



Department  
for Education

# **Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2018**

**Technical document**

**February 2019**

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## Summary

### Experimental statistics

The accompanying statistical publication provides national and local level information on the children and family social work workforce in English local authorities for the year ending 30 September 2018. This is the sixth year that statistics have been published based on data collected from local authorities on the children and family social work workforce.

Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics as “new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.” For more information on experimental statistics, please visit the ONS website [here](#).

Users should read all footnotes and caveats presented in this release and the accompanying tables to fully understand the practical applications and limitations of the data. In particular, any comparisons with statistics in previous publications should be done so with caution as changes from year to year may not reflect actual changes in figures, but may simply indicate improvements in data quality. Refer to the Data quality and Uses section for more information on data quality issues.

This document provides information on the methodology used in the processing of children and family social work workforce data, from collection through to publication, and includes information relating to the quality of the statistics derived from the data.

## Background

This is the sixth collection of the children’s social work workforce census collecting data over each full year, with this year’s collection spanning from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018. This is the second year in which data has been collected on an individual social worker level basis, with earlier years being submitted at an aggregate level.

The data provides a summary of children and family social workers employed by the local authority directly, or through an agency. Children and family social workers are social workers registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) working in a local authority children’s services department, or, if working in an authority where the services are joined up, working exclusively with children and families.

# Data collection and processing

## Data Collection

Local authorities are required by the Department for Education (the department) to collect and return individual level data on children and family social workers in post at 30 September and starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September.

This is the second year local authorities provided data at an individual social worker level, whereas in previous years data was submitted at an aggregate (local authority) level. Data was collected for all local authority and agency social workers in post at the 30 September 2018.

Some additional data variables were collected on a voluntary basis for the first time within the individual level return. These variables are not covered in the tables because of concerns over data quality, but where applicable to do so a summary is provided in the accompanying text document.

Further information on the data variables and data collection, including those collected on a voluntary basis can be found [here](#).

## Data cleaning

Local authorities submit their data to the department through the secure COLLECT data collection system. This data is stored securely by the department and access to it is restricted to a small number of officials prior to publication.

The department carries out consistency checks including those that are built into the data collection system. The department also carries out additional credibility checks that make comparisons between the data collected for the current year and the previous year. The consistency checks built into the data collection system enable local authorities to identify errors and discrepancies, and clean their data before it is submitted to the department.

Throughout the data collection local authorities were encouraged to check and correct as necessary data where there were errors and discrepancies. All local authorities were asked to provide comments against the validations recorded on their data collection form and confirm that the data submitted was accurate.

## Coverage

The data collection covers all local authorities in England and all children and family social workers employed by those local authorities. This year all local authorities provided an individual level data return.

Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames submitted a joint return through Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services.

## **Methodology**

### **Headcount and Full-time Equivalent (FTE) measures**

Headcount is a count of all distinct social worker records that fit the relevant criteria (Starters, leavers, individuals in post at 30<sup>th</sup> September). In instances where a social worker holds more than one post, only one record is counted to avoid duplication.

Within the data processing duplicate cases are removed based on local authority, HCPC number, and date of birth which avoids double counting when deriving the headcount. This methodology is used in the headcount derivation throughout the publication.

Headcount figures for starters are de-duplicated on the variables listed above, and in addition Role Start Date; leavers are de-duplicated on the variables listed above, and in addition Role End Date.

Records for agency workers are not de-duplicated however and each record is assumed to refer to a separate individual.

Full-time equivalent (FTE) figures are not subject to de-duplication. FTEs are calculated by aggregating the total number of hours that staff are contracted to work and dividing by the standard hours for their grade. In this way, part-time staff are converted into an equivalent number of 'full-time' staff. This allows for meaningful comparisons of measures such as caseload across local authorities.

### **Number of social workers at 30 September**

A count of the number of individual social workers in post at 30 September 2018 by headcount and FTE. This is all individuals with a valid role start date before 30 September 2018 and either no end date or an end date after the count date.

This measure does not include agency workers, who are covered separately within the publication.

If a social worker left their post on the 30 September they are counted as both in post and as a leaver during the reporting year.

## **Number of social worker starters during year ending 30 September**

A count of the number of individuals with a start date during year ending 30 September 2018 by headcount and FTE.

FTE is calculated using the FTE at 30 September 2018.

This is a measure of individual starters in the local authority, rather than starters within the social work profession. Refer to the data quality section for details of data quality concerns regarding this measure.

## **Number of social worker leavers during year ending 30 September**

A count of the number of individuals with a leaving date during year ending 30 September 2018 by headcount and FTE.

FTE is calculated using the FTE at 30 September 2017.

This measure counts the individuals leaving the local authority rather than leaving the social work profession.

## **Number of agency workers in post at 30 September**

A count of the number of agency workers at 30 September 2018. Data was only collected on agency workers in post at the 30 September 2018, but where a leaving date has been provided these cases have not been counted.

## **Number of agency workers covering vacancies (FTE and headcount)**

This is an aggregate variable collected by the local authority, at both FTE and headcount level.

## **Vacancies**

The FTE number of vacancies within the local authority at 30 September 2018. This is an aggregate variable provided by the local authority.

## **Age and gender**

Age and gender breakdowns are provided at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September
- Starters
- Leavers

Age is derived from the date of birth provided and is the age as at 30 September 2018.

Gender is taken from the data item collected.

## Time in service at local authority

Time in service breakdowns are provided at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September
- Leavers

This measure is derived from the 'role start date' which is collected and calculated as either the role start date to the 30 of September 2018 (for those still in post) or role start date to the leaving date for those that left a social work post within the year.

## Caseload measure

This is the second year we have collected the number of cases held by each social worker at an individual level. This allows us to calculate a more accurate caseload measure than in previous publications. However, as this is only the second year that data has been collected in this way comparisons with earlier years should not be made due to methodology differences.

In previous years some local authorities have raised issues around the reporting the 'number of cases held at 30 September' data item and linking cases to this to social workers at an individual level.

The caseload is derived as the total number of cases held divided by the number of social workers (as at 30 September) that hold one or more cases (as at 30 September).

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Average caseload	$\frac{\text{Number of cases held at 30 September by agency and non – agency SW}}{\text{Number of agency and non – agency social workers at 30 September with cases}}$
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## Interpretation of tables

Data was collected at an individual social worker level and figures are presented on both a headcount and full-time equivalent basis. The only exception to this is the number of vacancies (FTE) and the number of agency workers covering vacancies (both headcount and FTE) which were collected at an aggregate level.

## Definitions

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Children and family social workers	Children and family social workers are social workers who have registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC), and who either work in a local authority in a children's services department or (if working in an authority where the services are joined up) work exclusively on children and families work. This statistical release includes data on social workers regardless of their managerial responsibilities or caseloads.
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Full-time equivalent (FTE)	FTE estimates are calculated by aggregating the total number of hours that staff are contracted to work and dividing by the standard hours for their grade. In this way, the number of part-time staff is converted into an equivalent number of 'full-time' staff.
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This data item is collected for each individual record and the value is summed to produce figures at an FTE level.

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Starters/ Leavers	Starters and leavers are defined as any individual with a start/end date during year ending 30 September 2018. To note: these are social workers who were starting or leaving a children and family social work post within the particular local authority. Rather than social workers who started within or left the social work profession. Starters and leavers could be moving to a non child and family role or to a role within a different local authority.
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Vacancy rate	The vacancy rate is calculated using the formula:
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(FTE)

$$\frac{\text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}}{\left( \begin{array}{c} \text{Number of social workers at 30 September} \\ + \\ \text{Number of vacancies at 30 September} \end{array} \right)}$$

Turnover rate (FTE and headcount)	<p>The turnover rate is calculated using the formula:</p> $\frac{\text{Number of social workers leaving in the year}}{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September}}$
Agency worker rate (FTE and headcount)	<p>The agency worker rate is calculated using the formula:</p> $\left( \frac{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September}}{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September} + \text{Number of non – agency social workers at 30 September}} \right)$
Absence rate (FTE)	<p>The absence rate is calculated using the formula:</p> $\left( \frac{\text{Number of days missed due to sickness absence during year for social workers in post of 30th September}}{\left( \frac{\text{Number of children and family social workers at 30 September}}{253} \right)} \right)$ <p>Where 253 is the number of working days in a year taking account of bank holidays</p> <p>Note: Includes all absences including long-term sickness.</p>
Cases	<p>A case is defined as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an individual child allocated to a social worker (for example a family of three siblings would be three individual cases) including those on a child protection plan, children in need, fostering and adoption cases and care leavers</li> <li>• a carer or carers allocated to a social worker for the purposes of fostering or adoption.</li> </ul>
Average caseload (FTE and headcount)	<p>The average caseload per children and family social worker is calculated by taking the total number of cases held by each individual divided by the number of individuals who have a number of cases greater than zero in the individual level data return.</p> <p>Note: This is the second year we have published figures based on the individual level collection. Comparisons should not be made with previous years due to methodology differences.</p>

## Rounding and Suppression

The National Statistics Code of Practice requires we take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality. Rounding and suppression have therefore been applied to the data where it is applicable to do so.

The following rounding conventions have been used:

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In the main text and accompanying spreadsheets	Figures for FTEs have been rounded to one decimal place. Rates and percentages have been rounded to one decimal point. For presentational purposes figures in the national tables are rounded to the nearest 10.
In the supplementary tables and underlying data	Local authority figures for headcounts have not been rounded; local authority figures for FTEs have been rounded to one decimal place. Rates and percentages have been rounded to one decimal point.

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The following suppression conventions have been used:

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c	Where it is decided that disclosure control is necessary to protect confidentiality we have replaced the value with a c).
0	Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.
.	Not applicable.
..	Not available.

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These conventions are consistent with the department's statistical '*Policy Statement on Confidentiality*' found [here](#).

## Revisions

There are no revisions planned for this release. However, where we find that a substantial error has occurred because of the compilation or dissemination process the statistical release and accompanying tables will be updated with a correction notice as soon as this is practical.

The department's Statistical Policy Statement on Revisions can be found [here](#).

# Data Quality and Uses

## Experimental Statistics

Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics as “new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.”

For this reason, we strongly encourage all users to comment on the statistics.

## Data quality

The quality of the data has improved as we have expanded the coverage of the data variables and improved our guidance, and data validation and amendment processes.

Some data items were statutory for the first time within this data collection, for example Frontline graduate and reason for leaving. For some other items, this is just the second or third year that they have been statutory.

Quality assurance checks have been carried out at each stage of the data collection and production of the statistical publication. Anomalous data were highlighted and verified by contacting the local authority and late returns pursued to ensure overall response was as complete and accurate as possible.

The data collection included validation checks, as covered earlier in the data cleaning section. All local authorities were asked to provide comments on the return relating to any validations and, where applicable, asked to confirm that the year on year changes were valid.

The majority of local authorities derive their children and family social work workforce data from their management information systems. The data requires checking and managerial sign off before it is submitted, however the department does not collect information on the specific data checks carried out by local authorities.

Some known data quality issues are listed below:

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Comparisons between years	We are publishing children and family social work workforce data as “experimental” statistics because it is a relatively new data collection and some issues persist over data quality. Local authorities are however becoming more familiar with the return and their data collection systems are now better placed to provide the data. We are also working continuously with local authorities
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to improve the data collection process, by clarifying guidance and inviting their feedback through focus groups.

This is the second year we have collected data at an individual social worker level we have presented the data from previous years alongside the new data at an England level. But given the change in data collection over time any comparisons should be treated with caution.

There are still discrepancies between the years that are a result of data quality improvements and changes in data collection. For example, we would expect that the headcount of staff at 30 September 2017 plus the starters for this year minus the leavers would give the headcount as at 30 September 2018. However, this is not the case for a number of local authorities due to the way in which they have interpreted the guidance in previous years and have since improved the quality of their data return.

For the reasons outlined above any comparisons between years should be treated with caution.

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Starters

The number of starters during the year has been derived from the individual start date. During quality assurance of the data some local authorities advised that, in some instances, where an individual has changed roles within the same children services department the start date included relates to this role start rather than the date the individual started in the children's services department. As a result these individuals would be recorded as starters in the year, based on the start date provided, but may have been an existing member of staff. This means that the number of starters presented within the publication may be inflated as we cannot distinguish between new starters and individuals who changed roles, based on the data we have available.

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Duplicate records

Duplicates have been removed at a headcount level to account for cases where individuals have split roles; this avoids double counting. At FTE level duplicates have not been removed so that the FTE for each role is captured.

There are some occasions where the sum of the FTE in these cases is greater than 1. Consequently there are cases in the data where the FTE is greater than the headcount figure.

FTE	There are records returned within the data collection where the FTE is recorded as zero and leaving dates aren't recorded, these cases are included in the tables at a headcount level but at an FTE level will be recorded as zero. In some instances local authorities have reported that these individuals are working on a zero hour contract or casual basis so don't have an FTE recorded within their system.
FTE for leavers	<p>Within the data collection there are individuals who leave their post during the year and have a valid leaving date provided but don't have an FTE recorded at September 2017. This is the value used to calculate the FTE value for leavers.</p> <p>This has an impact on the turnover measure at an FTE level as these individuals will not be accounted for in the calculation.</p>
Gaps and inconsistencies	Some local authorities did not provide a complete and consistent set of data for the statutory data variables. The gaps and inconsistencies have been outlined in the footnotes of the relevant tables.

Returns were received from all 152 local authorities. The majority of local authorities returned data for the statutory data variables, although concerns were raised about the data quality in some instances and some local authorities reported that certain data items were not available within their IT systems, where applicable, these issues are explained in the footnotes of the relevant tables.

Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames submitted a joint return through Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services. Therefore, their data cannot be broken down to an individual Local Authority level and has instead been presented together against Kingston upon Thames, with entries for Richmond upon Thames marker as not applicable (see [rounding and suppression](#) above). This has no impact upon any regional/national totals.

### **Regional adoption agencies**

A regional adoption agency is a shared adoption service for several local authorities, working with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and other partners to deliver a system wide approach. RAAs were introduced as a 2015 manifesto commitment with the aim

that a larger service would be more efficient and effective than a fragmented system of 152 small services in local authorities.

So far, 12 RAAs covering 58 local authorities have gone live with the majority of other LAs in a developing RAA project. Where the RAA is hosted by an LA and staff have been transferred the social workers working within the RAA will be recorded against the host LA within this data collection.

**Live RAAs:**

RAA	Date it went 'live'	LAs involved	Host/Lead LA
One Adoption West Yorkshire	April 2017	Bradford Calderdale Kirklees Leeds Wakefield	Leeds
Adoption Counts	July 2017	Stockport Cheshire East Manchester Salford Trafford	Stockport
Aspire	July 2017	Bournemouth Dorset Poole	Bournemouth
Together For Adoption	September 2017	Wigan Cheshire West and Chester Halton St Helens Warrington	Wigan
Adoption NoW	November 2017	Bolton Blackburn with Darwen Bury Oldham Rochdale Tameside	Bolton
Adoption Thames Valley	December 2017	Oxfordshire Bracknell Forest Reading Swindon West Berkshire Windsor and Maidenhead Wokingham	Oxfordshire
Adoption Central England	February 2018	Warwickshire Coventry Solihull Worcestershire	Warwickshire
One Adoption North Yorkshire and Humber	March 2018	Kingston - upon – Hull East Riding North East Lincolnshire North Yorkshire City of York	York
Adoption in Merseyside (AIM)	April 2018	Knowsley Liverpool Sefton Wirral	Knowsley

RAA	Date it went 'live'	LAs involved	Host/Lead LA
Adoption Tees Valley	May 2018	Darlington Hartlepool Middlesbrough Redcar and Cleveland Stockton	Stockton
Adopt South West	October 2018	Devon Somerset Plymouth Torbay	Devon
Adopt North East	December 2018	Gateshead Newcastle North Tyneside South Tyneside Northumberland	North Tyneside

### Time Series Compatibility

This is the sixth year that local authorities have been under a statutory obligation to return data on children and family social workers and the second year data has been collected at an individual level for all local authorities. The statistics are not comparable over time because of inconsistencies with reporting over the years which have resulted in year on year changes that do not reflect true changes in the number of children and family social workers, but better reporting. The number of inconsistencies is decreasing over time however, as the department improves its guidance, and local authorities become more familiar with the data collection and develop their systems to return the required data.

### Data Source

The figures in the statistical publication were derived from the Children and family social work workforce 2017-18 individual level data collection. The department first collected these data on a statutory basis in 2012-13 as an aggregate return. The data was collected on an individual basis for the first time in 2016-17.

The primary source for information on the Children and family social work workforce was previously the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC). This is a voluntary return and the last report published by the department covering the workforce at December 2012 used data returned by 68 out of the 152 local authorities. The response rates for the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 data collections have been 100%.

### Further data

The underlying data for this release is available in .CSV format alongside this statistical publication.

Previous years of this statistical publication, can be found on the [collection page](#).

## Uses of the data

The main users of these statistics are officials in the department and the statistics are used to provide advice to Ministers for policy monitoring and setting future policies.

The main external users of these statistics are local authorities who use the information to compare the statistics for their local authorities with national and regional statistics and to benchmark their statistics against those for other local authorities.

## Feedback and user engagement

Feedback on methodology and presentation is welcomed and encouraged.

If you have any comments on the information collected, the timing or format of our outputs or whether these statistics are meeting your requirements, please email:

[CSWW.Stats@education.gov.uk](mailto:CSWW.Stats@education.gov.uk)



Department  
for Education

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Reference: Children and family social work workforce in England technical document



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