

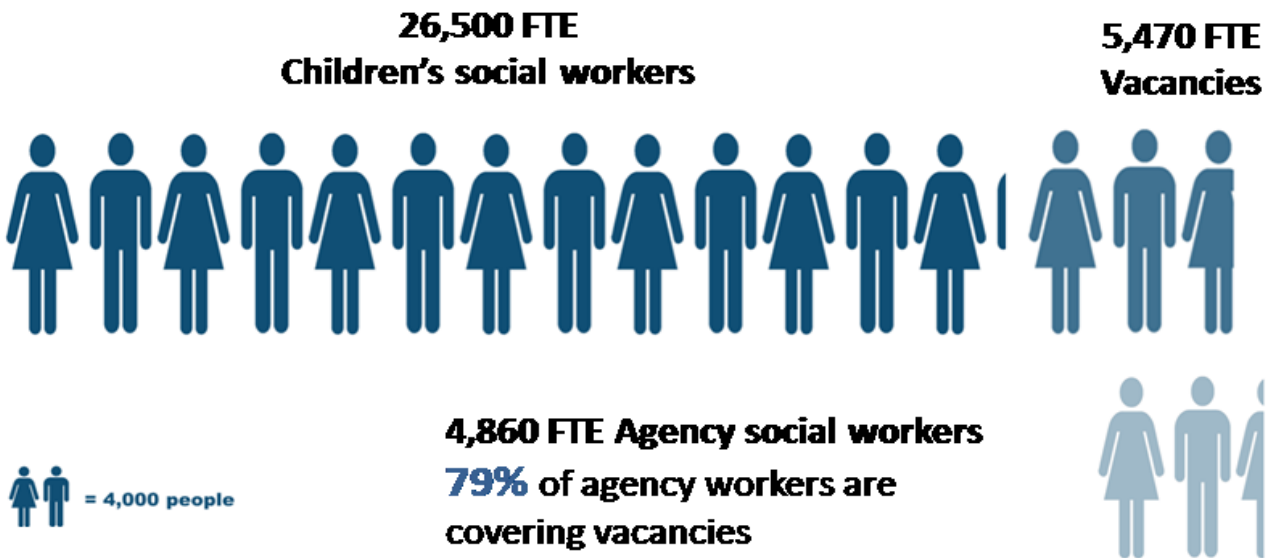


Department  
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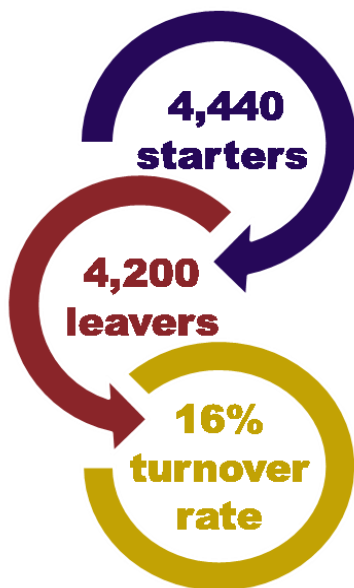
# Experimental official statistics: Children's social work workforce during year ending 30 September 2015 for England

SFR 07/2016 published on 25 February 2016

There were 28,570 children's social workers at 30 September 2015 (26,500 FTEs)



During the year ending 30 September 2015, there were more starters than leavers



Local authorities reported 4,440 FTE starters (4,640 headcount) and 4,200 FTE leavers (4,560 headcount) during year ending September 2015.

The FTE turnover rate reported during the year ending 30 September 2015 was 16%.

# Contents

1.	About experimental statistics .....	3
2.	Number of children’s social workers .....	3
	Number of social workers in place as at 30 September 2015 .....	3
	Age of children’s social workers .....	4
	Time in service at the local authority .....	4
3.	Agency workers .....	5
4.	Vacancies .....	6
5.	Absence .....	6
6.	Information collected on a voluntary basis .....	7
	Children’s social worker roles .....	7
	Starters and leavers by age .....	7
	Leavers by time in service .....	8
7.	Accompanying tables .....	9
8.	Further information is available .....	9
9.	Official Statistics .....	9
10.	Technical information .....	10
11.	Get in touch .....	10
	Media enquiries .....	10
	Other enquiries/feedback .....	10

## About this release

This experimental statistical first release provides national and local level information on the Children’s social work workforce in English local authorities for year ending 30th September 2015. This is the third year that we have published statistics based on data collected from local authorities on the children’s social work workforce.

## In this publication

The following tables are included in the SFR:

- Supplementary tables (Excel .xls)
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt)

The accompanying quality and methodology information document, provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

## Feedback

We are changing how our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at <mailto:ProgrammeOffice.CSAR@education.gsi.gov.uk>

## 1. About 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 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. Known data quality issues and explanations are listed in the technical document.

## 2. Number of children’s social workers

### Number of social workers in place as at 30 September 2015

The number of social workers reported by local authorities has increased from the previous year. There were 28,570 at 30 September 2015 – an increase of 7% compared to 26,810 social workers recorded at 30 September 2014. In terms of FTE, there was an increase of 8% from 24,620 FTE to 26,500 FTE. However part of the increase can be explained by improved data quality and in particular improved interpretation of the guidance. A number of local authorities did not include management roles in previous data returns. This is supported by fact that the net increase based on the recorded number of starters and leavers does not fully account for the increase from the previous year.

**Figure 1: Number of children's social workers**  
England, 2015

	At 30 September 2015	Starters in year end 30 September 2015	Leavers in year end 30 September 2015
FTE	26,500	4,440	4,200
Headcount	28,570	4,640	4,560

Source: *Children’s social worker workforce collection 2014-15*.

There were more starters than leavers in the year ending 30 September 2015. The difference equates to an increase of 80 social workers in head count. However the number of FTE has increased by 240, this could be explained by the fact that changes in FTE working hours are recorded as starters or leavers. So a social worker increasing hours from 0.2 to 0.8 FTE would show as 0.6 FTE starter, whilst the headcount would be unaffected by this change.

The turnover rate (defined as number of leavers divided by the number of workers in place at 30 September 2015) was 16% (FTE). Regional variation ranges between 12% in Yorkshire and the Humber to 21% in London and 23% in Outer London.

#### A “social worker” is defined as:

“A social worker that is 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) a social worker that works exclusively on children and families work.”

This includes social workers regardless of their position in the organisation, except Heads of Service. For the purpose of this publication the following job roles are included: Senior Manager (eg Area Director); Middle Manager (eg Service Manager); First Line Manager (eg Team Manager); Senior Practitioner (working in a local authority in a children’s services department as a team leader or supervising social worker); Case Holder (a social worker that manages cases; the definition of case can be found below); and Qualified without cases (eg Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Youth Custody worker, Family Support).

For the purposes of this data collection and publication, agency workers are counted and reported separately to children's social workers employed by local authorities.

## Age of children's social workers

The age distribution of social workers remains similar to the previous year although the data was returned on a voluntary basis. The age of social workers was a mandatory data item for the 2014-15 collection.

**Figure 2: Distribution of children's social workers by age:**  
England, year ending 30 September 2015

	Percentage of children's social workers (based on FTE)
20 to 29 years old	16
30 to 39 years old	28
40 to 49 years old	26
50 to 59 years old	24
60 years old and over	5

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

## Time in service at the local authority

At the 30 September 2015, 48 per cent of social workers had been in service for less than 5 years. This compares to 50 per cent in the previous year, although the data was returned on a voluntary basis and only covered around half of all social workers. The time in service at the local authority was reported as a mandatory data item for the 2014-15 collection.

**Figure 3: Distribution of children's social workers by time in service:**  
England, year ending 30 September 2015

Time in service	Percentage of children's social workers (based on FTE)
0 to 2 years	28
2 to 5 years	20
5 to 10 years	21
10 to 20 years	21
20 to 30 years	7
30 years or more	2

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

## Number of children in need per social worker

### Number of Children in Need (CIN)

The number of children in need (CiN) per social worker is estimated by using the number of social workers as at 30 September, and the number of children in need at 31 March 2015 from the statistical first release entitled [Characteristics of children in need 2014 to 2015](#). These estimates are provided for comparative purposes only and are not a robust estimation of caseload.

On average there were 15 children in need per social worker in 2015 (FTE). The rate varies between 14 and 16 across regions except for Outer London, with 18 children in need per social worker, and Yorkshire and the Humber with 12 children in need per social worker.

The data quality issues regarding the increase in social workers could affect the number of children in need per social worker. Therefore, the change from 16 per social worker in the previous year to 15 per social worker this year can partly be explained by the improvement in data quality as the number of social workers increased this year.

**Figure 4: The number of children in need per social worker varies across regions:**

England, year ending 30 September 2015

	Number of children in need per children's social worker (ranked high to low)
<i>Outer London</i>	18
North West	16
West Midlands	16
London	16
South West	16
<b>England</b>	<b>15</b>
East Midlands	15
East	15
North East	14
<i>Inner London</i>	14
South East	14
Yorkshire and the Humber	12

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

### 3. Agency workers

Agency workers are recorded separately from children's social workers employed directly by the local authorities. There was an increase in agency workers of 560 FTE (13 per cent increase) from 4,310 FTE in 2014 to 4,860 in 2015.

**Figure 5: Reported numbers of agency workers at 30 September:**  
England, 2014 to 2015

	Number of agency workers at 30 September 2014	Number of agency workers at 30 September 2015	Number of agency workers covering vacancies at 30 September 2015
FTE	4,310	4,860	3,850
Headcount	4,430	5,070	4,010

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

The agency worker rate (defined as agency workers as a proportion of agency workers plus social workers based on FTE) at 30 September 2015 was 16%. This is up by one percentage point from 15% in the previous year. There are large variations between the regions ranging from 6% in Yorkshire and the Humber, to 25% in London, and 30% in Outer London.

The latest data shows 3,850 of the 4,860 FTE agency workers at 30 September 2015 were covering vacancies - this equates to around 79% of agency workers covering vacancies. The proportion of agency workers covering vacancies varies between local authorities. Some local authorities report that none of the agency workers are covering vacancies. Agency workers not covering vacancies could be used to manage seasonal peaks, or deal with acute backlogs, as an alternative to employing permanent social workers. For this reason, high agency worker rates do not necessarily imply recruitment and retention issues.

## 4. Vacancies

The number of vacancies increased by 1,150 (27 per cent) from 4,320 FTEs at 30 September 2014 to 5,470 in 2015. This is an unexpected increase and could be a data quality issue, for example local authorities may not have counted vacancies covered by agency workers in the previous year's figures.

The vacancy rate at 30 September 2015 was 17% with large variations between the regions from 7% in Yorkshire and the Humber to 25% in London, 29% in Outer London.

## 5. Absence

The number of days missed due to sickness absence in the year ending 30 September 2015 was 236,760 days. This is broadly similar to the previous year's 240,000 days. The absence rate during the year to 30 September 2015 was 4% with some variation between the regions from 2% in London to 5% in the West Midlands.

### Calculating the absence rate

Calculated using:

$$= \frac{\text{Number of days missed due to sickness absence during year}}{\text{(Number of FTE at 30 September} \times 253)}$$

Where 253 is the number of working days in a year taking account of bank holidays. This includes all absences including long term sickness.

## 6. Information collected on a voluntary basis

Some information in the 2014-15 collection was collected on a voluntary basis, that is, local authorities had a choice of whether or not to provide the data. The following data items remained voluntary from the 2013-14 collection: origin of starters; time in service at local authority for leavers; destination of leavers.

The following voluntary data items are new for the 2014-15 collection: breakdown of social workers by role; number of cases held, number of cases held by front-line social workers and number of front-line social workers and number of agency workers covering these cases; age of starters; age of leavers.

### Warning about response rates for voluntary variables

This section contains findings for the voluntary data variables. Findings are shown at national level only and should be considered in conjunction with the relevant response rates, which varied across the different data variables and are shown in each table below. No findings are shown for: cases held by children's social workers; children's social workers holding these cases; origin of starters; or, destination of leavers; because of the low response rates. There is more information on response rates in the accompanying technical document.

### Children's social worker roles

Around 58% of children's social workers at 30 September 2015 were in a role described as a case holder and around 27% were in a senior or manager role.

**Figure 6: Distribution of children's social workers by role**  
England, at 30 September 2015

	Percentage of children's social workers (headcount)
Senior manager	1
Senior practitioner	10
Middle manager	4
First line manager	12
Case holder	58
Qualified without cases	15

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

Response rate: 48 local authorities (32%), covering 9,420 children's social workers.

### Starters and leavers by age

Starters are counted as the number of new people taking up a vacant children's social worker post in the local authority during year ending 30 September 2015. Around 65% of starters were between 20 and 39 years old. Leavers are counted as the number of people leaving a children's social worker post in the local authority during year ending 30 September 2015. Around 55% of leavers were 40 years old and over.

**Figure 7: Distribution of starters by age:**  
England, year ending 30 September 2015 (based on headcount)

Age	Percentage of starters	Percentage of leavers
20 to 29 years old	31	15
30 to 39 years old	34	30
40 to 49 years old	22	24
50 to 59 years old	11	20
60 years old and over	2	11

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

Response rate for starters: 67 local authorities (44%), covering 2,064 children's social workers starters

Response rate for leavers: 61 local authorities (40%), covering 1,886 children's social workers leavers

## Leavers by time in service

Of those children's social workers who left, 58% had spent less than 5 years in service. This does not count social workers going on maternity leave or sick leave. It does count social workers who move to another local authority to do a similar role.

### Figure 9: Distribution of leavers by time in service:

England, year ending 30 September 2015

Time in service	Percentage of children's social workers (headcount)
0 to 2 years	30
2 to 5 years	28
5 to 10 years	20
10 to 20 years	15
20 to 30 years	5
30 years or more	2

Source: Children's social worker workforce collection 2014-15.

Response rate: 61 local authorities (40%), covering 1,852 children's social workers leavers



## 7. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in excel format on the department's statistics website for [Children's social care workforce](#).

### National level

1 National summary of key statistics of children's social workers.

### Regional and local authority level

2 Key statistics of children's social workers by region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)

3 Number of children's social workers by age, region and local authority based on full-time equivalents

4 Number of children's social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents

5 Key statistics of children's social workers by region and local authority, based on headcounts

6 Number of children's social workers by age, region and local authority, based on headcounts

7 Number of children's social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on headcounts

## 8. Further information is available

- Previous releases: [Children's social care workforce](#).
- Rest of the UK: Information on the children's social work workforce of devolved administrations can be found at the following links:
  - [Scotland](#)
  - [Wales](#)
  - [Northern Ireland](#)
- Children in Need: [Statistical First Release Characteristics of children in need](#)
- Children Looked After: Statistical First Release [Children Looked After in England](#)

## 9. Official Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as Official Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Additionally, the Department has designated these as experimental statistics, which are defined 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.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as Official Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## 10. Technical information

A technical document accompanies this SFR. This provides further information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data, including how it is validated and processed.

## 11. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Tel: 020 7783 8300

### Other enquiries/feedback

Children's Social Care Statistics Team, Department for Education, 2 St Paul's Place, Sheffield, S1 2FJ.  
[ProgrammeOffice.CSDS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ProgrammeOffice.CSDS@education.gsi.gov.uk)



## Department for Education

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email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

About this publication:

Enquiries: Children's Social Care Statistics Team, Department for Education, 2 St Paul's Place, Sheffield, S1 2FJ. Email: [ProgrammeOffice.CSDS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ProgrammeOffice.CSDS@education.gsi.gov.uk)

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