



Department  
for Education

# **Admissions appeals in England, academic year 2015 to 2016: background and methodology information.**

**Quality and methodology information  
document**

**September 2016**

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## Introduction

This document provides background information on the 'Admissions appeals in England – academic year 2015 to 2016' statistical first release, including the improvements made in the school census collection since 2015 and the resulting break in the time series of appeals data.

It also explains the concepts and methods used to calculate the figures and provides an overview of the data sources and other relevant information.

## Improvements to the collection

Appeals relating to voluntary controlled and community schools are the responsibility of the local authority who report the appeals directly as an aggregate figure via the school admission appeals (APAD) collection. All voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools are required to report their admissions appeals directly in the spring school census. This is because they are responsible for the administration of their own appeals, even if they contract the actual running of those appeals to a third party.

Following last year's publication, some stakeholders expressed concern that admissions appeals to these schools were being under reported. An investigation was undertaken by the department which brought to light a likely omission of appeals by some voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools.

In response to this, prior to the January 2016 census the admissions appeals module had additional checks put in place for schools who reported having received no appeals. The subsequent census return showed an increase in the proportion of schools reporting that they had received appeals (and processed them accordingly). Analysis against local authority records and previous years' appeal data has shown that at least some of this increase is due to schools reporting their appeals for the first time, rather than a general increase in appeals received. However, the exact breakdown (and how many appeals there would have been if the affected schools had submitted their appeals figures in previous years) cannot be ascertained.

In addition, other improvements to the 2016 census included comparing the recorded governance of each school – that is, whether they are foundation, community etc schools – with other records, such as edubase, and correcting those which were recorded differently. As a consequence a number of schools are recorded as a different governance to 2015. It is not possible to say precisely how many schools were changed because of the conversion of a number of schools into academies during the year, but the number of schools recorded as foundation schools is over 200 higher in 2016 than in 2015. This change affects the calculation of the appeals rates in table 2 (appeals by level and school type).

Where a number of admissions were, in 2015, incorrectly allocated to one school type when they were actually another, the heard appeals rate for the former could have decreased (because the number of appeals heard was divided by a larger number of new admissions) and that for the latter increased. The rate of appeals which were decided in the parents' favour is calculated as a proportion of those heard and is therefore unaffected throughout.

Both changes to the census are permanent and will continue to help schools accurately record the number of appeals they receive and process, and the governance of their schools. However, analysis will be undertaken before the next census in January 2017 to quantify the past and future effect on the number of appeals recorded.

## **About the output: interpretation of the figures**

The appeals collections gather data on the progress of all appeals (against not receiving a place at a requested school) from initial submission through to their resolution. All received appeals are described as being lodged. If not withdrawn by the parent the appeals will be considered by a panel hearing – this is described as being heard. The heard appeals breaks down into those which have been rejected and those which have been upheld (ie decided in favour of the parent). This release looks at the number and percentage of appeals which have been lodged, heard and found in favour.

The total number of appeals initially lodged by parents can be misleading. Some appeals are resolved before they reach a panel hearing (for example a place at the school could become available via the school's waiting list) and will therefore be withdrawn. In addition parents can lodge appeals for more than one school but only require a single school place.

Figures for the total number of admissions appeals lodged are provided in this publication but the number of appeals actually heard by an appeals panel is considered to be a more reliable indicator. Therefore in tables 2 and 3 rates are calculated for appeals heard and those upheld only.

Because the number of appeals heard can be very small at LA level, there can be significant variation in rates found in favour (calculated as percentage of the appeals heard) which only relate to a numerical difference of one or two appeals being upheld.

## **Methodology**

The appeals data is derived from two sources:

The local authorities provided aggregate appeal data for all of their community and voluntary controlled schools via the school admission appeals data collection (APAD), returned to the department in January 2016.

Foundation, voluntary aided and academy schools provided their own appeal data via the spring 2016 school census (admissions appeals module). Community and voluntary controlled schools who are in the process of converting to academies provided their data via either the local authority or school census based on their school type on census day, 21 January 2016.

In each collection, figures are provided on the number of appeals lodged, withdrawn, heard, found in favour and rejected.

In order to improve timeliness, allowing us to report on the current academic year, only appeals lodged by 1 September and relating to entry into the start of the academic year (for any school year) are collected. Therefore appeals relating to an application for a child to move schools during the school year are not included.

Appeals for entry into infant age classes are listed individually. These are a subset of the primary appeals figures. This subset relates to the national curriculum year of the class only, they are not necessarily infant class size appeals (relating to regulations limiting the maximum size of an infant class), although these will be included.

The local authority figures for community and voluntary controlled schools reported on appeals by phase: that is, whether the appeal related to entry into primary (including infant) or secondary school (including middle deemed schools).

The school census returns made by foundation, voluntary aided and academy schools provided total appeals figures (plus the infant appeal subsets). For all through schools it is not possible to identify which appeals related to the primary national curriculum years and those relating to secondary years. As some of these schools have recorded infant appeals, all such all-through schools have been recorded as primary in the appeals dataset. All through community and voluntary controlled schools will have their appeals correctly recorded within the local authority aggregate return.

Therefore there is a mismatch in the treatment of appeals to all through schools in this dataset.

Appeals against non-admission to a school sixth form and 14-19 schools such as UTCs and studio schools are included.

The admissions dataset used to calculate the rates of appeals lodged and heard is calculated from the spring 2016 school census. It includes all pupils who were on roll on census day and who were identified as a new entrant into a mainstream maintained or academy school between 1 August 2015 and 1 October 2015 (autumn school census day).

Admissions into all through schools have been designated as primary admissions throughout to match the foundation, voluntary aided and academy school appeals (see methodology note above). As a consequence the primary admissions total will be slightly

elevated and the secondary admissions totals slightly reduced. Although the effect will be very small at England level, it could be more pronounced for certain local authorities.

The designation of the governance of each school was aligned to those used in the SFR Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2016, published on 28 July 2016.

## **The appeals process**

Each LA coordinates admissions to all the state-funded schools in its area. It receives applications for all children resident in its area, and sends offers of a school place on National Offer Day.

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 parents have the right to submit an appeal, to an independent appeal panel, against a decision to refuse their child admission to a school for which they have expressed a preference. The process by which this works, including the required timetable for the lodging and hearing of appeals, is set out in the admissions and appeals codes. These were last updated in February 2012.

Applicants have the right of appeal against all schools for which they were not offered a place, if that school was placed as a higher preference than the one they were offered.

The appeal is made directly to the relevant admissions authority for that school. This is the local authority for community and voluntary controlled schools and the school's governing body for voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools.

If the appeal panel finds in the favour of the parent, then that decision is binding on the admissions authority concerned, who are therefore required to find the child a place at the school.

## **Accuracy and reliability**

150 LAs provided a return for all of their mainstream community and voluntary controlled schools via the school admission appeals data collection (also known as APAD) in January/February 2016. City of London has no community or voluntary controlled schools and the Isles of Scilly has one school which all children attend – therefore these two LAs are not required to submit a return.

The APAD return includes 'clean data submit' which means that an LA can only submit its return if it contains no errors or queries. The return then undergoes additional checks and verification within the department.

Mainstream voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools submitted their appeal data as part of their 2016 spring school census return (in the admissions module). The data was submitted to the standard school census checks made by the department. A school's appeals figures were designated to their school phase and governance based

on how each school was recorded in the underlying data of the 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2016' SR. This holds the phase and governance, as recorded in Edubase, on spring census day, 21 January 2016.

As described in the section on improvements to the figures, additions to the validation process in the appeals module of the school census have resulted in an increase in the number of schools reporting appeals (and therefore the total number of appeals). It is not known what proportion of the increase is due to improved reporting and what proportion to a genuine rise in the number of appeals being lodged and heard, but the improvement in the level of reporting seen in 2016 is expected to remain for future years.

The final appeals dataset was calculated, using the above returns, within the department. The school census admissions module requires schools to provide their total number of appeals loaded, withdrawn, heard, rejected and upheld, and of those which were for infant classes. For all through schools recorded in this dataset it is not possible to divide the total number of appeals into those which are for the primary school years and those for secondary. It has therefore been necessary to designate the all through schools reported via the school census admissions module as primary schools in order to ensure that the infant appeals are correctly designated.

The APAD return for community and voluntary controlled schools separately records the number of appeals for primary, infant and secondary phases. Therefore in this instance appeals relating to all through schools should have been correctly designated by the LA making the return. Overall, however, the designation of any all through voluntary aided, foundation and academy school into primary, as described above, will mean that the number of appeals into the secondary years could be underestimated, and the number into primary years overestimated. There were 125 affected schools in this dataset.

The admissions denominator used to create the rates for the number of appeals lodged and heard was calculated within the department from the pupil module of the spring 2016 school census. It calculated the number of new admissions (i.e. a pupil starting at a new school between 1 August 2015 to 1 October 2015 (autumn census day)) using the entry date of the pupil and the LA and Estab codes of the school the pupil is recorded as attending. Additional checks were made to identify if a school converting to an academy adjusted all pupils to a new entry date, and to identify if the child was in reality an existing pupil of that school.

The admissions figure calculations depended on the LAs correctly recording the pupils' entry dates in the school census. It also required additional processing to identify past and present establishment codes for converting schools (required to identify whether a pupil has moved schools), correct recording of the phase and governance of the schools, and correct recording of the conversion dates of academies. The improvements to the reporting of the school governance in the January 2016 census have resulted in differences to the breakdown of the admissions figures into the different school types (community & voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation and academy) compared

to 2015. The overall and LA level admissions figures are unaffected. Processes have been put in place within the school census to ensure that the governance of all schools continues to be recorded correctly in future censuses.

There are significant differences in the total admissions figures for a few LAs between 2014-15 and 2015-16. It is not known the margin of uncertainty for these figures but the processing methodology has been thoroughly reviewed and the actual processing quality assured.

There are no planned revisions to this statistical release. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the departmental revisions policy which is published at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20revisions.pdf>

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires us to take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality. The tables produced for this SFR have been assessed and it has been determined that suppression was not required to protect confidentiality.

## **Accessibility**

The SR text is published in pdf format so that it is accessible to all users irrespective of their choice of software. Care is also taken to ensure that the document meets accessibility guidelines. Key figures are highlighted in the SR text which draws out the key messages such as changes over. Small tables or charts illustrating key figures are also included in the text.

Each SR is accompanied by formatted excel tables with clear titles which allow general users to find more detail than can be provided in the SR text. Any important limitations or inconsistencies in the data are mentioned in footnotes so that users don't have to refer to the text or this document.

## **Revisions and further information**

The APAD collection and admissions appeals module in the spring School Census are collected annually. This publication was produced using the January 2016 APAD collection and January 2016 School Census and there are no plans to make any revisions to this publication. If a revision is necessary, this will be made in accordance with the Department's revisions policy.





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