



Department
for Education

Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2016

Technical document

February 2017

Contents

Summary	3
Background	4
Data collection and processing	5
Data Collection	5
Data cleaning	6
Coverage	6
Interpretation of tables	7
Definitions	7
Rounding and Suppression	8
Revisions	9
Data Quality and Uses	10
Experimental Statistics	10
Data quality	10
Individual data returns	11
Time Series Compatibility	12
Data Source	13
Further data	13
Uses of the data	13
Feedback and user engagement	13

Summary

Experimental statistics

The accompanying statistical first release (SFR) provides national and local level information on the children and family social work workforce in English local authorities for the year ending 30 September 2016. This is the fourth 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 and understand 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, comparisons with previous year’s published statistics 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. Known data quality issues and explanations are listed in the technical document.

The SFR contains information on the following data variables, which were collected on a statutory basis:

- Number of children and family social workers (not including agency workers)
- Number of children and family social workers by role
- Number of cases held
- Number of cases held by front-line children and family social workers
- Number of front-line children and family social workers holding these cases
- Number of agency front-line children and family social workers holding these cases
- Number of children and family social workers by age
- Number of children and family social workers by time in service at LA

- Number of vacancies (including those covered by agency workers)
- Vacancy rate

- Total number of starters (not including agency workers)
- Number of starters by origin
- Number of starters by age

- Total number of leavers (not including agency workers)
- Number of leavers by time in service at LA
- Number of leavers by destination
- Number of leavers by age
- Turnover rate
- Number of days of work missed due to sickness absence by children and family social workers (not including agency workers) in previous 12 months
- Absence rate
- Total number of agency workers
- Number of agency workers covering vacancies
- Agency worker rate

The data on the number of children and family social workers by age and time in service, and the number of agency workers covering vacancies, were collected on a statutory basis for the second time in 2016.

The data on the number of children and family social workers by role, starters by age and leavers by age were collected on a statutory basis for the first time in 2016. The data on the number of cases held by children and family social workers was also collected on a statutory basis for the first time in 2016; this is only presented at a national level within the SFR.

The data on the number of front-line children and family social workers holding these cases' and the number of agency front-line social workers holding these cases is not presented within the main tables as we were aware that the interpretation of these fields differed across local authorities and also differed between the aggregate return and the individual level.

This document provides information on the methodology used in the processing of these data from collection through to publication, and information relating to the quality of the statistics derived from the data.

Background

The data are mainly counts of children and family social workers employed by the local authority (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 in a children's services department, or, if working in an authority where the services are joined up, working exclusively on children and families.

Data collection and processing

Data Collection

Local authorities are required to collect and return to the Department for Education, aggregate data on the number of children and family social workers at 30 September, and, for starters and leavers, aggregate data on number of children and family social workers during the year ending 30 September, as follows:

- Number of children and family social workers (not including agency workers)
 - Number of children and family social workers by role
 - Number of children and family social workers by age
 - Number of children and family social workers by time in service at LA
- Number of cases held
- Number of cases held by front-line children and family social workers
- Number of front-line children and family social workers holding these cases, and
- Number of agency front-line social workers holding these cases
- Number of vacancies (including those covered by agency workers)
- Vacancy rate
- Total number of starters (not including agency workers)
 - Number of starters by origin
 - Number of starters by age
- Total number of leavers (not including agency workers)
 - Number of leavers by time in service at LA
 - Number of leavers by destination
 - Number of leavers by age
- Turnover rate
- Number of days of work missed due to sickness absence by children and family social workers (not including agency workers) in previous 12 months
- Absence rate
- Total number of agency workers
- Number of agency workers covering vacancies
- Agency worker rate

For the first time this year, local authorities had the option, on a voluntary basis, to provide an individual social worker level data return. If a local authority provided an individual level return, they were not required to make an aggregate return. The individual level data was

used to derive aggregate figures for the publication. Some additional data variables were collected on a voluntary basis for the first time within the individual level return.

Further information on the data variables within both the aggregate and individual level returns, including those collected on a voluntary basis can be found [here](#).

Data cleaning

Local authorities submit their data to the Department for Education. Their data is collected using a standard data collection form and stored securely on the Department's servers and access to the data is restricted to a small number of officials prior to publication.

The Department for Education carries out consistency checks including the ones that are built into the data collection form. The Department for Education also carries out additional credibility checks that make comparisons between the data collected and the data for the previous year. The consistency checks built into the data collection form enable local authorities to identify possible errors and clean the data before they submit their data to the Department. The checks can identify errors (where the data are incorrect) or queries (where the data are questionable but could be correct in certain circumstances). All local authorities were asked to provide comments against the validations on the data collection form and confirmation that the data submitted was accurate, this included a year on year comparison and confirmation that any changes were valid.

Local authorities were encouraged to check and correct as necessary data where there are queries. Notes can be added to the data collection form to explain any apparent discrepancies including unusual data.

Coverage

The data collection covers all local authorities in England and all children and family social workers employed by the local authorities.

Interpretation of tables

Data on counts were collected on both a headcount and full-time equivalent basis except for the number of vacancies and the number of days absent due to sickness, which were collected on a full-time equivalent basis only.

Definitions

Children and family social workers	This SFR includes 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 includes social workers regardless of managerial responsibilities or caseloads.
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.
Starters/ Leavers	This SFR includes the number of starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September 2016.
Vacancy rate (FTE)	The vacancy rate is calculated using the formula: $\frac{\text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}}{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September} + \text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}}$
Turnover rate (FTE and headcount)	The turnover rate is calculated using the formula: $\frac{\text{Number of children and family social workers leaving in year ending at 30 September}}{\text{Number of children and family social workers at 30 September}}$
Agency worker rate (FTE and headcount)	The agency worker rate is calculated using the formula: $\frac{\text{Number of agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September}}{\text{Number of agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September}}$

September + Number of children and family social workers at 30 September)

Absence rate (FTE)

The absence rate is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{(Number of days missed due to sickness absence during year)}}{\text{(Number of children and family social workers at 30 September (FTE) x 253)}}$$

Note: This includes all absences including long-term sickness.

Average caseload (FTE and headcount)

The average caseload per children and family social worker is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{(Number of cases held at 30 September)}}{\text{(Number of children and family social workers with the role of 'Case Holder' at 30 September + Number of agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September)}}$$

Due to data quality and issues with interpretation, this is an **indicative measure only**.

Note: This is a new measure and should not be compared to last year's number of children in need (CiN) per social worker measure.

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 were applied to the data.

The following rounding conventions have been used:

In the main text and accompanying spreadsheets	The counts given in the main text have been rounded to the nearest 10. Rates and percentages have been rounded to one decimal point.
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In the supplementary tables and underlying data	National and regional figures for both headcounts and FTEs have been rounded to the nearest 10. 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 decimal point.
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The following suppression conventions have been used:

x	We have suppressed all headcount of 2 or fewer and replaced them with a cross (x). Percentages and rates where the numerator or denominator is based on a value of 2 or fewer have also been replaced by a cross (x).
0	Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.
-	Negligible. Used to represent a percentage below 0.5% or a number below five (that would not have been suppressed as it is larger than 2) where numbers are rounded to the nearest ten. Not applicable
.	Not applicable.
..	Not available.

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

Revisions

There are no revisions planned for this release.

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 and provide feedback 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.

A number of data items were statutory for the first time within this data collection and for others, this is just the second year that they have been statutory.

Quality assurance checks have been carried out at each stage of the data collection and production of the SFR. 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 form 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 asked to confirm that the year on year changes were valid.

In the majority of cases, local authorities will derive the data they send from their management information systems and will require managerial sign off before sending the data. However, information on the specific data checks carried out by local authorities was not collected.

Some known data quality issues are listed below:

Comparisons between years	We are publishing these as “experimental” statistics because this is a relatively new data collection. Since the first collection covering the year ending 30 September 2013, we have worked with local authorities to improve and clarify the data requirement and the guidance. Local authorities are becoming more familiar with the return and their systems better placed to provide the data.
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For the first time this year, we have presented the data from last year alongside the new data at an England level. There are still discrepancies between the years that are a result of data quality improvements. For example, we would expect that the headcount of staff at 30 September 2015 plus the starters for this year minus the leavers would give the headcount as at 2016, but this is not the case for a number of local authorities due to the way the guidance has been interpreted. The department is continuously working with local authorities to clarify guidance and inviting feedback, for instance, through focus groups with LAs. Therefore, comparisons between years should be treated with caution.

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 were minor and have been outlined in the footnotes of the relevant tables.
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Returns were received from all 152 local authorities. The majority of local authorities returned data for the statutory data variables. Some local authorities reported that certain data items were not available within their I.T systems; these have been outlined 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.

Individual data returns

For the first time this year, local authorities were able to provide an individual children and family social work workforce individual worker level return; 23 local authorities provided this return. Within this version of the return, there were some data variables collected on a voluntary basis. The completion of these data items varied across local authorities, and has been summarised in the main text that accompanies the publication.

Individual Level Voluntary Variables

There were several voluntary variables available to local authorities submitting an individual level return, such as children and social worker's HCPC number, ethnicity and gender. Of the 23 local authorities to submit individual level data on a voluntary basis, 21 returned partial data for at least one of the two voluntary variables collected (ethnicity and gender). Therefore, national level figures for ethnicity and gender are provided.

For the collection of ethnicity in the children and family social work workforce collection, the Department for Education's approved list of extended ethnic categories codes were used. These were then further aggregated into broader ethnic groups as follows.

Ethnicity group (as published)	Ethnicity (as collected)
White	WBRI = White - British WIRI = White - Irish WOTH = Any Other White Background
Black	BAFR = Black African BCRB = Black Caribbean BOTH = Any Other Black background
Asian	AIND = Indian APKN = Pakistani ABAN = Bangladeshi AOTH = Any Other Asian Background
Mixed	MWBC = White and Black Caribbean MWBA = White and Black African MWAS = White and Asian MOTH = Any Other Mixed Background
Other	CHNE = Chinese OOTH = Any Other Ethnic Group
Unknown	REFU = Declared not stated or Refused NOBT = Information Not Yet Obtained

Source: [Department for Education Extended Ethnicity Codes](#)

Time Series Compatibility

This is the fourth year that local authorities have been under a statutory obligation to return data on children and family social workers. 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. This has improved as the Department for Education improves the data collection guidance and local authorities get used to the data requirements and develop their systems to produce the required data.

Data Source

The figures in the SFR were derived from the children and family social work workforce 2015-16 data collection. The Department first collected these data on a statutory basis for 2012-13. The data return template local authorities were asked to populate and its guidance can be found [here](#).

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 and 2015-16 data collections have been 100%.

Further data

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

Previous years of this statistical first release, can be found on the collection page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childrens-social-care-workforce>

Uses of the data

The main users of these statistics are officials in the Department for Education, with the statistics being 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:

ProgrammeOffice.CSAR@education.gsi.gov.uk



Department
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