



Department  
for Education

# **Notifications of private fostering arrangements in England: year ending 31 March 2015**

**Methodology document**

# Contents

Background	3
Methodology	6
Data cleaning	6
Data processing	6
Production of the statistical first release	6
Process map	10

## Background

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### Definition of a private fostering arrangement

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. 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.

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### Legal duty to notify

Parents and carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority when entering into a private fostering arrangement; local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment, and to monitor the arrangement. Some notifications are received from parties involved in private fostering arrangements, often private foster carers or young people. These notifications tend to occur once the arrangement is well underway, and often come about as a result of a private foster carer approaching the authority for general support or advice. On occasion authorities are notified of private fostering when the arrangement is in crisis and in danger of breaking down. Reasons for such crises could be because of a breakdown in financial arrangements between the private foster carer(s) and the birth parent(s), or conflict between the privately fostered child and their carer. Note that not all notifications go on to be classified as private fostering arrangements; if they do not meet the requirements of the definition of a private fostering arrangement as detailed above they would be counted as a notification but not an arrangement.

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### PF1 statistical return

The figures in the *Notifications of private fostering arrangements in England* statistical first release (SFR) are taken from the PF1 statistical return for 2014-15, along with historical figures taken from the collections for 2006-07 to 2013-14. The PF1 return provides the Department for

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Education (DfE) with aggregate data on the number of children reported to be cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements at 31 March, and the number of reported new arrangements and the number of arrangements reported to have ceased during the year to 31 March. The PF1 statistical return was introduced from 1 April 2004.

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## Legislation

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.

The requirements of Regulation 4(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority has received notification under regulation 3 it 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 7 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.

The requirements of Regulation 7(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority has received a notification under regulation 5 or 6 they must for the purposes of discharging their functions under section 67(1) of the Act, arrange for an officer of the authority within 7 working days to:

- a) visit the premises where the child is being cared for and accommodated;
- b) visit and speak to the 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 3 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

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 6 weeks in the first year of the private fostering arrangement; and intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year.

## Methodology

Local authorities return their information on the number of reported private fostering arrangements to DfE via the COLLECT (collections online for learning, education, children and teachers) system.

## Data cleaning

COLLECT has built-in validation rules which flag up data which is invalid or the quality is questionable. This allows local authorities to identify errors and clean the data before they submit it to DfE. Validation rules can either be errors (data is invalid) or queries (data quality is questionable but could be accurate in certain circumstances). Local authorities are encouraged to clean all errors and double-check data where queries are flagged. Local authorities can add notes to their return if there is a genuine reason for “unusual” data.

## Data processing

Once all local authorities have cleaned and submitted their data, a final dataset is compiled. The underlying data used in this publication is available to download from the publication webpage.

The underlying data zip file contains the data itself in .csv format and metadata in .txt format. The metadata document contains a list of the variables and their definitions.

## Production of the statistical first release

The SFR contains 5 tables which cover:

1. Number of children reported to local authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements, years ending 31 March 2007 to 2015
2. Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits and, of those, the number that were carried out within 7 working days, years ending 31 March 2007 to 2015
3. Number and percentage of reported new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March and place of birth, years ending 31 March 2007 to 2015

4a. Number and percentage of reported new arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within 6 weeks, years ending 31 March 2010 to 2015

4b. Number and percentage of reported ongoing arrangements where scheduled visits were completed in 12 weeks, years ending 31 March 2010 to 2015

Data in tables 1, 2, 4a and 4b is presented at region level, table 3 at national level. The majority of the data items in the tables are taken directly from the dataset. Extra analysis is only required for the calculation of percentages. The numerator and denominator used to calculate the percentages in each table are shown below:

<b>Table</b>	<b>Percentage(s)</b>	<b>Numerator</b>	<b>Denominator</b>
Table 2	Percentage of cases where action was taken within 7 working days	Number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits
Table 3	Percentages of all children who were born in each geographical region	Number of all children who were born in the UK, Europe, Africa, Asia or other countries	Number of all children
Table 3	Percentages of all children in each age group	Number of all children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all children
Table 3	Percentages of all UK children in each age group	Number of UK children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all UK children
Table 3	Percentages of all Europe children in each age group	Number of Europe children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all Europe children
Table 3	Percentages of all Africa children in each age group	Number of Africa children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 &	Number of all Africa children

<b>Table</b>	<b>Percentage(s)</b>	<b>Numerator</b>	<b>Denominator</b>
		over	
Table 3	Percentages of all Asia children in each age group	Number of Asia children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all Asia children
Table 3	Percentages of all children from other countries in each age group	Number of children from other countries who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all children from other countries
Table 4a	Percentage of reported arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2014 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks	Number of reported arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2014 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks	Number of reported new arrangements that began during the year
Table 4b	Percentage of reported arrangements that began before 1 April 2014 that were continuing on the 1 April 2014 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks	Number of reported arrangements that began before 1 April 2014 that were continuing on the 1 April 2014 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks	Number of reported private fostering arrangements which began before 1 April 2014 that were continuing on the 1 April 2014



When reviewing the tables, please note the following:

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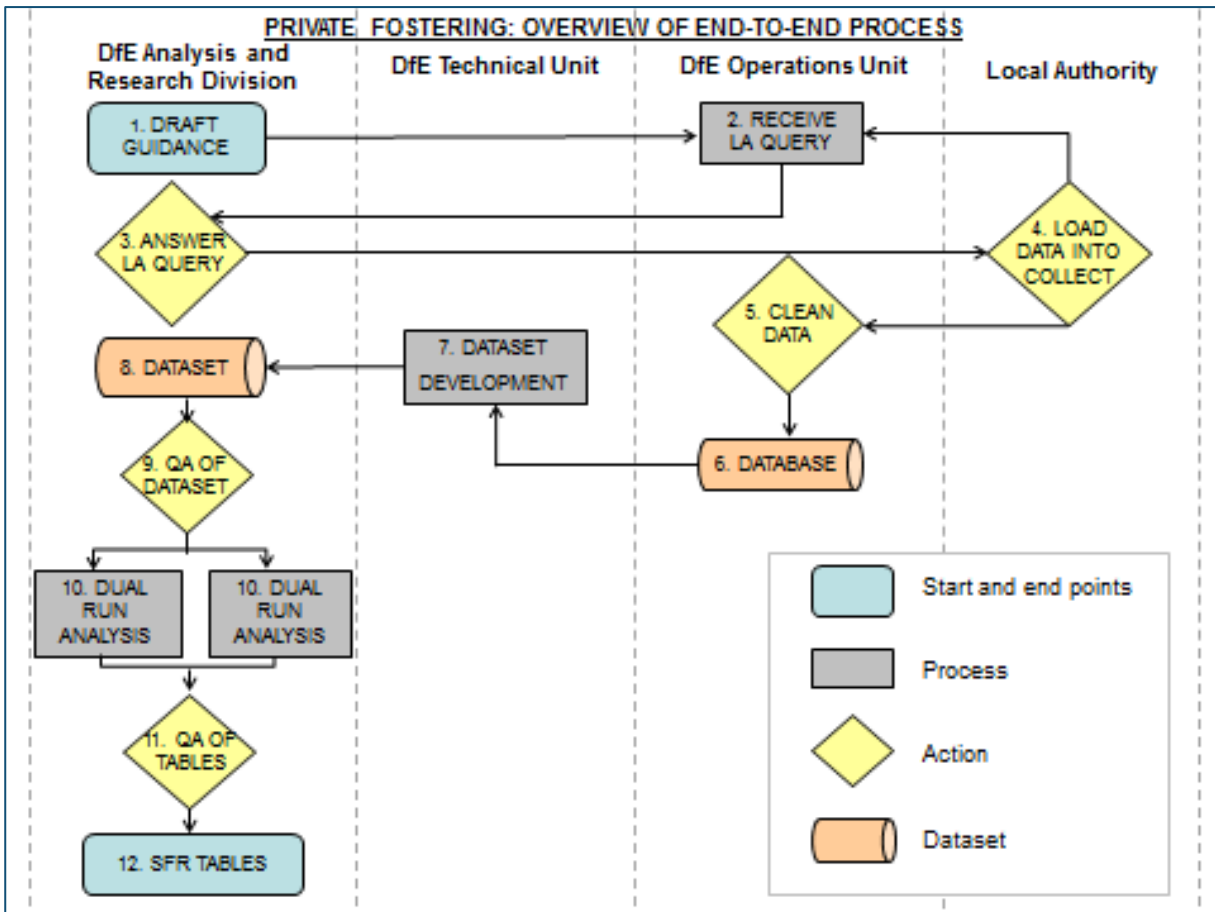
We preserve confidentiality	The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires we take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality.
We round numbers	We round numbers to the nearest 10. Because of this rounding, totals in text and in tables may not always equal the sum of their component parts. This suppression is consistent with the <a href="#">Departmental statistical policy</a> .
And publish underlying data	As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications and to make data more accessible, supporting underlying data at local authority level is published alongside this SFR. Further detail on the underlying data can be found in the quality and uses document on the publication webpage.

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## Process map

The process map shown in Figure 1 covers the end to end process of the private fostering return, from data collection through to publication of the SFR.

**Figure 1: Overview of end to end process of the private fostering collection and publication**





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