
Safeguarding children statistics: the availability and comparability of data in the UK

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Introduction

The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC) have been commissioned by the Department for Education to undertake a study to draw together data on safeguarding children and to compare the current position of England with other countries (Munro et al., 2011 and Munro and Manful, forthcoming). As part of the wider study, this Research Brief presents findings from preliminary work to explore the current availability and comparability of safeguarding and child protection data in the UK; this is of particular interest given that there have been shifts in policy and practice in recent years and these data have the potential to facilitate exploration of changes in levels of need and service responses in different parts of the UK over time (see Stafford, Vincent and Parton, 2010).

Key Findings

- The Department for Education publishes comprehensive datasets on referrals to children's social care and on subsequent service responses. The English statistical returns are most comparable with Wales and least comparable with Scotland. Variations reflect differences in legislation, policy and practice and in the data items collected by each administration.
- Northern Ireland and Wales publish data on the source of 'child protection' and 'children in need' referrals (respectively). It would be beneficial for England and Scotland to publish data on the source of referrals to facilitate exploration of how the public and different professional groups respond to concerns that children are in need, or are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

- Data on initial child protection conferences, child protection registrations, de-registrations and looked after children are available in every part of the UK¹; but data on children in need are not so readily available, making it difficult to explore how different parts of the UK respond to cases that are below the threshold for significant harm².
- Exploration of similarities and differences in the characteristics of children coming to the attention of, or receiving services from children's social care across the UK is problematic; there are variations in the age bands and ethnicity codes adopted in the published statistics for different parts of the UK; and in the points in the child welfare process at which these data are produced. Adopting a consistent approach would facilitate comparative analysis of similarities and differences in need and service responses across the UK.

Aim

The aim of this phase of the study was:

- to ascertain the current availability and comparability of data on safeguarding children in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- to contribute to discussions about what actions the Department for Education in England, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Services in Northern Ireland could take to maximise opportunities to compare levels of demand for children's social care and subsequent service responses across the UK.

Methods

The most recent safeguarding children statistical publications for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were scrutinised to ascertain what data are *published* in each part of the UK³. Data were available for the year ending 31 March 2010 in England, Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland and these are the figures cited, unless otherwise stated (Department for Education 2010a; 2010b; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2010; 2011a; 2011b); The Scottish Government, 2010a; 2010b; Welsh Assembly Government 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d; 2011). The UK population statistics used in this

¹ The terminology employed differs in England and children become the subject of a child protection plan.

² A wealth of data are available from the Children in Need Census in England; this return has just been reviewed to examine the data burden relative to the benefits of the information collected.

³ The focus of this and previous work undertaken by the research team (Munro et al., 2011) has been on mapping what administrative data are routinely *published* and accessible in English. A wider range of data items may be *collected* but these are not necessarily accessible to the public.

Research Brief are taken from mid-2010 estimates provided by the Population Estimates Unit of the Office for National Statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

The availability of data items on referrals, assessments, child protection plans or child protection registrations and looked after children were systematically mapped for each part of the UK and information on these variables was entered into a database⁴. Similarities and differences in the published data were explored. Findings were also considered with reference to legal frameworks, policy guidance and technical notes concerning the statistical returns as these all influence the comparability of data collected in different parts of the UK.

Findings

STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

Table 1 below outlines the latest statistics on children's social care services that are collected and published by government departments in the UK⁵.

Table 1: Children's social care services statistical publications in the UK

	Department responsible	Main statistical publications on children's social care services
England	The UK Government's Department for Education	<p>Department for Education (2010a) <i>Children In Need in England, including their characteristics and further information on children who were the subject of a child protection plan (2009-10 Children in Need census, Final)</i>. Available at: http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000970/index.shtml</p> <p>Department for Education (2010b) <i>Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2010</i>. Available at: http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000960/index.shtml</p>
Scotland	Scottish Government's Educational Analytical Services Division	<p>The Scottish Government (2010a) <i>Children's Social Work Statistics 2009/2010</i>. Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/09/27113315/0</p> <p>The Scottish Government (2010b) <i>Children Looked After Statistics 2009/2010</i>. Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/18105352/0</p>
Wales	Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate	<p>Welsh Assembly Government (2010a) <i>Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities: Year Ending 31 March 2010</i>. Available at: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/100916/?lang=en</p> <p>Welsh Assembly Government (2010b) <i>Local Authority Child Protection Registers Wales 2010</i>. Available at: 2010 Available at: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/1011251/?lang=en</p>

⁴ Outcome data for looked after children and data on care leavers are not presented in this Research Brief.

⁵ The UK National Statistics publication hub provides details of the relevant statistical publications governing children's social care services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and includes technical notes and a glossary of key terms (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/children-education-skills/children-and-early-years-education/child-safety-and-well-being/index.html> and <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/health-social-care/social-care/social-care-clients/index.html>).

		<p>Welsh Assembly Government (2010c) Personal social services. Statswales. Available at: http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx?IF_ActivePath=P,24604,24605,24792</p> <p>Welsh Assembly Government (2010d) <i>Referrals, Assessments and Social Services for Children, 2009-10</i> Available at: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/100922/?lang=en</p> <p>Welsh Assembly Government (2011) <i>Wales Children in Need Census, 2010</i>. Available at: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/110224/?lang=en</p>
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Executive's Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.	<p>Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2010) <i>Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2008/09</i> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/looked_after_children_2009.pdf.</p> <p>Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2011a) <i>Children Order Statistical Tables for Northern Ireland 2009/10</i>. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/looked_after_children_2009_press_release.pdf</p> <p>Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety (2011b) <i>Children Order Statistical Trends for Northern Ireland 2004/05 – 2009/10</i> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_2_children_order_statistical_trends_for_northern_ireland_2004-05_to_2009-10_-_tab_b22.pdf</p> <p>Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2011c) Quarterly Child Protection and Referral Statistics for quarter ending 31 December 2010. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_2_tab-a_children_order_child_protection_and_referral_statistics_quarter_ending_31_december_2010.pdf</p>

DATA ON CHILDREN'S CHARACTERISTICS

Countries collect a range of data items to assist them in understanding similarities and differences in the profiles of children coming to the attention of, or receiving services from children's social care. However, there are some variations in what data are published at each stage of the child welfare process. England and Wales do not publish data on age, gender and ethnicity (attribute data) until a child becomes a child in need or the subject of a child protection plan; in Northern Ireland and Scotland data on a child's age and gender are collected and published at the point of referral. Every area in the UK does publish data on the age and gender of children on the child protection register (or who are the subject of a child protection plan in England) and on looked after children. England and Scotland publish data on the ethnicity of children who are the subject of a child protection plan (or on the child protection register)⁶. In Wales, ethnicity data are published for children on child protection registers who are included in the Children in Need census. Information on the ethnic

⁶ In England data are also published on the ethnicity of children in need.

background of looked after children are published in every part of the UK. Although attribute data are readily available difficulties can be encountered comparing the age profile of children known to children's social care services. This is because of variations in the age bands adopted in statistical publications in different parts of the UK. In England and Wales age categories for children who are the subject of a child protection plan or placed on the child protection register are comparable (unborn, under 1, 1-4, 5-9, 10-15 and 16-18). However, differences in practice are apparent; in Wales children are not placed on the register pre-birth and therefore no children are recorded in the 'unborn' age category. In Northern Ireland 'unborn' is not a separate data category; data are simply collected on children aged under one at registration. Scotland, consistent with England, does place some children on the register pre-birth and this is coded separately. However, the age brackets adopted for children aged over five in Scotland and Northern Ireland both differ from those used in England and Wales making direct comparisons problematic.⁷

Data on the ethnic origin of children known to children's social care services are available across the UK. However, again, there are differences in the categories employed and the stages at which data are published in different parts of the UK. Nowhere in the UK publishes data on the ethnicity of children referred to children's social care; only Northern Ireland publishes information on this at the point of assessment. Ethnicity data are available from England and Scotland for children who are the subject of a child protection plan/ placed on the register; these data are not published in Northern Ireland. Everywhere publishes data on the ethnicity of looked after children.

REFERRALS

Data on referrals provides an indication of the volume of cases coming to the attention of children's social care services. Table 2, below, provides an overview of the key variables that England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland publish on referrals.

⁷ England collect data on children's dates of birth and therefore DFE can provide data on any age group to facilitate comparison with other parts of the UK.

Table 2: Core data items published on referrals

Data item	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Total number of referrals (requests for services from children's social care services) during year	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Total number of children referred	Yes	No	No	Yes
Total number of children referred re: child protection concerns	No	Yes	No	Yes
Children who have more than one referral	Yes	No	Yes	No
Referrals by region	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Outcome of referral/referrals resulting in further action	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Items that are only collected in one part of the UK have been excluded from the table. Details concerning the availability of attribute data (age, gender and ethnicity) are outlined above and have not been included in the summary tables.

As the table shows, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all publish referral data; however, the operational definitions employed in the different areas vary. In Scotland *child protection referral*⁸ data are published (although it is noted that there are inconsistencies across local authorities in the recording and reporting of child protection referrals); this is a narrower definition than the one employed in England and Wales, where a referral is defined as a request for services to be provided (by children's social care)⁹. In Northern Ireland 'children in need referrals' and 'child protection referrals' are separate data items. Variations in the approaches employed in different parts of the UK means that drawing valid comparisons can be problematic, as the table below illustrates.

⁸ There was a definitional change in the counting of children protection referrals in Scotland in 2005/06 and therefore data prior to 2005/06 may not be directly comparable with data collected after this date. Since 2005/06 Scottish local authorities have counted the *number of children who have a referral* rather than the number of referrals.

⁹ In accordance with the Children Act 1989.

Table 3: Types, numbers and rates of referral in different parts of the UK

	Definition of referral	Number of referrals	Referrals per 10,000 children	Number of children referred	Children referred per 10,000 children
England	Request for services	603,700	546.6	516,900	468.0
Wales	Request for services	48,544	777.0	-	-
Scotland	Child protection	-	-	13,523	130.3
N. Ireland	Children in Need	31,693	734.0	23,926	554.0
N. Ireland	Child Protection	4,270	98.9	-	-

Scotland and Northern Ireland both present data on referrals by age and gender, although the age bandings adopted by each are not directly comparable. Northern Ireland and Wales are the only jurisdictions in the UK that publish data on the source of referrals. Although such data are not routinely published in England, a number of other countries including Norway, Australia and the USA do collect and publish this information; it can be valuable as it facilitates exploration of how the public and different professional groups respond to concerns about the welfare of children (Munro et al., 2011).

ASSESSMENTS

Following referral, decisions have to be taken about whether further action is required to support families and/or safeguard them from harm. Table 4 shows the data on assessments that are published for the statistical returns. Scotland's publication does not provide any data on this part of the child protection process.

Table 4: Core data items published on assessments of need

Data item	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Total initial assessments completed in year	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total number of in depth assessments (core assessments)	Yes	No	Yes	No
Enquiries for children thought to be at risk of harm	Yes	No	No	Yes
Response time (i.e. within statutory timescales)	Yes	No	Yes	No
Assessments by region	Yes	No	Yes	No

Note: Items that are only collected in one part of the UK have been excluded from the table. Details concerning the availability of attribute data (age, gender and ethnicity) are outlined above and have not been included in the summary tables.

In England and Wales initial assessments are undertaken to determine ‘whether a child is in need, the nature of any services required and whether a further, more detailed core assessment should be undertaken’. More in-depth core assessments may be initiated at various points; these are *not* confined to cases where there are concerns that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. In England and Wales there is a statutory requirement for initial assessments to be completed within 7 working days¹⁰ and for core assessments to be completed within 35 working days; data on the completion of assessments within these timescales is collected to monitor local authority performance (HM Government, 2010)¹¹. As Table 5 shows, over two-thirds of initial and core assessments were undertaken within statutory timescales in England.

¹⁰ From April 2010 the timescale to complete an initial assessment has been changed to 10 working days (HM Government, 2010).

¹¹ Eileen Munro’s *Review of Child Protection: Final Report* (Munro, 2011) has recommended that prescribed timescales for social work assessments should be removed from statutory guidance as they distort practice. She also suggests that decisions about the depth and breadth of assessments should be made at a local level. The government’s response to the Munro review (Department for Education, 2011) sets out that an interim amendment to Working Together will be made by December 2011 in respect of the timescales and removing the distinction between initial and core assessments.

Table 5: Numbers and percentages of initial and core assessments undertaken within statutory timescales year ending 31 March 2010

	Initial assessments completed during year 2009-10	Initial assessments completed with 7 working days	Core assessments completed during year 2009-10	core assessments completed within 35 working days
England	395,300	266,100 (67%)	142,070	102,910 (72%)
Wales	24,380	15,957 (65%)	7,782	4,934 (63%)

In Northern Ireland initial assessments are undertaken but data on the total completed in a given year are not presented in the statistical returns. However, data are published on episodes by category after initial assessment. These data demonstrate that 83 per cent (13,693) were categorised as children ‘whose carers may require support and assistance in order that they might provide a reasonable standard of care’, 14 per cent (2,380) were assessed to meet the threshold for a child protection investigation, two per cent (318) were children with disabilities who may require services and the remainder were classified as other.

CHILD PROTECTION

Enquiries where there are child protection concerns

In England and Wales a section 47 enquiry will be initiated if there are concerns that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (section 47, Children Act 1989). In England 87,700 children were subject to a section 47 enquiry which started in 2009-2010. Of these, 43,100 (49%) were subject to an initial stage child protection conference. Data on the number of enquiries is not published in Wales. In Northern Ireland data on child protection investigations are also published. In presenting such data a distinction is made between joint protocol investigations, those carried out by social workers and those carried out by the police. Of the 3,387 child protection investigations initiated in 2009/10; 2,620 (77%) were carried out by social workers, 723 were joint protocol investigations and 44 were carried out by the police (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2011).

Child protection conferences, children who are the subject of a child protection plan or placed on the child protection register

England, Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland all publish data on the number of children who are the subject of an initial child protection conference. Data are also available on the number of children subsequently placed on the child protection register in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and those who become the subject of a child protection plan in England. Table 6 provides an overview of core data items published in more than one UK jurisdiction.

Table 6: Core data items on child protection processes

Data item	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Children who were the subject of an initial child protection conference	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Initial child protection conferences held within 15 days of the start of a s.47 enquiry/strategy discussion	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total number of children who are the subject of a child protection plan/on the register at 31 March	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Area/region	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Category of abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Re-registrations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children ceased to be the subject of plan/de-registered	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Duration of time subject to a plan/time prior to de-registration	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Children who had reviews carried out within statutory timescales	Yes	No	Yes	No
Children who became subject to a child protection plan/registration during year.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

As Table 7, below shows, Northern Ireland has the highest rate per 10,000 of children on the child protection register at 54.6 and Scotland has the lowest at 24.3. Northern Ireland's Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety suggest that comparisons with other parts of the UK need to be set against a background in which different legislative frameworks are in operation. The rates in England and Wales where the same legislative framework is in operation are not dissimilar at 35.4 and 39.8 per 10,000 respectively.

Table 7: Number of initial child protection conferences and number and rates per 10,000 on the child protection register at 31st March 2010

	Initial case conferences	Children subject to a child protection plan/registration at 31 March	Children subject to a child protection plan/registration at 31 March per 10,000
England	43,100	39,100	35.4
Wales	3,687	2,730	39.8
Scotland	4,660	2,518	24.3
N. Ireland	2,136	2,357	54.6

Abuse and neglect (children who are the subject of a child protection plan or placed on the child protection register)

Variations in definitions of abuse and neglect will influence the relative number or percentage of children classified as suffering, or likely to suffer, each abuse type. However, based on scrutiny of inter-agency guidance, Vincent (2008) concluded that the definitions of abuse and neglect employed in each area of the UK are similar (Vincent, 2008; Stafford, Vincent and Parton, 2010). Munro and colleagues (2011) found that at an international level there is least consensus cross-nationally about definitions of emotional abuse and neglect; in part this is because there is overlap between the two phenomena (Ward et al., 2004).

Table 8: Children who are the subject of a child protection plan or placed on the child protection register by category of abuse (year ending March 31 2010)

	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Sexual abuse	2,500 (6%)	257 (7%)	205 (8%)	208 (9%)
Physical abuse	6200 (14%)	798 (22%)	415 (15%)	627 (27%)
Neglect	19,300 (44%)	1577 (44%)	1180 (43%)	682 (29%)
Emotional abuse	12,400 (28%)	910 (26%)	735 (27%)	264 (11%)
Mixed classification/more than one type	3,900 (9%)	0 (0%)	190 (7%)	576 (24%)
Other, unknown or missing	0 (0%)	9 (0%)	5 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	44300 (100%)	3551 (100%)	2730 (100%)	2357 (100%)

As Table 8 above shows, between 70-72 per cent of children on the child protection register in Wales and Scotland or who are the subject of a child protection plan in England are categorised under 'neglect' or 'emotional abuse'. The percentage is lower in Northern Ireland (40%) but this is likely to be attributable (in part at least) to different recording practices. Just under a quarter (24%) of child protection cases in Northern Ireland are registered under more than one abuse type; Scotland categorises children according to the 'main' category of abuse and in England and Wales it is not common practice to record more than one abuse type.

Children ceasing to be the subject of a child protection plan/de-registrations

Every part of the UK publishes some data on the duration of time children spend on the child protection register. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland publish data on the length of time prior to de-registration, whereas Wales publishes data on the number of children on the register *at year end* who were registered for a given length of time. England, Wales and

Northern Ireland all publish data using the same classification framework (under three months, three months to under six months, six months to under one year, one year to two years and two years or more), whilst Scotland uses a different one. Despite differences it is possible to aggregate the data to facilitate comparisons between England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. As Table 9 below shows, the majority of children in Scotland are de-registered within six months (42%). In England the majority (39%) of children cease to be the subject of a plan between six months and a year after the initial plan was agreed. In Northern Ireland most children (31%) are de-registered between one and two years.

Table 9: Number and percentage of children who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan (or de-registered) during the year ending 31 March 2010, by length of time as the subject of a plan (or on the register)

Children who cease to be the subject of a child protection plan (de-registrations from the child protection register) by duration of time as the subject of a plan (on the register)	England	Scotland	N. Ireland
Under six months	30% (11,300)	42% (1,592)	21% (402)
Six months to one year	39% (14,700)	39% (1,483)	30% (575)
One to two years	25% (9,600)	16% (628)	31% (606)
Two years or more	6% (2,300)	3% (123)	19% (364)
Total	100% (37,900)	100% (3,826)	100% (1,947)

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Relative to a number of other countries the UK collects and publishes extensive data on looked after children (Munro et al., 2011). Table 10 provides an overview of a number of core data items¹².

¹² Additional outcome data and specific information on young people making the transition from care to adulthood are also available.

Table 10: Core data items published on looked after children

Data item	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Total number of children looked after at [given date]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Area/region	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Category of need	Yes	No	Yes	No
Legal status [at given date]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Placement type [at given date]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Short term placements during year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children started to be looked after for first time during year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children started to be looked after in year by legal status	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes
Children started to be looked after in year by placement	Yes	No*	No*	Yes
Total ceased to be looked after during year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total ceased to be looked after aged over 16 years during year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total ceased to be looked after during year by destination on discharge	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes
Total ceased to be looked after during year by reason ceased	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Length of time on an order	No*	Yes	No	Yes
Number of moves whilst in care/length of time in continuous placement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Not published but are collected/ available

Every area in the UK supplies data on the total number of children looked after on a given date (in care/snapshot data) and on entrants to care each year (entrants or flow population) (see Thoburn, 2007). However, definitions of looked after children may include a combination of children voluntarily placed away from home and those on legal orders or simply the latter. Placements with parents may be included or excluded from the statistics and influence the comparability of data. Definitions of looked after children are enshrined in the Children Act 1989 (England and Wales), the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The principal difference between the legislation for England and Wales and that of Scotland is that in Scotland where a child or young person is subject to Supervision Requirements (Children (Scotland) Act 1995, s 70(1)) but there is not a condition of residence through the Children's Hearing system and the child remains at home; these children are still classified as looked after. There are a small number of looked after children placed with parents in England and Wales, so simply excluding looked after children at home in Scotland might not result in comparable figures (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010e). Scotland also includes all episodes of starting and ceasing to be looked after during the year in their returns, therefore a child may be counted more than

once¹³. This approach is inconsistent with that adopted in the rest of the UK and needs to be taken into account when comparisons are being drawn. It should also be noted that in Northern Ireland children in short-term placements are included in statistics on children looked after at 31 March; this is not the case in England, Wales and Scotland. These differences go some way to explaining why the rate of looked after children per 10,000 is much higher in Scotland than other parts of the UK, as Table 11 shows (153.1 per 10,000 children in Scotland compared to between 58.3 and 82.6 elsewhere in the UK). Data excluding placements with parents are also presented below.

Table 11: Number and rate of looked after children at year end 2010¹⁴

	Number of children looked after at a given date	Number of children looked after at a given date (excluding placement with parents)	Rate per 10,000 children (including placements with parents)	Rate per 10,000 children (excluding placements with parents)
England	64,400	60,200	58.3	54.5
Wales	5,162	4,685	82.6	75.0
Scotland	15,892	9,699	153.1	93.4
N. Ireland	2,606	2,123	60.4	49.2

Table 12: Number and rate of children entering care for the first time in a given year (new entrants)

	Children who became looked after during year	Rate per 10,000 children
England	27,800	25.2
Wales	2,018	32.3
Scotland	4,859	46.8
N. Ireland	1,042	24.1

Placement types

Data on children and young people's placements are available across the UK, although the level of detail supplied in different countries varies, with England supplying the most detailed information and Northern Ireland the least (however, where possible, further information is

¹³ From 2008/09 the number of children can be calculated if required.

¹⁴ Year end is 31 March for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 31 July for Scotland.

available from Scotland on request). Despite these differences it is possible to collate the available data to facilitate comparisons between each part of the UK. As Table 13 shows, foster care is the most common placement type across the UK accounting for between 50% (Scotland) and 78% (Wales) of all placements. In Scotland around two fifths of these foster placements are provided by relatives or friends¹⁵. The data also reveal that Scotland makes greater use of placement with parent arrangements than other parts of the UK; 39% of looked after children are living at home in Scotland. This reflects differences in legislation and practice.

Table 13: Looked after children’s placements at year end 2010¹⁶

	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Foster care	47,200 (73%) ¹⁷	7,869 (50%)	4,050 (78%)	1,687 (65%)
Residential Placement with parents	8,170 (13%)	1,480 (9%)	230 (4%)	287 (11%)
Placed with prospective adopters	4,200 (7%)	6,193 (39%)	480 (9%)	483 (19%) ¹⁸
Other	2,300 (4%)	299 (2%)	205 (4%)	-
Total	2,530 (4%)	51 (0%)	200 (4%)	149 (6%)
Total	64,400 (100%)	15,892 (100%)	5,165 (100%)	2,606 (100%)

¹⁵ Wales and Northern Ireland do not publish data on the number of children in kinship foster placements, although these data are available for Wales.

¹⁶ Year end is 31 March for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 31 July for Scotland.

¹⁷ This includes 5,200 relative or friend foster placement.

¹⁸ The term ‘with family’ is used in Northern Ireland in reference to placements with parents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The mapping exercise undertaken to examine similarities and differences in the safeguarding data published in different parts of the UK highlights that there are limits in how far child welfare statistics can be compared (see also Vincent, 2010). At present the data collated by Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate aligns most closely with that collected and published by the Department for Education in England; in part this reflects the fact that both operate under the same legal framework (Children Act 1989). There is greater divergence in the data items and classifications employed by Scotland and (to a slightly lesser degree) Northern Ireland. However, it should be acknowledged that Scotland is in the process of revising their child protection survey in light of the revised National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland issued by the Scottish Government in 2010 (see The Scottish Government, 2010c for further details). In time, these developments may address certain data comparability issues highlighted in this Research Brief.

Overall, to enhance opportunities for comparative analysis of child welfare data in the UK it would be desirable to:

- publish data on the source of referrals;
- standardise the age and ethnicity categorisations in the published data; and the stages in the child welfare process that these are produced; and
- given that definitions of abuse and neglect are similar it may be worthwhile to consider reaching a universal consensus on these across the UK.

While these recommendations do not resolve the challenges of comparative analysis (associated with, among other things, differences in legal, social, political and economic context) they would maximise opportunities to examine variations in need and service response across the UK and provide a solid foundation for mapping trends and learning lessons from other parts of the UK.

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