



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **National Fostering Agency Limited**

Uxbridge House  
464 Uxbridge Road  
Hayes  
Middlesex  
UB4 0SP

18th December 2003, 9th, 15th & 21st  
January, 3rd & 5th February, & 3rd March  
2004

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

NO

**Name of Authority**

**Address**

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

**Address**

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

YES

**Name of Agency**

National Fostering Agency Limited

**Tel No**

020 8848 7878

**Address**

Uxbridge House, 464 Uxbridge Road, Hayes, Middlesex,  
UB4 0SP

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

G100000269

**Name of Registered Provider**

National Fostering Agency Limited

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

Miss Edwinda May Beech

**Date of first registration**

5th August 2003

**Date of latest registration certificate**

5th August 2003

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

5/3/03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		18th December 2003	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		10.00	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Ms Jane Collisson	079752
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Mrs Susheila Ramcharran	083185
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		NA	
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		NA	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Liz Cowling (Manager Designate)	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

**Description of Fostering Service**

**Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings**

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

**Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)**

**Part D: Provider's Response**

**D.1. Provider's comments**

**D.2. Action Plan**

**D.3. Provider's agreement**

## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of The Fostering Agency Limited. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The National Fostering Agency, formerly the Fostering Agency until October 2003, was established in 1996 as an independent fostering agency. The subject of this inspection is the work carried out from by the London area office, which is based in Hayes, Middlesex. The company has a suite of offices within an office block on Uxbridge Road at Hayes End, within easy reach of public transport and motorway routes. There is a small South London office which is a base for staff in that area to use occasionally. The National Fostering Agency has additional branches in East Anglia and Wales which are managed separately. It is expanding into the Midlands, Manchester and Yorkshire.

At the time of the Inspection, the Agency's foster carers had more than six hundred children placed by a number of London Boroughs and Local Authorities in the counties around London. The Agency includes the placement of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum and children with special needs in its range of fostering services.

The agency also has a supported living service for young people leaving foster care and staffed mother and baby units. These services are not inspected by the National Care Standards Commission and do not form part of this report.

There are two Directors of the National Fostering Agency, one being the Responsible Person for the organisation and the other is the Registered Manager of the London office. An application is being made to the National Care Standards Commission for the current Duty/Resource Manager of the London office to become the Registered Manager. From the Hayes office, a team of duty officers arrange the placement of children to the foster carers. There are administrative and financial officers working from this office. There are two area managers, and eleven link workers for the London area who work from home. Staff in other roles, such as duty officers, also undertake some link working. Freelance social workers are also employed to undertake Form F assessments for the potential fostering carers.

The National Fostering Agency operates a 24 hour on-call duty and emergency service. Link workers are on call to their foster carers on the same basis.

## **PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Inspector's Summary**

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The National Fostering Agency, formerly the Fostering Agency, was registered with the National Care Standards Commission in August 2003, following its first inspection which concluded in March 2003. This inspection took place between the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2003 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004, over seven days.

Two Inspectors were involved in observing a panel meeting, visiting the foster carers and children in placement, and attending a foster carers' support meeting. They also interviewed the training manager, panel chair, directors and senior managers of the organisation. One Inspector was involved in the interviews of link workers and duty officers.

During the course of the inspection, five foster carer families were identified, at random, for case tracking. Their records were examined and they were visited in their homes. All of the ten children currently in placement with them were seen. The link workers involved in their support were interviewed. In addition, the Foster Panel was attended and seven cases were presented, which were both new applications and annual reviews of existing foster carers. A monthly foster carers' support group meeting was attended to which a guest speaker had been invited. The policies, procedures and records were supplied by the agency as requested.

The Inspectors found, through the inspection process, a high standard of professionalism from the staff employed by the agency. The foster carers with whom the Inspectors had discussions, at home visits, the support group meeting, and through written feedback, expressed their satisfaction with the agency. The particular strength of the agency was said to be the supportive and approachable staff at all levels. They were appreciative of the twenty-four hour availability of link workers and on-call staff. The training programme of the agency is being expanded to incorporate more advanced training and the longer serving foster carers welcomed this. NVQ training is also being planned for the foster carers and PQ development for link workers.

The agency's IT system is being expanded and, with protected access, Local Authorities are able to view vacancy lists and records relating to their own placements.

The majority of the requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection are in place or are in the process of being completed. This includes the Children's Guide and Welcome Pack which are due to be distributed. Two requirements on staff references, which was being addressed, and the review of the quality of care were reissued.



## Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

NOT APPLICABLE

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	3 (3) & (4)	FS1	That the Children's Guide must be produced and distributed in accordance with this Regulation.	1/7/03
3	20 (3)	FS3	That references required to be obtained under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 must available for inspection.	1/6/03
4	42 (1)	FS4	That a system is established and maintained which monitors at appropriate intervals, the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002	1/6/03

**Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.**

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

**Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Locality Manager** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3 (3) & (4)	FS1FS1	That the Children's Guide must be produced and distributed in accordance with this Regulation.  This is restated from the previous inspection.	30/4/04
2	20 (3)	FS15	That references required to be obtained under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 must be available for inspection.  This is restated from the previous inspection.	30/4/03
3	42	FS25	A system to monitor the records required by Schedule 7 is required to fulfil the requirement for a review of the quality of care. This must include complaints and allegations.  This is restated from the previous inspection.	31/5/04

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS4	That information on the declaring of a conflict of interests is included in all literature to foster carers and staff.

\* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. FS10 refers to Standard 10.

**PART B****INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	9
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	NO
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	18/12/03
Time of Inspection	10.35
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	68

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- |                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded   | (Commendable)      |
| 3 - Standard Met        | (No Shortfalls)    |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met    | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The National Fostering Agency has produced its Statement of Purpose. This was a requirement of the last inspection in March 2003. It includes the principles of the agency, young peoples' rights, structure of the organisation, and recruitment procedures for foster carers. The duty system, training, support systems and complaints procedure are also detailed in the documentation. The Standard requires the number of foster carers, children in placement and complaints to be included in the Statement of Purpose. The approximate numbers of carers and children are included in the documentation but the information on the number of complaints and their outcomes is not. Because this information is variable, and changes frequently, it is recommended that this information is included as an addendum which can be sent with the Statement of Purpose as required. The agency produces two brochures, one for purchasers of its services and one for prospective foster carers.

It was a requirement at the first annual inspection in March 2003 that the Children's Guide is produced and distributed. This is not yet completed. There is currently a leaflet for children and young people. This gives details of who they should contact if they wish to raise concerns, which are their social worker, foster carer, National Fostering Agency complaints officer or the National Care Standards Commission. The Inspectors saw the almost completed draft of the new Guide, called "Information for Young People". There is a feedback sheet regarding accommodation, education, health and information on bullying and complaints. It was planned that this information was to be distributed in January 2004. However, it has now been held until after April 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, when details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), which will be responsible for inspection of the service after that date, can be included. When the Guide is finalised, it is planned that it will be distributed to all children and young people currently in placement and all new placements. It has been produced in a user-friendly format. The guide does not have information on independent advocacy but the complaints procedure and leaflet on bullying include the telephone number of Child Line and an internet site on dealing with bullying are included. The Guide will need to be available in other formats once it is completed and the Agency has indicated that this will be done.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The two current Directors of the National Fostering Agency started the agency in 1996. Both had prior experience of working in fostering services in local authorities. One Director is the Registered Manager of the London area office. She has Certificate in Social Service, a Diploma in Social Work and has worked in children's services since 1973. The other Director is the Responsible Individual for the company and is also a qualified social worker. Because of the expansion of its fostering services, it is planned that an application will be made to the National Care Standards Commission for the current Resource/Duty Manager to become the Registered Manager for the London area office. She is a qualified social worker and is undertaking a NVQ Level 4 in management.

All of the Senior Managers employed have had many years' experience of working within Social Services departments in childcare. From the discussion that the Inspectors had during the course of the inspection, it was demonstrated that there is an effective management style. This style combines professionalism and good organisation with approachability and flexibility, which was valued by foster carers, staff and panel members.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All of the staff involved in managing the National Fostering Agency are qualified social workers who have many years' experience of working in services for children and fostering generally within local authorities. References required for the Directors of the Agency, and CRB disclosures, were obtained when the registration of the agency was carried out in 2003.



## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

**Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)**

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The Agency demonstrated that there are clear procedures for monitoring the activities of the services provided. The Agency's computer system, which is password protected, allows members of staff, depending on their level of access, to view a variety of records. These include the records of the link workers visits to the foster carers which can be seen and monitored by the line manager. The progress of the complaints can also be tracked through the computer system.

No information was seen on the declaring of a conflict of interests by staff or foster carers and it is recommended that this is included in all literature to foster carers and staff. This needs to be included in policies. One complaint was made to the National Care Standards Commission, regarding the Agency, which was outside of the Commission's remit.

**Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:**

19

**Death of a child placed with foster parents.**

1

**Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.**

0

**Serious illness or accident of a child.**

1

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

1

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

0

**Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.**

0

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

9

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

10

**Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:**

0

**Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:**

0

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)****The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

It was demonstrated during the course of the inspection that the National Fostering Agency is being managed effectively and efficiently. Additional resources have been put in place to cope with the increased numbers of foster carers who are being assessed by the Agency. The current Registered Manager is also a Director of the organisation. Because the Agency is expanding, and the roles of the Directors changing, it is planned that a new Registered Manager will take over the London office.

The current Registered Manager does not hold a similar position in any other organisation. The Agency does have a subsidiary, in addition to its other branches, which assists children leaving foster care, and mothers and babies, to live in supported housing units. There are clear lines of accountability and the second Director, who is the Responsible Individual, or one of the senior managers, have responsibility if the Registered Manager is not available.

However, because of a number of recent changes to staff responsibilities, and the continued expansion of the Agency, staff roles were being redefined during the inspection. Once the major changes have taken place, it is recommended that information is distributed regarding the roles and responsibilities of all of the staff in order to clarify the new structure.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>All of the assessment processes, including annual reviews and link worker visits, are used to ensure that the environment in which children are being placed is safe and secure. These include the initial visit, carried out by duty officers, and Form F assessments. There is a health and safety profile that includes information about sleeping arrangements, kitchen, garden, bathroom and general home safety. Car safety is included in the list and covers insurance, seat belts, child proof locks and appropriate car seats. There is also a questionnaire regarding dog ownership, and guidelines on assessing dogs and other animals which may be prohibited by Acts of Parliament.</p>		
<p>It was recommended at the last inspection that that link workers could have a specific section in their monthly visits for health and safety and this is now undertaken. The link workers carry out an annual assessment of health and safety as part of the Annual Foster Carers' Review. Five foster carers' homes were visited during the course of the inspection and were found to be of a suitable standard. The Inspectors are recommending that further information is included when the foster carers' initial assessment is carried out, regarding the size of the bedrooms which the foster carer can offer and whereabouts in the home they are located. This information needs to be updated as it was apparent during the visits to foster carers, and from information given during the panel meeting, that the accommodation on offer may change. This had happened because a foster carer's own child had left home and the bedrooms available were changed around. The sleeping arrangements of the foster carers' family members also need to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of a home.</p>		
<p>In the homes visited, the size and space of bedrooms for foster children varied considerably. In one home, two children shared a room with bunk beds and, in others, single rooms were available. Whilst there are no minimum standards, it is recommended that clearer information is provided to ensure that there is sufficient space for the children and young people's activities.</p>		
<p>The National Fostering Agency has continued with its regular newsletters, named "Link Lines" which includes information on training, support meetings, social events and updates on fostering procedures. Information has been given in the newsletter that foster carers may be visited by inspectors from the National Care Standards Commission.</p>		

**Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)**

**The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The National Fostering Agency has recruited its carers from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnic minorities. It is aware of the need when recruiting to try and provide suitable matches for the children and young people, particularly those who may arrive unaccompanied from abroad. During the visits to foster carers' homes and at the foster carers' monthly meeting, the Inspectors met carers from many diverse backgrounds. Targeted recruitment has taken place to try and ensure that suitable cultural, religious and linguistic matches can be made. There is a section in the Foster Carers' Portfolio which covers unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers. Details of organisations who are able to help foster carers to provide support are included in the information.

Training courses are held on "Working with unaccompanied minors", "Transcultural placements", and "Helping children and young people achieve a positive identity". There is an Equal Opportunities policy.

In discussion with the foster carers interviewed during this inspection, it was demonstrated to the Inspectors that the children were offered suitable activities and leisure pursuits, such as Brownies, drama clubs and visits to religious establishments. Pursuits which helped to raise the children's self-esteem and promote confidence were seen as the most valuable. The needs of children with disabilities were being met by gaining appropriate access to the education facilities which suited their needs. It was evident from the attitude of the foster carers that the provision of good education facilities was paramount. One child was to be assessed for equipment to assist with manual handling due to changing needs.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

**Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

A team of duty officers are responsible for taking referrals and finding placements. They are qualified social workers and may also act as link workers. There is an out-of-hours duty system. One of the duty officers was interviewed as part of the inspection process. The process for the placement of children was explained and is in accordance with this Standard. Duty officers try to obtain as complete a profile of the child or young person as possible but this is not always possible, depending on the circumstances of the placement.

Local authorities who refer to the National Fostering Agency are offered the most appropriate match available at the time, which may be based on cultural needs, geography or any special criteria required by the local authority. Information regarding the foster carers, is e-mailed or faxed to the placing social worker. Placement meetings are held either on the day that the child is placed, or on the next day, depending on circumstances which the link worker attends. A vacancy list is circulated to Local Authorities each week and this can be accessed via the web site. Duty officers are involved in regular meetings with some placing authorities' professionals in order to improve the service to them. Where it is possible to

give placing agencies the Form F assessments, including the competency assessments, this is done but may not be possible if an emergency placement occurs out-of-hours.

The National Fostering Agency has tried to recruit a wide range of carers from many ethnic origins in order to meet the needs of the children being placed, including those who may be unaccompanied children seeking asylum. The Inspectors met, at one of the monthly support meetings, fosters carers from a variety of countries and continents who had culturally and/or linguistically matched young people in placement. These countries include Eritrea, Guyana, Somalia, Jamaica and Ethiopia.

The Foster Carer's Portfolio has a policy of the "Hierarchy of Need" regarding placements, which in line with the Children Act 1989. This aims to place children with "a close a match as possible in terms of race, language, culture and religion". This provides information on how placements are made which may not be matched as closely as the agency would prefer. Criteria, such as the experience and expertise of the foster carers, are taken into account. An unaccompanied minor may be suggested for placement with a family who have experience of the immigration and asylum processes, but may not be ethnically matched, for instance.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

**The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The majority of foster carers take part in the "Choosing to Foster" training, and it is planned that all will attend the new "Skills to Foster" course in the future before being approved. As part of the third day of this course, there are sessions on Safer Caring, which includes discussion on abuse, neglect and their consequences. Videos, case studies and group discussion are used during this training. Part of this day's content is regarding allegations against foster carers and child protection. The Training Programme includes courses on "Safe Caring - minimising allegations against foster carers" and "Child Protection", which are core courses, and "Sexual Abuse – working effectively with young people" which is an advanced course. In addition to guidelines in the Foster Carers' Portfolio on these topics, there is information on the disclosure of abuse by young people. Those foster carers who were met during the course of the inspection were aware that this can be an issue for the children they foster and felt prepared to deal with this if the situation arose.

The agency was asked to consider providing further information on bullying at the last inspection. It is now included, along with information on bullying, in its Children's Guide and has guidelines in the Portfolio. Details of an internet site are given in the Guide. This is also the subject of a new core training course which is being specifically run in conjunction with the link workers. There is a procedure in the Portfolio on reporting young people as missing.

There are guidelines on behaviour management, discipline and control. Foster carers sign, as part of the Foster Carers' Agreement, to agree that they will not use corporal punishment on any young person in placement, in accordance with the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991. The term "corporal punishment" is explained in the guidelines.

Guidelines on physical restraint and intervention are in the Foster Carers' Portfolio. There is a computerised record of complaints and allegations kept and the National Care Standards Commission has been informed of the majority of these. One Inspector has been involved in

attending a series of child protection strategy meetings concerning an allegation of abuse against one of the agency's carers. The outcome of the case was delayed by circumstances outside the control of the agency, who were seen to have acted appropriately. However, a concern was raised about a conflict of interests during the investigation and this was dealt with. It is recommended that further guidance is put in place for link workers regarding attendance at child protection meetings.

The information that foster carers receive regarding the children placed in their care is variable, particularly when children may have come from abroad and their details are unknown. The duty officers try to ensure that as much information is received as possible. Foster carers spoken to are aware that the information from the local authorities is variable and, in emergencies, may be very limited. The agency has arranged regular meetings with some of the placing authorities to improve communication and information sharing. Not all of the children in placement have a current social worker or have had a number of changes over a short period of time. This can be source of concern to the foster carers.

<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	99	%
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**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

**The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

Not all of the foster carers who were visited as part of the inspection had to facilitate contact with the families of the foster carers. Those that did demonstrated a clear understanding of the necessity of the contact and were willing to ensure that the contact went as smoothly as possible. The circumstances of these contacts visits varied considerably, from regular visits from parents and siblings, to final visits from grandparents prior to adoption. The Inspectors found the attitude of the foster carers to be very professional, showing concern for the children in their care whilst having understanding and sympathy with those involved in the contact. Efforts were seen to be made by foster carers to ensure that the contact visits were as positive an experience as possible. Support is given with supervised contacts where this is appropriate.

Fosters carers were aware of their responsibilities and that they are required to record the contact visits, where they are involved, and understood the need for this. One of the sessions in the "Skills to Foster" course is on working with parents and grandparents.

There is a core training course on "Working with birth parents" and a new intermediate training course available on "Working with substance misusing parents".

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

There have been no formal processes for consulting with children except for the contact the link workers have at their monthly visits to the foster carers. The Children's Guide which has been produced includes a questionnaire which will be used to ascertain the views of the child or young person in relation to the home in which they are placed, food, activities, education, assistance with homework, and health. This will include information about the Fostering Agency, complaints, information about bullying, and the feedback sheet. It is intended that this will be distributed to all children currently in placement as well as new children and young people being placed.

In the Foster Carer's Portfolio the complaints procedure states that all complaints by children, young people or a parent will need be reported immediately to the social worker, link worker and foster carer. It was a previous requirement that the details of the National Care Standards Commission, and the procedure for making complaints directly to the NCSC, was included in the complaints procedures and this has been rectified.

The foster carers' attitudes towards children are explored in the assessment process and in the Annual Foster Carers' Review (AFCR). One of the competencies assessed within the Form F and AFRCR is the "ability to listen to and communicate with children, appropriate to their emotional age and understanding". Where there are shortfalls in the competencies, these are noted and will be addressed at the panel meeting. Core training is provided on "Child development and communicating with children". The Inspectors were able to observe excellent communication skills being demonstrated by foster carers during their visits, particularly with young children.

The Agency will need to ensure that the Children's Guide is produced in suitable formats that will address the needs of children with a first language other than English and children who may require a visual aid.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Information is included in the Foster Carer's Portfolio regarding the support the agency expects the foster carers to provide regarding the children and young people's health care needs. This is detailed in a policy called "Medical Issues and Healthy Lifestyles". This covers the procedure for a statutory medical when a child is placed, the registering with a GP within 10 days, and the necessity to arrange dental and optical appointments if these had not been ongoing. The agency highlighted in the pre-inspection questionnaire that a recent concern has been that not all GPs are willing to take children or young people where the placement may be for less than three months.

Emergencies and admissions to hospital have to be reported to the child's social worker, local authority emergency team, if applicable, and the link worker, after the medical need has

been met. There is a brief section on healthy lifestyles, which discusses the need for flexibility around food, whilst promoting a healthy choice. Where there are concerns, the foster care is advised to discuss them with the child's social worker and link worker. First aid training is one of the core training courses held by the agency on a regular basis.

In discussions between the Inspectors and the foster carers, it was demonstrated that the children and young people were supported to access all the community services available to them. Two children had special medical needs which require the involvement of outside professionals for advice and guidance. Foster carers showed an awareness of the fact that the health of children may have been neglected and measures could be taken to make positive improvements.

The ability of the foster carers' to meet the health needs of the children and young people placed with them are recorded in the Annual Foster Carers' Review. Training courses are held on "Young people - drug and solvent misuse" and "Awareness of sexually transmitted infections" to assist foster carers with the young people they support.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

**The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The children seen during the course of this inspection had a variety of education needs. These included attendance at schools for special education needs, including physical and learning disabilities. It was demonstrated that the foster carers had been active in finding suitable educational establishments for the children. Two recently placed children had been unable to attend school because of the lack of places in the area. It is recognised by the agency that this is a potential concern.

The ability of the foster carers to meet the education needs of the children and young people placed with them are recorded in the Annual Foster Carers' Review.

A series of guidelines are in place to assist the foster carers to support the children and young people. These include promoting school attendance, placement expectations, and promoting participation in school activities. These set out the expectations placed on foster carers and how educational needs can be met. These include reading to children, purchasing books and liaising with the child's social worker and education professionals. It was demonstrated during inspection that meeting the education needs of the children in placement had been given high priority. The children seen during the course of the inspection, who were of school age, were seen to be supported in environments that encouraged them to progress with their school work and to find new interests. Play therapy had been provided for a child of pre-school age.

In the Allowances Guidelines, which was published October 2003, there are details of an "exceptional costs" which is designed to cover payments outside of the routine expenses. These include school uniform costs, school trips, music lessons, extra books for college, uniforms for Scouts, Brownies and similar organisations. Further explanation of these charges was explained the October/November issue of Link Lines, the Agency's newsletter.



**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

None of the children seen on this inspection were of an age to be leaving foster care or assisted to move on to independent living or work. Three of the younger children, placed with different carers, were due to leave the homes of the foster carers to be adopted, one very shortly after the Inspectors' visit. From the records seen regarding this placement, a number of changes had been to the plans for the child. However, it was demonstrated that these had been dealt with in the best interests of the child. In preparation for the moves, life story work was being carried out. The agency runs a core training course on this subject.

In the Foster Carer's Portfolio there are policies on moving on, leaving care and independent living skills. These give basic information on supporting young people to move on. Core training course are held on the "Leaving Care Act 2000 / Pathways Plans", which is a joint training course with link workers, and "Moving in, Moving on".

## Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The National Fostering Agency recruits foster carers in a variety of ways. This may be through word of mouth, community groups or targeted recruitment. These include black and ethnic minority newspapers and churches. The agency has an internet site. Initial visits are carried out by duty officers, using a set format, and prospective foster carers complete an Application Form. The person carrying out the Form F assessment interviews three referees in person. This, together with all the statutory and health checks, is presented to the Fostering Panel. All duty officers, link workers and freelance social workers, who carry out assessments, have recognised social work qualifications. Training is provided to the social workers for carrying out the assessment process.

There is a written recruitment and selection policy for The National Fostering Agency's staff. Vacancies are placed on the company's internet site or advertised through professional magazines, national newspapers or specialist agencies. A selection of staff files were examined which were in order, except for one, which had only one reference in place. The second referee had been requested from the same place of employment but had not arrived. The Registered Manager, who has been responsible for recruitment of staff, is to obtain the second reference. No evidence of telephone enquiries regarding the references was available. Staff who work directly with foster carers have to be appropriately qualified and have a good understanding of foster care. In the files examined, it was demonstrated that the staff are qualified and have extensive experience of work with children and with fostering services.

Total number of staff of the agency:

65

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

3

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

**Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The National Fostering Agency has had a clear organisational structure, although recent changes have meant a change of roles for some of the senior staff. In all of the files seen Contracts of Employment were in place. The two Directors have been responsible for personnel and finance. The new Manager Designate has been responsible for resource and duty management. The new Training Coordinator has previously been responsible for the panel administration, which he retains, as well as link working and other tasks. Two part-time trainers are responsible for NVQ and “Skills to Foster” training.

The agency has a computer system which is accessible to all the link workers who are based at home. The system has been demonstrated to the Inspectors and found to be an effective resource. The records held include initial referrals, assessments, link worker visits, running records of the children’s reviews, as well as complaints. The records are also accessible to the child’s placing authorities. Policies on Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures were seen to be in place.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

**The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The National Fostering Agency employs eleven link workers to supervise the foster carers. The link workers are qualified social workers, who have experience of children’s work. Each has a caseload of up to twenty foster carers. Some are involved in Form F foster carer assessments, but freelance staff are also employed to carry out this work. Link workers may also be involved in the recruitment of new foster carers. Two full-time link workers and three of the staff, who also have experience of link working, were interviewed as part of the inspection and gave details of their tasks. The foster carers who were visited were appreciative of the link workers who support them. Written feedback was positive. The agency demonstrated that it supports its staff by ongoing supervision, appraisal and a package of terms and conditions. Post-qualifying professional development is being offered. Link workers will also be assessing foster carers during their NVQ training.

Foster carers are recruited by in a variety of ways, including word of mouth, and through community groups. There is targeted advertising in publications which include black and ethnic minority newspapers. National advertising is not usually undertaken. The assessment is the Form F, which includes a section on competencies. These include all the sections covered by this Standard. The competency schedule is being used as part of the Annual Foster Carers’ Review and a competency-based evaluation will be used for the training courses. The samples seen of the Form F and AFCR assessments were of a good standard.

There is a worksheet for the foster carers’ children which is used when the Form F assessment is carried out. The views of social workers and carers is sought for the Annual Foster Carers’ Reviews and presented to the panel.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

**The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

There are fourteen link workers and duty staff employed by the agency. All are qualified social workers with experience of children's and fostering work. Three of those staff were interviewed as part of this inspection. From discussion with staff and management, and documentation provided, the employment practices of the agency are satisfactory. A recruitment policy is in place. The feedback from staff was positive on the support they receive from management. Health and Safety procedures are in place and evidence was shown of the required insurance policies. It had been a requirement of the last inspection that a Whistle Blowing procedure was produced and this has been done. Disciplinary and grievance procedures are available.

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

**There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The induction programme for staff working for the agency was discussed with the staff interviewed. There is a policy for the induction programme which includes an introduction to the computer system, an explanation of the administrative procedures and visits to a link worker session, Annual Foster Carers' Review, time on the duty desk, and going through the Link Worker's Handbook and Foster Carers' Portfolio. Regular professionals' meetings are held for the link workers, where they are able to meet on a regular basis and have input on professional matters. Professional PQ development training is being offered. This is an area which has been on some concern to the link workers met at the last two inspections. However, the Inspectors were informed that this is to be expanded. Joint working with foster carers on training sessions is encouraged.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

A sample of three staff files were examined. All of these contained Job Descriptions and these are available for all the staff. In addition to supervision, which takes place on a regular basis, annual appraisals are carried out. Evidence of this was seen in files examined. There are also professionals' meetings held on a regular basis.

It is planned that further professional development work is to be introduced. The Inspectors has been told by staff over the two inspections held in the last year that this is an area which requires further development. The National Fostering Agency is aware of this and has taken action to improve its provision. Link workers are able to attend the training which is provided for the foster carers and joint training is encouraged. Health and safety and leaving care are two areas specifically identified for joint working.

**Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)****The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?**

4

The agency has continued to demonstrate that it supports its foster carers in a positive manner. All foster carers are issued with a portfolio of policies, procedures and information about the National Fostering Agency. There is 24-hour support provided by the link worker for advice and emergencies. Additionally, the organisation has an on-call system of senior management cover. Link workers visit foster carers monthly, or more frequently if required by the circumstances of the placement. Foster carers confirmed that they had received additional help and support at the commencement of placements or at times when extra support has been required. The computer system allows the link workers' line managers, and senior managers, to access their records should support be required when the link workers are not available, or for monitoring purposes.

A regular newsletter, Link Lines, is sent to all foster carers. The Inspectors were informed that changes are being made to this to include more details of the support groups which are held monthly in different parts of London. The groups are facilitated by link workers, and are held in accordance with the wishes of the group and may be during the day or in the evening. As part of the inspection process, the Inspectors attended one of these meetings, held from 12 noon to 2pm. This was well attended, by more than twenty foster carers, and the Inspectors were able to speak to a number of carers and link workers. An invited speaker, who is a qualified social worker, led a participatory session on "Giving and receiving advice and help" which was very well received by the carers. Suggestions for guest speakers are taken from foster carers. Lunch was provided and the foster carers were given the opportunity to meet with other carers and staff informally.

Since the last inspection, in March 2003, a regular forum is now being held with the Directors and a group of representatives from the foster carers. Social events are held for both accommodated children, foster carers and their birth children, including Christmas socials. Outings to theme parks and pantomimes have also been arranged. These are advertised in Link Lines.

In addition, five foster carers were visited in their homes, and three written responses were received. The Inspectors found in discussion with the foster carers that there is a high level of satisfaction with the support systems in place. In particular, the 24 hour availability of the link workers and the on-call system. All felt confident about using the system both for advice and for emergencies. Access to the office staff and senior managers was also appreciated. It was generally felt that the growth of the organisation had not reduced the accessibility of staff or ethos of the organisation, although it was acknowledged that some changes will be inevitable.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The foster carers are each issued with a Foster Carer's Portfolio which contains policies, procedures and guidelines. There is a foster care agreement with the carers which has a list of the commitments to which the foster carers are required to adhere. These are clearly stated. Each foster carer has a link worker who visits on a regular basis and who can be contacted for advice on a 24-hour basis. Foster carers are supported by their link worker by a monthly visit. These are more frequent if the foster carers should require additional support. Telephone contact is also maintained. The notes which are kept of the meetings are now being organised to take into account a number of headings, such as health and safety. These notes are maintained on the computer system and available to link workers covering for leave, and senior managers. The Foster Carers' pack is in the process of being updated.

The link workers spoken to during the inspection said that they would make at least one unannounced visit a year.

The information regarding possible allegations is contained in the information issued by the National Fostering Agency and forms part of the "Skills to Foster" course. It was demonstrated during the inspection that the agency provides support to its foster carers where allegations have been made. Foster carers indicated that they had no concerns regarding the promptness of payments and support in providing additional payments, except for one instance, where first time carers appeared to be unsure of the equipment supplied and that which was bought from the foster care allowance. There is a detailed list included in the portfolio but this may need further clarification to first time carers. Insurance cover is provided and there is free membership of the Fostering Network.

Foster carers are able to nominate a carer to provide cover. These carers are interviewed by the agency and have CRB disclosures. The placing authority is informed of the details of the nominated carer. The complaints procedure was known by the carers. Foster carers were aware of the expectations of the agency regarding ongoing training but not all had fulfilled the commitment. This was discussed by the Inspectors and the senior managers of the agency. It is an area of which the Agency is aware and it is looking at ways in which its training programme can address this issue. It was demonstrated during the inspection that the circumstances under which a foster carer should be removed from the register were being followed. This resulted in a complaint to the National Care Standards Commission which was inappropriate as it was not within its remit. This should be clarified in the complaints and deregistration procedures.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

A comprehensive training programme is in place. Wherever possible, foster carers attend the preliminary course, "Skills to Foster", which was formerly "Choosing to Foster". This has been developed to include a competency-based course. There is a backlog of foster carers waiting to complete the course, because of the level of new applications, and it is planned that this will be cleared by June 2004 by the provision of additional courses. A competency feedback/evaluation form has been devised which includes sections on "caring for children, providing a safe and caring environment, working as a team and own development". A completed sample of this was seen. The Training and Placement Consultant, who will be at the training courses, completes it. This will be used to inform the assessment process and be included in the information that goes to the panel when new applications are made. The course lasts three days and the Training Coordinator said that it should be possible for the course to take place in units, where the first part may be held as an introductory course.

A comprehensive training programme has been produced up until July 2004. The previous Training Coordinator is providing NVQ training and there is a new trainer assisting with the "Skills to Foster" course. Additional courses have been provided to cope with the number of prospective carers who require training. Courses are held in central, north, south, east and west London in accessible venues with parking or near to public transport. The training is divided into three levels, core, intermediate and advanced. The core training includes "First aid", "Health and safety", "Challenging behaviour", "Child protection" and "Safe caring". Link workers are able to attend all of the training which is provided for the foster carers and joint training is encouraged. Training details are provided in Link Lines and the programme is sent to all carers, who were required to book for the current courses by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003. Waiting lists are held should vacancies occur.

The expectation is for all foster carers, including those who foster jointly, to undertake three training courses a year. This commitment forms part of the Foster Carer's Agreement. Not all of the foster carers have reached this target. The information on participating in training is included in the Annual Foster Carers' Review. This was discussed with the Agency managers who are aware that, for various reasons, some carers may not achieve the target. An assurance was given that Agency will try to ensure that this commitment is fulfilled. The Training Coordinator said that there are a number of places not taken up on courses as carers had failed to attend without giving notice. These have amounted to over one hundred training places in the last year. He said that he will aim to reduce this waste of resources.

Documentation for the new database was shown to the Inspectors. This is partially completed. It has a number of functions and will be able to show training undertaken by individual carers and the numbers who require a particular training course. It is intended as an aid to planning for additional courses as well as showing the training needs of carers are being met.

Experienced fosters carers who have attended all the core courses have additional intermediate and advanced courses to choose from, including a two-day "Advanced parenting" course, "Caring for children with learning disabilities", and "Medical conditions". Foster carers can also have funding to access specialist courses which are not run by the agency, but which will assist their work with the children in their care.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A sample of records was seen regarding the ongoing placements of the children. These are maintained on the IT system. Recording of the link worker visits and of the children's reviews are kept on the running records. Where information is known regarding the children upon initial placement, it is recorded, but this has not always been possible as some of the young people arrived from abroad without documentation. The placing authority can access documentation on individual placements, with appropriate security safeguards in place. While the information on the probable length of placements had been shared with the foster carers, who were met during the course of the inspection, these were often changed because of the individual circumstances. The foster carers were aware, and accepted, the reasons for this.

The foster carers keep diaries of the events in the children's lives. Guidelines on recording are in the Foster Carer's Portfolio. Life story book work is being recorded for the foster children who are close to being adopted. One foster carer was keeping a video diary for the child. The agency's management said that the method of recording is agreed with the child's social worker.

### Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Confidential records are kept on the computer system, which is password protected. The systems are available to link workers, their managers and other senior staff. The agency has introduced a system whereby local authority social workers can access the records on their placements. A brochure giving details of this system is available. There is a written protocol for using the agency's database. Senior staff monitor the records as required. A policy on confidentiality is included in the Foster Carers' Portfolio and is available to all staff.

It was noted that the confidentiality policy does not include information on the Data Protection Act 1998 and it is recommended that the policy is revised to include access to records procedures.

The foster carers who were spoken to said that they do not have records of the link workers visits. It is recommended that this is considered in line with Standard 25.12 which states "Children and foster carers are encouraged to access their records, make additions and



comments and record personal statements, including any dissent”.

The Agency has a system for notifying the National Care Standards Commission, under Regulation 43 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, of any event which is required to be reported. Records are kept of complaints and allegations on the computer system. It was a requirement under Standard 4, at the last inspection, that “a system is established and maintained which monitors at appropriate intervals, the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002”. Whilst the majority of complaints and allegations had been notified, on checking the information supplied with the pre-inspection documentation, a small number were found to be unknown by the National Care Standards Commission. Some of the outcomes of the complaints were not recorded on the system. A system which ensures appropriate notification under Regulation 43, and provides information on the investigation, the conclusion reached and action taken, must be in place.

The records required under Schedule 7 are in place within the documentation held by the Agency, but a system to monitor them must be introduced to fulfil the review of the quality of care required by Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>				612
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>				969
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>				840
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>				110
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>				6
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>		310	<b>Maximum £</b>	375

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The London office is situated in Hayes End, on the main Uxbridge Road. There are a number of bus routes to Uxbridge, Ealing and Hayes. The M4 and A40 can be easily reached. The offices are located on the second floor of an office block which is well-maintained. There are areas available for training and meetings to take place. There is an IT system, which is accessible to relevant staff.

The management, duty and administrative staff work from the office but all link workers are employed to work from their own homes. They are provided with computers and are able to connect to the main computer network. There is suitable lockable space for records in the office. The agency has indicated that it plans to move to larger offices in the future to accommodate additional staff. Insurance documentation was provided by the agency.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The detailed trading and profits and loss account for the Fostering Agency were provided to the National Care Standards Commission. These were in respect of the two years to the end of March 2003. A company of Chartered Accountants produced these.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Evidence was provided of insurances for Public Liability with a limit of indemnity of £10m and Employers Liability with a limit of indemnity of £5m. These expire in December 2004. Proof of Professional Indemnity insurance and Malpractice insurance were also seen. The agency also has insurance under the Foster Care Scheme to cover damage to foster carers' property.

The Agency's financial procedures were examined at the inspection in March 2003 but was not examined on this inspection. One member of staff is responsible for payments to foster carers.

### Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency has a policy on allowances and agreed expenses. These give details of all aspects of foster caring including the reward elements, self-employment, insurance, and tax. Payments to children are explained and minimum standards are written into the placement contract. Allowances made to children have to be recorded in the foster carers' diaries.

The contents of the Allowance Guidelines are explained under the headings of allowance essentials; allowance elements; the payment matrix; minimum standards for children's pocket money (according to age), clothing allowance, birthdays and festivals allowances; additional payments, for exceptional costs, travel costs and summer holiday allowances; the holiday respite scheme element; and tax facts.

All of the foster carers spoken to during the course of this inspection said that there were no concerns with the financial procedures and payments were accurate and on time.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

The National Foster Agency's panel commenced in July 2002. Information is provided for Local Authorities on the role of the panel and states its aims and objectives. These are to oversee the applications for new foster carers, annual reviews, changes to approval status and termination of approvals hearings and make recommendations to the fostering service provider.

The current panel structure has ten members and has access to independent legal and medical advisors. The panel consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, two members from the National Fostering Agency, and six external members. The external members include two foster carers, and professionals working in children's and fostering services. The panel have current CRB disclosures. There is a panel advisor/manager employed by the National Fostering Agency to administer the work of the panel. Policies and procedures are available to explain all areas of the panel's role. There are guidelines in place should the panel fail to reach a decision, which include deferral, temporary approval or passing the decision to the "decision maker" who is the Responsible Person.

The panel coordinator is responsible for arranging the training for panel members which includes an induction and a minimum of two training sessions a year. There is a Panel Members' Pack provided. The contents include information on the Form F assessments, and the information which should be assessed, including competencies and referees statements. The Annual Foster Carers' Review details the areas which should be included in the link workers' report. The report is in two sections. One is the support and monitoring of the foster family, and the second is the support and monitoring of the fostered child.

There is an extensive section on Competencies and Young People's Rights. The section on Young Peoples' Rights is to assist the panel members to explore with the Form F or Annual Review assessor, any areas where further clarification is required. The competency section outlines the core competencies requires for fostering and gives examples of the abilities required and how these can be evidenced. There is a quality assurance process regarding the quality of the Form F assessments that the Inspectors observed to be used.

Meetings of the panel were being held fortnightly until recently. Because of the growth of the agency there are now three panels held each in each month to hear new applications and annual reviews. The Inspectors attended one of the panels that had both new applications and reviews being considered. Before the assessments or reviews are considered, a discussion takes place between the panel members and areas of questioning agreed.

The panel was found by the Inspectors to be efficiently chaired and there were good administrative procedures in place. The members had prepared for the panel and were able to ask appropriate questions. At the panel attended by the Inspectors, where three new assessments and four Annual Foster Carers' Reviews were heard, one new assessment was deferred for an updated assessment to be undertaken and one annual review was accepted but had conditions imposed.

Information had been made available to the National Care Standards Commission regarding the termination of a foster carer's registration. There had been some confusion regarding the process for appeal and complaint. The policy on termination does not have the timescales for appeal as shown in Regulation 29 (7) b of the Foster Care Regulations 2002 and this must be amended. The complaints procedure also requires clarification to ensure that staff and foster carers are clear as to the issues which are within the remit of the National Care Standards Commission and those which are not.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The Fostering Agency does not provide short term breaks as defined within the Standard. Foster carers have nominated carers who provide holiday or child-minding relief. These may be other foster carers employed by the agency, or family members. Appropriate statutory checks are carried out.	0
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## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.**

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>0</b>
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This Standard is not applicable to the National Fostering Agency.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_



**D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.**

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

An action plan has been received and is available on request from the West London Office.

**Action taken by the NCSC in response to the provider’s comments:**

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note:**

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

**Status of the Provider’s Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:**

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Public reports**

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children’s homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

**Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.**

**D.3.1 I Michael Lovett of Nation Fostering Agency Limited confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

<b>Print Name</b>	<u>Michael Lovett</u>
<b>Signature</b>	<u>Michael Lovett (signed)</u>
<b>Designation</b>	<u>Director</u>
<b>Date</b>	<u>26/04/2004</u>

**Or**

**D.3.2 I \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:**

<b>Print Name</b>	_____
<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Designation</b>	_____
<b>Date</b>	_____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.