **support from local authorities** was also significant when it came to children's interest in books<sup>64</sup>. Carers who indicated their foster child was not interested in books found, on average, the support provided by local authorities less useful than those carers who stated their child was interested in books. Again, this could indicate challenges in encouraging reluctant readers.
- There were also moderate positive relationships between the **usefulness of the library support** and **frequency** a carer and foster child read non-fiction together<sup>65</sup>, and the usefulness of the support from friends and family and the frequency they read fiction together<sup>66</sup>. **Both of these indicate that the more frequently the carer and child read together, the more useful the carer found the support.**
- Those carers that received **support from libraries**, on average, used **audio books slightly**

<sup>60</sup>  $t(28)=2.25, p=.032, \eta^2=0.21$ : child not interested in books:  $M=3.83, SD=.75$ ; child interested in books:  $M=4.52, SD=.653$

<sup>61</sup>  $t(29)=2.60, p=.016, \eta^2=0.18$ : child does not enjoy reading:  $M=3.88, SD=.641$ ; child enjoys reading:  $M=4.57, SD=.662$

<sup>62</sup>  $r=.150, p=0.22$

<sup>63</sup>  $r=.152, p=.024$

<sup>64</sup>  $t(18)=3.15, p=.006, \eta^2=0.10$ : child not interested in books:  $M=3.20, SD=.447$ ; child interested in books:  $M=4.27, SD=.704$

<sup>65</sup>  $r=.332, p=.002$

<sup>66</sup>  $r=.268, p=.040$

**more frequently** than carers who did not access support from libraries<sup>67</sup>.

In the open-ended questions in the survey and in interviews, carers reported that after receiving support, their confidence to support their foster child with reading increased, which in turn led to foster children being more confident about their reading abilities. Having access to books was seen as essential to encourage reading. For example, the Letterbox Club provided new books for children that they could keep and read when they wanted.

"All the new books provided have been quite precious to the children we foster. Letterbox parcels make all our children feel valued - that someone thinks enough of them to do something so special. It also encourages them to read in their own spare time when they might not otherwise have chosen to as they are interested in the gifts sent to them."

Foster carer

However, some carers felt that the books received from the Letterbox Club were not always appropriate as they were at the wrong level, despite carers completing information prior to the start of the programme about the child's abilities.

The library-based Summer Reading Challenge was another example of how support had really encouraged some children to read more.

"The library's Summer Reading Challenge also boosted their confidence and self-esteem - they achieved something over a period of weeks and were singled out and rewarded through school."

Foster carer

One carer explained they were a member of a foster carer support group which had been invaluable in providing advice on how to deal with particular issues and a place to exchange books. Another carer had found the support they received from their fostering agency useful in terms of what topics could be covered in books without causing distress to the child. They also wanted advice about how to start discussions about how the child might be feeling around particular issues.

"I am a confident reader and teach phonics so the help I asked for was more in terms of how much or how little to delve into conversations on certain topics, areas/topics that were no-go, topics that might cause a reaction, techniques to facilitate discussion, etc."

Foster carer

There were mixed views on support provided by schools. In some cases, foster carers acknowledged that schools and colleges tried to offer appropriate support for the level of their child in terms of reading and learning. However, where this support was offered, often it seemed to be a lengthy process with several challenges along the way. In addition, some foster carers made reference to schools not offering support, or being unable to provide the support that was needed. There were examples where carers felt that school support had actually been a hindrance in supporting the child to read. For example, requiring the child to read a certain amount each week could result in the child being turned off from reading more.

Several carers discussed the support that virtual schools had provided. Generally, this was positive. There were examples of virtual schools providing books and book vouchers to encourage book buying, providing staff to read with the child on a regular basis, and organising special story-telling events to encourage reading. The virtual schools also offered a level of flexibility perhaps not found elsewhere. For example, one of the carers highlighted that the mobile library attached to their foster child's virtual school allowed the child to keep their library books if they changed placement.

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<sup>67</sup>  $t(85.8) = -3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ : received support from libraries:  $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ; did not receive support from libraries:  $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 2.03$

### 3.10.3 Future support

In the survey carers were asked what future support they would like. The most frequently cited response was to have **better access to books**. This included having better access to libraries, better access to high interest and lower ability books; and for books to be supplied to each foster child so that they can build up their own library. Some carers, especially those offering emergency or respite care, highlighted the fact that they needed to have a wide array of books to suit different children's needs. This was not always practical for them financially, but also having the available space to store the books.

The next most frequently cited area of support was around **advice**. Carers wanted advice about which books would be suitable for their foster child. Carers sometimes felt unsure and lacked confidence in understanding the foster child's reading level which made it difficult for them to assess the appropriateness of books and other reading materials. Some carers also wanted advice on specific subjects, such as how best to support a child with particular additional needs and how best to engage reluctant readers, especially older children.

Additional support from **schools** was the next most common theme. Carers felt that an integrated approach from school would best support the foster child. Carers wanted schools to provide advice on how to support their foster child. However, carers also wanted schools to listen to their concerns, especially when school approaches were not working, and for schools to be more adaptable to suit the needs of the child.

Finally, carers also discussed the need for **tutoring**. This included additional support being provided in schools by teaching assistants spending time reading with the foster child, and more support from library staff helping and encouraging foster children to read. One carer highlighted the need for this tutoring to be 'fun and interactive' to encourage reluctant readers to take part and engage in the process.

With these ideas in mind, BookTrust may be able to provide some of these support elements to foster carers, in partnership with other agencies.

## 3.11 Summary of findings

The findings have highlighted:

- **Most carers said they enjoyed reading.** Nearly, half of the carers in the survey read websites or blogs and just over a third read fiction books at least once a day. When they were children, over half of the carers read by themselves very often.
- **There was a relationship between a carer's reading habits as a child and their educational status.** Carers with a lower level of qualification read less frequently with an adult when they were aged 10 years and younger, while carers who read more frequently by themselves when they were aged 11 to 16 years were more likely to gain a higher level of qualification.
- **Just over half of the carers responding to the survey reported their foster children read with them at least once a day,** with fiction and non-fiction books being the most frequently read. As the child gets older, the frequency the carer and foster child read together decreases.
- **Two out of five of the foster children were reported to have a below average reading level.** There were significant relationships between a foster child's reading level and the length of time they had been in care; the length of time they lived in their current placement; and the age of the foster child. **The longer a child had been in care, living with the carer, and the older the child was, the more likely their reading level was to be reported as average or above average.** This indicates the potential importance of placement stability in improving foster children's reading abilities.
- **Carers were important role models** for foster children. For example, the more time foster

carers spent reading fiction and magazines, the more time they spent reading with their foster children. There were also positive links between the frequency a carer read certain materials and the frequency the foster child read the same materials.

- Reading was often prioritised over other activities, at least at certain times during the day. In interviews, for example, carers described how computers and televisions were turned off at a set time each night and books chosen for the carer to read to the child.
- Carers read with younger children as part of a bedtime routine. Some foster children described not wanting to spend time with their carer reading as they were too old for this. However, other children said, despite being capable of reading on their own, they still enjoyed having shared reading sessions with their carer.
- The type of fostering arrangement also impacted on the child's reading habits. Those in **fostering to adopt and short term placements read more frequently than those who had children in emergency and long term placements**. This could be due to the age of the foster child. Most children in a fostering to adopt arrangement will be young and carers were keen to spend time reading with this age group. However, those in long term placements will encompass a much broader age range and include foster children who are independent readers.
- **Carers generally felt confident with reading to their foster children**. This was often attributed to being read to as a child and being keen readers themselves. The findings indicated a close **link between educational attainment and a carers confidence** in reading aloud to someone else and discussing books with others. Generally, the higher the educational status of a carer the more confident they were in both areas.
- Carers had positive views about reading as it gave them an opportunity to escape from their lives, use their imagination and relax them. Children had similar views, reporting that reading made them feel happy and increased their knowledge and understanding. Foster carers also understood the benefit of reading in terms of improving language and writing skills, and ultimately improving the life chances of the foster child.
- **Many of the interviewed foster children said their views of reading had changed since being in the placement**. This was generally attributed to the foster carer making reading fun and enjoyable. Foster carers also described how important it was to find the right book to inspire children to read. Once a child was inspired it generally became much easier to keep that motivation and delight in reading going. Carers needed to make reading fun and enjoyable to encourage the foster child to read.
- **Around three-quarters of carers strongly agreed that reading helped to widen a child's vocabulary, fed imagination, helped with school work and built communication skills**. The more frequently carers read to the foster child, the more likely the carer was to agree with the benefits of reading. Carers with a higher educational status were also more likely to believe reading helped to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Survey findings highlighted that **the more frequently a carer and foster child read together, the more likely the carer was to report reading had a positive impact on their relationship**. Foster children who had started to read were reported to have increased confidence and self-esteem. Carers believed that spending quality time with the child while sharing a book was one of the best ways to connect with their foster child.
- Reading was also seen as an opportunity for children to hear about and understand issues in their own lives in an enjoyable, non-threatening way. Reading stories about specific subjects allowed carers to tackle issues in a way that meant the child could understand. It also opened up conversations in natural way allowing the carer to understand how the child might feel about things without having to ask them direct questions.
- **Over half of the carers said their foster child struggled to concentrate when reading**, and about a third of carers reported that their child found reading difficult, they had difficulty finding books their child would enjoy, and that their child did not enjoy reading. Nearly half of the carers who stated they rarely read with their foster child said the child

preferred to read on their own, and a quarter stated their foster child did not enjoy reading. **Carers with foster children who did not enjoy reading, read to their foster children less frequently.**

- Several carers felt that there was a lack of appropriate books for foster children. Some foster children have a below average reading level and carers reported that books at their child's reading level were on subjects that did not interest the child. Carers also reported a lack of appropriate books about foster care.
- **Less than half of the foster carers had received support with helping their foster child to read.** Foster carers with children who were able to read were less likely to look for support. Of those that had received support, two thirds had been given support from their foster child's school and half from the local authority. **The support provided by friends and family, libraries, schools and local authorities was the most useful.** However, for some foster carers the child's school was a barrier to encouraging children to read. For instance, in some cases carers reported that the school had sent children home with books below the child's level. In others, participation in reading schemes at school had led to damaged self-esteem for children.
- There were various areas of support that carers thought would be helpful. These included better access to books, advice on suitable books to read with foster children, additional support from schools and additional literacy tutoring.

## 4. Conclusion and recommendations

### 4.1. General conclusion

Our literature review highlighted that children in care tend to have lower educational achievement than those not in care. This may be due to placement instability and difficulties in forming secure relationships with caregivers. In this research, two out of five carers believed that their foster child had a reading level below average.

The literature highlighted the importance of reading for children, and the benefits of encouraging this. Carers we spoke to generally understood these benefits, which included improved vocabulary, building communication skills, feeding imagination, and an opportunity to improve the relationship between the carer and the foster child. Due to the self-selecting nature of the sample, it is likely that carers who took part were more likely to prioritise reading and understand the benefits of reading when compared to the wider foster carer population.

Our research findings showed that foster carers are keen to make an effort to read with their foster children. In particular, they referred to the importance of having quality time with their child. Reading together improved the bond between the carer and the child, and made children feel secure and loved, leading to happier placements. This finding is key when considering the literature showing the importance of forming secure relationships. Our research suggests that foster carers are aware of this importance and take steps to try and achieve this.

Foster carers were found to be important role models for children throughout the research. Foster carers' reading habits and attitudes were linked to the amount they read with their foster child, and their perceptions of its importance. Placement stability was another important factor, as the longer a child had been in their current placement, the more the child and the foster carer read together.

In cases where foster children did not read, this was due to a variety of reasons. These included the child being unwilling to spend time reading either because they found reading difficult and frustrating or because they preferred to undertake different activities, such as watching television or playing computer games. Some children also lacked concentration, making reading sessions particularly difficult. However, the carers in this research were generally aware of the link between reading and increased concentration skills which was a reason why they persevered with reading with their foster child. Findings showed that foster carers mostly have a positive view of reading with their foster children, and are keen to overcome barriers in order to read with them more.

As highlighted in the literature review and in the research findings, carers believed that reading provided an important opportunity to teach children how to express themselves. Sharing a book together also opened conversations about how the child might be feeling which was seen as a non-threatening way of helping the child talk about their past.

Our recommendations below are based on some specific key findings, including:

- There was a link between foster carers' childhood reading and their reading with their foster child. Carers who read less frequently when aged 10 years and younger by themselves were more likely to read with their foster child.
- Foster carers providing emergency and respite placements struggle to ensure frequent reading with their foster children.
- Foster carers' confidence plays a role in their reading with their foster children. Those who reported lower levels of confidence were more likely to report that their foster children found reading difficult. This, in turn, was related to their educational attainment, where higher qualifications were linked to higher levels of confidence in reading.
- In most cases, the country of residence was not found to affect either reading patterns in foster families, or the support provided and wanted in foster families. However, one barrier that was highlighted more in Wales than other countries, was difficulty in finding

books that children would enjoy. In addition, foster carers living in Wales were less likely to report that reading built communication skills.

- Whilst foster carers generally recognised the importance of reading in childhood, those who were less likely to recognise benefits of reading also reported less frequent reading with their foster child.
- Carers had received support from a variety of places, but many felt that there was more support that could be provided to encourage and promote reading with foster children.

## 4.2. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, there are a number of recommendations that we think would be useful for BookTrust to consider.

- Advice should be provided on how foster carers with shorter term placements can integrate reading into their time with their children, particularly when other more profound issues may, understandably, take greater priority.
- There is scope to increase confidence in foster carers, as this may in turn help them to support their children's engagement with reading and support their learning. Furthermore, foster carers who were interviewed did highlight their own reading as an area where they would like to receive more support.
- Generally, any additional support from BookTrust should be provided across the UK, without specific support in each country.
- There may be scope to conduct more research to find out about the types of books required in Wales, and an exploration of why the impacts of reading on communication are seen as a lesser benefit than in other countries.
- BookTrust may consider providing different types of support to foster families with children of different ages. In particular, carers highlighted the need to boost reading at a younger age when children are potentially more open to this support. BookTrust could widen the Letterbox Club to younger age groups to meet this demand.
- It is important to ensure that any books provided for children with lower than average reading levels, include suitable content that will interest the child. Related to this, but more widely, there is a need for increased availability of high interest low ability books.
- There is scope for more support to be provided to schools, in terms of guidance around how they could provide more help with reading in foster families, or providing books of a suitable level.
- Libraries play an important role in some foster families, and with the current decline in library numbers, this may be an important topic to consider more closely.
- Foster carers reported that and they would value more support and suggested potential ways of doing this, such as through their foster carer training. As such, there is scope for BookTrust to work with local authorities to integrate some of the aspects mentioned in this report.

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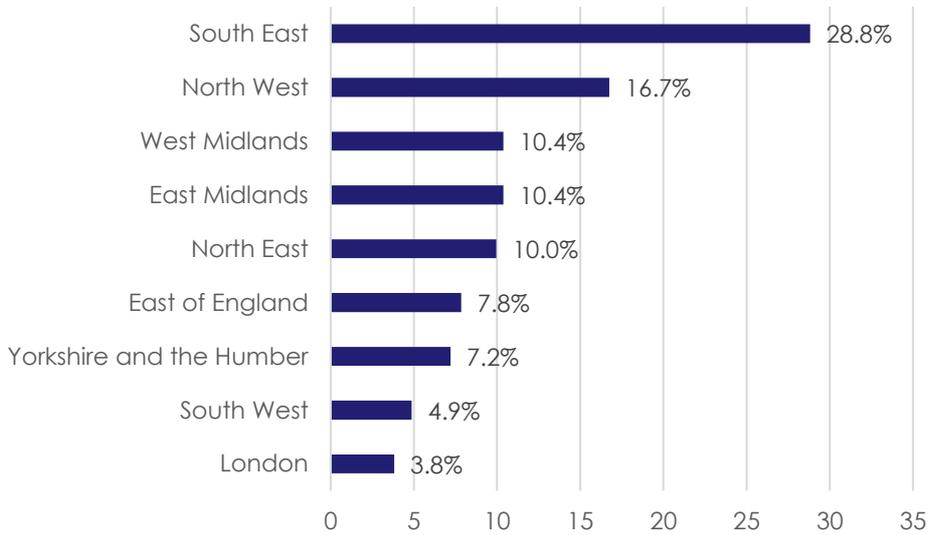
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# Appendix A - Survey demographics

Foster carers were asked to indicate which region they lived in. All nine regions in England were represented in the survey with nearly a third (28.8%) of respondents living in England coming from the South East (Figure 1).

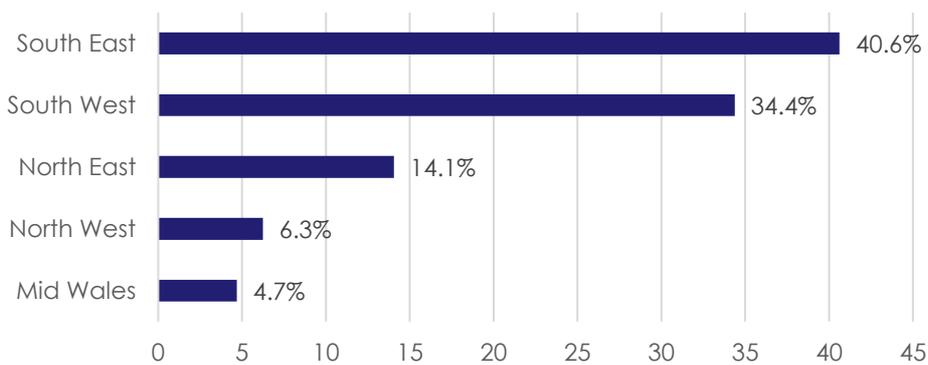
**Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents living in England by region**



(n = 472)

Similarly in Wales, there were respondents from all five regions with two out of five respondents (40.6%) living in the South East of Wales (Figure 2).

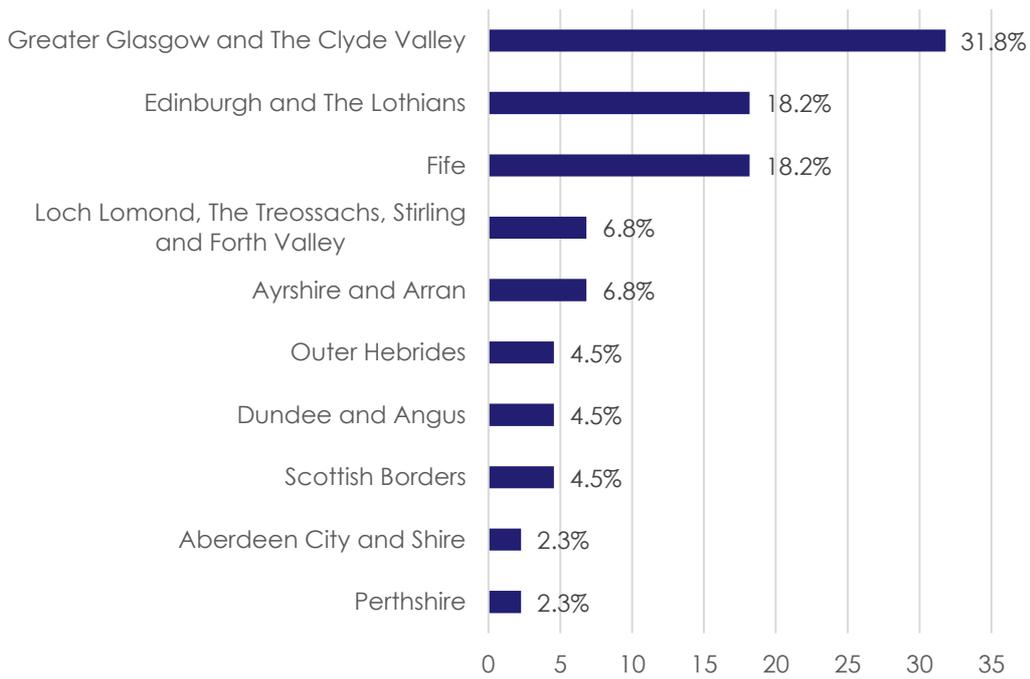
**Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents living in Wales by region**



(n= 64)

Ten of the 15 regions in Scotland were represented with nearly a third of respondents (31.8%) living in Greater Glasgow and the Clyde Valley (Figure 3).

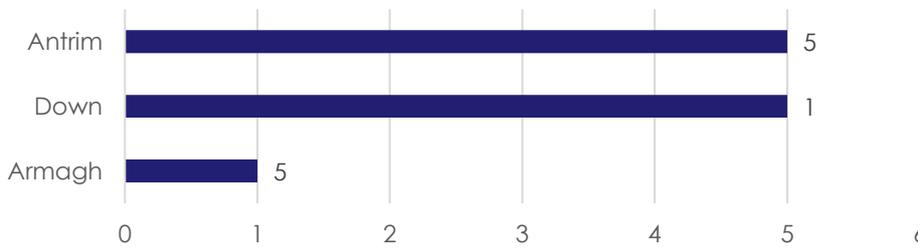
**Figure 3: Breakdown of respondents living in Scotland by region**



(n= 44)

In Northern Ireland carers came from three of the six regions (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Breakdown of respondents living in Northern Ireland by region**



(n=11 - figures are shown in frequencies for Northern Ireland due to the low response rate).

# Appendix B - Analysis plan

Below is an outline of the statistical tests that were run using the data from the foster carer survey about reading.

## Analysis plan

This analysis plan will cover data from both the carer survey and children's survey.

### 1. Sample description

#### a. Demographics of carer respondents

Frequencies of the following variables:

- Q2 – where do you live?
- Q3 – region of England
- Q4 – region of Wales
- Q5 – region of Scotland
- Q6 – region of Northern Ireland
- Q7 – length of time as a carer
- Q66 – gender of carer
- Q67 – partner / spouse
- Q68-70 – description of household members
- Q71-72 – employment status of respondent and spouse/partner
- Q73-74 – educational qualification of respondent and spouse/partner
- Q75-76 – ethnicity of respondent and spouse/partner

#### b. Child demographics

Carers were asked to provide information for up to 2 children they foster. The **child data provided by the carer** will be analysed together as no criteria was set to decide which child was A and which B; therefore the total number of children in this dataset will exceed the number of carers.

Frequencies of the following variables will be provided in the demographics section:

- A new variable: total number of children included in the carer survey
- Q20-23 and Q36-39 – demographics of the child (gender, age, ethnicity) and length of time in foster care
- Q28 & Q44– additional needs of the child

Sample information will also be provided from the **child survey completed by the child**. This will include frequencies of the following variables:

- Q3 – age of the child
- Q4 – gender of the child
- Demographic data will be matched with the carer survey to provide the following information for respondents who completed the child survey:
  - Country live in
  - Gender of child
  - Ethnicity of child
  - Length of time in care
  - Additional needs of the child

#### c. Fostering arrangements

Frequencies of the following variables from the carer survey:

- Q15 – number of carers who are currently fostering vs those who are foster carers but have no children currently in their care
- Q16 & Q18– number of children currently/in the last placement being fostered

- Q17 – last time fostered a child
- Q24 – Q27 & Q40 - 43– type and nature of placement and length of time in placement.

Matched data from the child survey and foster carer survey will be matched to show the breakdown of respondents to the child survey in terms of:

- Length of time in care
- Type of foster placement
- Nature of foster placement
- Length of time with carer

**2. How foster carers' support their children to engage with reading and how this might be affected by other factors (e.g. region, age)**

a. Description of current reading practices with children

Coding and analysis of the following open questions:

- Q19 – What do you see your role as in supporting the children you foster to read?
- Q33 & Q49 – describe how you read together

Frequencies for the following variables:

- Q29 & Q45 – reading level of foster child
- Q30 & Q46– How often they read together
- Q31 & Q47 – Why don't read much together
- Q32 & Q48 – frequency read certain materials together

b. Factors that may affect reading with foster child

Factors can be broadly broken down into the following areas:

- Carer (and partner) demographics
- Child demographics
- Fostering arrangements

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Control	Statistical test
Q29 & Q45 – reading level of foster child (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• Gender of carer and gender of child;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer, partner and child;</li> <li>• educational status of carer and partner;</li> <li>• employment status of carer and partner;</li> <li>• additional needs of the foster child;</li> <li>• recoded variable length of time as a foster carer;</li> <li>• type of placement;</li> <li>• nature of foster care placement (nominal)</li> </ul>	We will see if the reading level of the child is associated with the age of the child and additional needs of the child	Chi-square test / crosstabulation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age of child;</li> </ul>		Correlation

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Control	Statistical test
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length of time child been in care and with the carer (interval)</li> </ul>		
Q30 & Q46 – How often they read together (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>gender of carer;</li> <li>gender of child;</li> <li>ethnicity of carer, partner and child;</li> <li>educational status of carer and partner;</li> <li>employment status of carer and partner;</li> <li>additional needs of the foster child;</li> <li>recoded variable length of time as a foster carer;</li> <li>type of placement;</li> <li>nature of foster care placement; (nominal)</li> </ul>	Possibly need to control for age of child and any additional needs of the child	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age of child</li> <li>length of time child been in care and with the carer (interval)</li> </ul>		Correlation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading level of foster child (ordinal)</li> </ul>		Correlation
Q31 & Q47 – Recoded variable: Why don't read much together <sup>68</sup> (nominal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>gender of carer;</li> <li>gender of child;</li> <li>ethnicity of carer, partner and child;</li> <li>educational status of carer and partner;</li> <li>employment status of carer and partner;</li> <li>additional needs of the foster child;</li> <li>recoded variable length of time as a foster carer;</li> <li>type of foster care placement;</li> </ul>	Possibly need to control for age of child and any additional needs of the child	Chi-square test / crosstabulation

<sup>68</sup> This variable will be recoded into a dichotomous variable with a Yes/No response for each reason why the carer and foster child do not read together

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Control	Statistical test
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>nature of foster placement (nominal).</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age of child</li> <li>length of time child been in care and with the carer (interval)</li> </ul>		Linear regression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading level of foster child (ordinal)</li> </ul>		ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
Q32 & Q48 – frequency read certain materials together (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>gender of carer; gender of child;</li> <li>ethnicity of carer, partner and child;</li> <li>educational status of carer and partner;</li> <li>employment status of carer and partner;</li> <li>additional needs of the foster child;</li> <li>recoded variable length of time as a foster carer;</li> <li>type of placement;</li> <li>nature of foster care placement (nominal)</li> </ul>	Possibly need to control for age of child and any additional needs of the child	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age of child</li> <li>length of time child been in care and with the carer (interval)</li> </ul>		Correlation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading level of foster child (ordinal)</li> </ul>		Correlation

### 3. Carers' and foster child's views about reading and own reading habits

#### a. Carers' reading habits

Frequencies of the following variables from the carer survey:

- Q9 – enjoyment of reading
- Q10 – frequency read certain materials
- Q11 – Confidence in reading
- Q13 & 14 – frequency read as a child

Analysis and possible recoding of the following string variables:

- Q12 – other comments about how confident they feel in their own reading abilities

The following statistical tests will be run to see if carers' reading habits are influenced by any demographic variables:

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Statistical test
Q9 – enjoyment of reading (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
Q10 – frequency read certain materials (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
Q11 – confidence in reading (interval)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA
Q12 – frequency read as a child (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents

#### b. Child's reading habits

Frequencies of the following variables from the child's survey:

- Q5: What kind of things do you read?
- Q6: Normally how do you read books?
- Q7: How often to you read at home?

c. Carers' views about reading

Frequencies of the following variables from the carer survey:

- Q52- benefits of reading to the children they foster
- Q54 – barriers of reading to the child they foster

Coding and analysis of open questions from the carer survey:

- Q53 – other benefits of reading to foster children
- Q55 – other barriers to reading with the foster children

The following statistical tests will also be run to see if any demographic variables influence carers' views about reading

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Statistical test
Q52 –benefits of reading (interval)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA
Q54 – barriers of reading (nominal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country carer lives in (England vs. rest of sample and Wales vs. rest of sample);</li> <li>• gender of carer;</li> <li>• ethnicity of carer;</li> <li>• educational status of carer;</li> <li>• employment status of carer (nominal)</li> </ul>	Chi-square / crosstabulation

d. Child's views about reading

Frequencies of the following variables from the child's survey:

- Q8 – how reading makes them feel
- Q9 – would you like to read more?
- Q10 – what would help to read more / why don't want to read more.

**4. How carers' own experiences (e.g. own reading habits and confidence) and views may relate to the reading patterns<sup>69</sup> and activities with their children.**

This section will be broken down into the following headings:

- impact of carers own reading habits on their reading patterns with the children they foster
- impact of carers views about reading on their reading patterns with the children they foster
- Impact of support received by carers to encourage reading using the following variables:

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<sup>69</sup> For reading patterns using the following variables:

- Q30 & Q46– How often they read together
- Q31& Q47 – Why don't read much together
- Q32 & Q48 – frequency read certain materials together

- Q56: have you received support? (nominal)
- Q60: who did you receive the support from? (nominal)
- Q61: What support did you receive? (nominal)
- Q63: How useful, if at all, did you find the support you received? (interval)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Statistical test
Q30 & Q46 – How often they read together (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyment of reading;</li> <li>• frequency read certain materials;</li> <li>• confidence in reading;</li> <li>• frequency read as a child (ordinal)</li> </ul>	Correlation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of reading;</li> <li>• how useful the support was (interval)</li> </ul>	Correlation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recoded variable barriers of reading<sup>70</sup>;</li> <li>• received support;</li> <li>• who received the support from;</li> <li>• what support they received (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents
Q31 & Q47 – Why don't read much together (nominal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyment of reading;</li> <li>• frequency read certain materials;</li> <li>• confidence in reading;</li> <li>• frequency read as a child (ordinal)</li> </ul>	Logistic regression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of reading;</li> <li>• how useful the support was (interval)</li> </ul>	Linear regression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recoded variable barriers of reading;</li> <li>• received support;</li> <li>• who received the support from;</li> <li>• what support they received (nominal)</li> </ul>	Chi-square test and Logistic regression
Q32 & Q48 – frequency read certain materials together (ordinal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyment of reading;</li> <li>• frequency read certain materials;</li> <li>• confidence in reading;</li> <li>• frequency read as a child (ordinal)</li> </ul>	Correlation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recoded variable barriers of reading;</li> <li>• received support;</li> <li>• who received the support from;</li> <li>• what support they received (nominal)</li> </ul>	ANOVA and non-parametric equivalents

**5. How foster parents and their children's engagement with reading may influence their relationship and attachments with each other**

Frequencies of the following variables:

- Q34 & Q50: does reading together make a difference to your relationship?

Coding and analysis of open questions:

- Q35 & Q51: Please explain your answer

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Statistical test
Reading make a difference to the relationship (nominal)	Q30 & Q46 – How often they read together;	Logistic regression

<sup>70</sup> This variable will be recoded into a set of dichotomous variables with Yes/No responses for each barrier

	Q32 & Q48 – frequency read certain materials together (ordinal)	
	Q31 & Q47 – Why don't read much together (nominal)	Chi-square and Logistic regression

**6. What additional help and support could be given to foster parents to increase their engagement with and confidence in reading to foster children**

Frequencies of the following variables as the entire sample and at country level:

- Q56: received any support to help foster child to read?
- Q57: would you like any support to help foster child to read?
- Q60: Who did you receive the support from?
- Q61: what support did you receive?
- Q63: how useful, if at all, did you find the support?

Coding and analysis of open questions:

- Q58: what support do you think would be most helpful to you?
- Q59: why don't you want any support?
- Q62: Where did you find out about this support?
- Q64: What difference, if any, has this support had for you and the child you foster?
- Q65: Any other support that you would like to help you encourage foster child to read?

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# Appendix C- Summary of statistically significant findings

A range of statistical analyses were run, as per Appendix B. Statistically significant findings have been shown below with a tick, for ease. This should be viewed in conjunction with the analysis plan in Appendix B.

IV/DV	Foster child's reading level	Frequency of reading together	Frequency of reading different materials together	Reasons for not reading together	Carer's enjoyment of reading	Carer's frequency of reading	Carer's confidence of reading	Carer's frequency of reading as a child	Benefits of reading for child	Barriers to reading	Reasons for not reading together	Impact on relationship
Country		✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		
Foster carer gender					✓	✓		✓				
Foster child gender												
Foster carer ethnicity						✓						
Foster carer partner ethnicity												
Educational status of foster carer							✓	✓	✓			
Educational status of foster carer partner												
Employment status of foster carer										✓		
Employment status of foster carer partner												
Additional needs of foster child												
Length of time as foster carer	✓											
Type of placement		✓									✓	
Age of child	✓		✓									

IV/DV	Foster child's reading level	Frequency of reading together	Frequency of reading different materials together	Reasons for not reading together	Carer's enjoyment of reading	Carer's frequency of reading	Carer's confidence of reading	Carer's frequency of reading as a child	Benefits of reading for child	Barriers to reading	Reasons for not reading together	Impact on relationship
Length of placement	✓	✓										
Reading level												
Foster carer's enjoyment of reading												
Foster carer's frequency of reading		✓	✓									
Foster carer's confidence in reading										✓		
Foster carer's frequency of reading as a child			✓									
Benefits of reading		✓	✓									
Usefulness of support		✓	✓									
Support accessed / received											✓	

## Appendix D - Detail of statistically significant findings

As explained in the main body of the report, the following tables present more specific correlations where these were applicable across a wide number of variables.

**Table 1: Correlations between the frequency a foster carer reads certain materials and the frequency that their foster child reads the same material**

	Correlation (r)	Significance
Magazines	.327	$p < .001$
Newspapers	.336	$p < .001$
Websites and blogs	.286	$p < .001$
Comics	.219	$p < .001$
Audio books	.341	$p < .001$
Fiction books	.208	$p < .001$
Non-fiction books	.234	$p < .001$

**Table 2: Independent-sample t-test results for gender and reading when younger**

	Read by yourself		Read with an adult	
	10 and younger	11-16	10 and younger	11-16
Males	M=3.56, SD=1.19	M=3.53, SD=1.21	M=2.56, SD=1.14	M=1.67, SD=0.75
Females	M=4.12, SD=1.16	M=4.21, SD=1.07	M=3.18, SD=1.27	M=2.01, SD=1.09
	(572) -3.74, $p < .000$ , $\eta^2 = .024$	(84) -4.50, $p < .000$ , $\eta^2 = .034$	(548) -3.73, $p < .000$ , $\eta^2 = .025$	(106) -3.30, $p = .001$ , $\eta^2 = .019$

**Table 3: Correlations between the frequency a foster carer reads with their foster child and perceived benefits of reading**

Benefit	Correlation
Helps with school work	$r = .162, p = .000$
Builds communication skills	$r = .115, p = .001$
Feeds children's imagination	$r = .082, p = .017$
Increases children's self-esteem / confidence	$r = .123, p = .000$
Reduces stress or anxiety	$r = .113, p = .001$
Improves relationships	$r = .211, p = .000$
Improves understanding of other people / cultures	$r = .068, p = .047$