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PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLAND: YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2011

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides figures on children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

These figures are important because they monitor the impact of the legislative changes in 2005 under which Local Authorities have a duty to promote and encourage notification of private fostering arrangements.

KEY POINTS

- At 31 March 2011, 1,649 children were reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. This compares with 1,590 children reported at 31 March 2010 and 1,530 at 31 March 2009.
- 2,308 new private fostering arrangements began during the year to 31 March 2011, an increase compared with 1,940 arrangements beginning in the previous year.
- 2,332 private fostering arrangements ended during the year to 31 March 2011, compared with 1,950 arrangements that ended during the year to 31 March 2010.
- Of the 2,415 cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, 1,858 (77 per cent) were carried out within 7 working days; in 2010 this figure was 75 per cent.

Characteristics of privately fostered children who have new arrangements which started during the year ending 31 March 2011

- The percentage of privately fostered children in each age group remained broadly the same in each category as in 2010, the largest group being those aged 10 to 15 (68 per cent of privately fostered children).
- 60 per cent of privately fostered children were born in the United Kingdom; in 2010 this figure was 65 per cent and in 2009 it was 66 per cent. The percentage of privately fostered children born in Europe has increased from 10 per cent at 31 March 2010 to 15 per cent at 31 March 2011.

Percentage of arrangements where visits were made within the required timescales

- 2,308 arrangements began on or after 1 April 2010 and of these 65 per cent (1,504) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than six weeks (see note 5 for information).
- Performance varied across the regions, the North East achieved the highest percentage of visits within the timescales, at 76 per cent, and the West Midlands achieved the lowest, at 59 per cent.
- 1,498 arrangements were ongoing at the 1 April 2010 and of these 63 per cent (942) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than twelve weeks (see note 5 for information).
- For these ongoing cases, only 46 percent of visits in the South West were at intervals of not more than twelve weeks, compared to 80 percent in the North East.

TABLES

Table 1: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements, years ending 31 March 2007 to 2011

Table 2: Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, and of those the number carried out within 7 days during year ending 31 March 2011.

Table 3: Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2011 and place of birth.

Table 4: Number and percentage of arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within the timescales, year ending 31 March 2011.

All of the tables above are available in Excel format under the “Additional Information” section on the Department’s website at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001013/index.shtml>

As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications and to make data more accessible, supporting underlying data for this publication will be published at the same time as the publication and available in the ‘Publication’s Underlying Data’ section from the link above.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Background

1. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer.

2. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but if a child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.

Legislation

3. The legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989, as amended by section 44 of the Children Act 2004 which came into effect on 1 July 2005, and regulations made under Part 9 of 1989 Children Act (the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005), which also came into effect on 1 July 2005. Local authorities are required to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within their area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

4. The requirements of Regulation 4(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority have received notification of a proposal to foster a child privately they must, for the purposes of discharging their duty under section 67(1) of the Act (welfare of privately fostered children), arrange for an officer of the authority within seven working days to (a) visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated; (b) visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of his household; (c) visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate; (d) speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and (e) establish such matters listed in Schedule 2 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

5. The requirements of Regulation 8(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that each local authority must arrange for an officer of the authority to visit every child who is being fostered privately in their area at intervals of not more than six weeks in the first year of the private fostering arrangement; and intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year.

Source of Information

6. The figures in this release are taken from the PF1 statistical return for 2010/11, along with historical figures taken from the collections for 2006/07 to 2009/10. The PF1 return provides DfE with aggregate data on the number of children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements at 31 March, and the number of new arrangements and the number of arrangements which ceased during the year to 31 March.

7. The figures provided are based on data provided by all 152 Local Authorities. Four of these Local Authorities reported that they had had no private fostering arrangements during the year.

8. Two new questions were introduced in the 2006/07 survey about the percentage of foster placements where visits were made to new arrangements at intervals of not more than 6 weeks, and to existing arrangements of not more than 12 weeks. Doubts over whether the percentages were calculated correctly and the quality of the data submitted in response to these questions resulted in figures not being reported in previous publications. However, for 2009/10, underlying data were collected from which these percentages were calculated which has led to improved accuracy and confidence in the data; therefore we have published the figures in table 4.

9. Provisions on private fostering in the Children Act 2004 and the new Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into effect on 1st July 2005 and therefore affect arrangements starting from that date. These measures are designed to strengthen the existing notification scheme for private fostering arrangements. For further details, please refer to the Private Fostering Guidance at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/childrenandyoungpeople/a0063874/private-fostering-pf1-return>.

10. A research document funded by DCSF (Research into Private Fostering) was published in March 2010 and can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectId=15688&keyword=229&keywordlist1=0&keywordlist2=0&keywordlist3=0&andor=or&type=0&resultspage=1>.

11. The Private Fostering Advisory Group reported in March 2010, in relation to increasing notifications of private fostering. This can be found at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Adoptionandforstering/Page1/DCSF-RR229>.

Data Quality

12. These figures are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. This is because there is doubt over whether all parents, carers and other relevant third parties currently report the existence of these arrangements to their Local Authority. We are not clear whether the increase in arrangements seen is due to increased activity in private fostering or an improvement in the reporting of such arrangements. Therefore, some caution should be exercised in the use of the figures.

Uses of the data

13. The purpose of this publication is to provide the latest information on children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. Information are used by government officials to monitor the impact of the legislative changes in 2005 under which Local Authorities have a duty to promote and encourage notification of private fostering arrangements. Local Authority users may be interested in the underlying data which presents numbers at the Local Authority level to see local comparisons and trends on how their numbers compare to other authorities.

Confidentiality

14. In line with the Department for Education's Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality (link below), numbers in this publication are presented exactly; in previous publications in this series, numbers were rounded to the nearest ten.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns-sp-confidentialityv3.pdf>

15. In order to ensure confidentiality of children, the following suppression conventions have been used in this statistical release:

- Any numbers less than 6 have been suppressed and have been replaced by a 'x'. To protect the suppressed number, secondary suppression may be required in some cases.
- Percentages are displayed to the nearest whole number.
- Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.
- A '.' represents data not available.
- A '-' represents less than 0.5%.

Secondary suppression is the process of suppressing additional small numbers across other columns or tables to minimise the risk of identification by combining different pieces of information.

16. It has been identified that for some national tables, suppressing numbers less than 3 is sufficient and practical. This avoids unnecessary destruction to the data which would result from having to apply secondary suppression.

National Statistics

17. This is a National Statistics publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

Related Publications

18. Related publications for the UK can be found at:

Wales:

The statistics on fostering and adoption intermediary services include data for Wales for the period up to the end of March 2010 are available at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/101027/?lang=en>

Scotland:

The Scottish Government do not centrally collect information on Private Fostering arrangements in Scotland.

Northern Ireland:

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety does not produce statistics relating to Private Fostering Arrangements in Northern Ireland.

User Consultation

19. We would like to establish a user group to consult of the format and content of this publication. If you would like to be part of that group and involved in future consultations, please contact the statistician for this publication (contact details can be found in the next section).

Queries

20. Any queries of comments on the statistics in this publication should be addressed to:

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Table 1: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements ^{1,2}

Years ending 31 March 2007 to 2011

Coverage: England

	numbers ³																			
	Number of children under private fostering arrangements at 31 March					Number of new notifications during the year					Number of new arrangements that began during the year					Number of arrangements that ended during the year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
England	1,250	1,330	1,530	1,590	1,649	1,570	1,790	2,180	2,370	2,678	1,420	1,560	1,980	1,940	2,308	1,040	1,520	1,700	1,950	2,332
Region																				
North East	50	60	70	70	69	80	80	80	70	85	80	80	80	70	84	50	70	70	70	90
North West	100	90	160	170	177	90	110	230	250	305	90	90	200	220	268	70	100	160	220	282
Yorkshire and Humberside	70	90	100	130	141	80	120	130	170	177	80	110	110	150	164	60	100	90	140	142
East Midlands	110	110	100	110	123	140	160	170	170	212	130	120	140	120	176	100	120	110	130	173
West Midlands	90	120	170	150	147	120	170	240	210	212	120	160	220	190	198	90	150	190	220	195
East of England	120	140	160	160	202	110	180	240	310	307	110	160	230	230	281	60	150	170	190	236
London	360	370	400	440	407	420	470	400	470	439	340	330	330	360	328	180	310	290	340	386
South East	210	230	220	190	176	260	260	360	340	363	250	290	340	290	258	200	280	340	320	309
South West	140	120	150	190	207	270	240	330	380	578	230	220	340	300	551	230	240	290	320	519

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.
2. Notifications received during the year include private fostering arrangements which may have started before 1 April or were due to start after 31 March. The same applies to notifications of private fostering arrangements coming to an end.
3. With the exception of 2011 figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Regional figures may not sum to the national total due to rounding.

Table 2: Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits¹, and of those the number that were carried out within 7 days
Year ending 31 March 2011
Coverage: England

	numbers and percentages		
	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits	Number of cases where this action was taken in accordance with requirements within 7 working days	Percentage of cases where action was taken within 7 working days
England	2,415	1,858	77
Region			
North East	83	76	92
North West	292	190	65
Yorkshire and Humberside	171	131	77
East Midlands	175	99	57
West Midlands	206	156	76
East of England	246	185	75
London	424	367	87
South East	278	203	73
South West	540	451	84

Source: PF1

1. The table displays figures for visits made in accordance with regulation 4 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Regulation 4 states that where a Local authority has received notification under Regulation 3 they must, within seven working days, visit the proposed private foster carer at the premises where the child will be accommodated and visit and speak to the child.

Table 3: Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2011 and place of birth¹
Year ending 31 March 2011
Coverage: England

	numbers					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other
All children	2,308	1,396	343	143	323	103
Under 1	18	18	0	0	0	0
1 - 4	124	99	6	9	4	6
5 - 9	206	138	15	23	12	18
10 - 15	1573	889	258	91	265	70
16 & over	387	252	64	20	42	9

	percentages					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other
All children	100	60	15	6	14	4
Under 1	1	1	0	0	0	0
1 - 4	5	7	2	6	1	6
5 - 9	9	10	4	16	4	17
10 - 15	68	64	75	64	82	68
16 & over	17	18	19	14	13	9
All ages	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.

Table 4: Number and percentage of arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within the timescales¹
Year ending 31 March 2011
Coverage: England

	numbers and percentages ²			
	Arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2010 where visits were made at intervals of not more than six weeks		Arrangements that began before 1 April 2010 that were continuing on 1 April 2010 where visits were made at intervals of not more than twelve weeks	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
England	1,504	65	942	63
Region				
North East	64	76	60	80
North West	172	64	98	58
Yorkshire and Humberside	100	61	63	54
East Midlands	113	64	63	54
West Midlands	116	59	82	66
East of England	197	70	79	50
London	224	68	310	76
South East	172	67	120	66
South West	346	63	67	46

Source: PF1

1. This table displays information on the follow up visits which have been made by Local Authorities. The minimum number of visits required is at intervals of not more than six weeks in respect of the first year of any private fostering arrangement and at intervals of not more than twelve weeks in respect of the second and any subsequent years of any arrangement.

2. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.