



Department
for Education

Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2017

Technical document

February 2018

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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 2017. This is the fifth 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 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.

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

This is the fifth collection of the children’s social work workforce census collecting data over each full year, with this year’s collection spanning from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017. This is the first year in which data has been collected on an individual social worker level basis, with previous years being submitted at an aggregate level.

The data are a summary 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 (the department), individual level data on children and family social workers in post at 30 September, and, starters and leavers, during the year ending 30 September.

For the first time this year, local authorities provided data at an individual social worker level, in previous years data has been submitted at an aggregate level. Data was collected for all local authority and agency social workers in post at the 30 September 2017.

Some additional data variables were collected on a voluntary basis for the first time within the individual level return these variables are not covered in the tables but a summary is provided in the accompanying text document.

Further information on the data variables and data collection, including those collected on a voluntary basis can be found [here](#).

Data cleaning

Local authorities submit their data to the department through the secure COLLECT data collection system. Their data 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 carries out consistency checks including the ones that are built into the data collection system. The department 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 system 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.

Local authorities were encouraged to check and correct as necessary data where there were 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. This year all local authorities provided an individual level data return.

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.

Methodology

Headcount and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) measures

In all cases the headcount figures are a count of all social worker records that fit the relevant criteria. For FTE figures the FTE as at 30 September for the relevant year are summed to give the FTE equivalent measure for each breakdown.

There are some instances where an individual is holding two roles at the same time with a split FTE. Within the data processing duplicate cases are removed based on the local authority, HCPC number, and date of birth which avoids double counting of these individuals when deriving the headcount. This methodology is used in the headcount derivation throughout the publication, whereas FTE figures are not subject to de-duplication.

For headcount figures of starters, cases are de-duplicated on the variables listed above, and Role Start Date. For headcount figures of leavers, cases are de-duplicated on the variables listed above, and Role End Date. Agency workers are not de-duplicated on the variables above and are assumed to be separate individuals.

Number of social workers at 30 September

A count of the number of individual social worker in post at 30 September 2017 by headcount and FTE. This is all individuals with a valid role start date before 30 September 2017 and either no end date or an end date after the count date.

This does not include agency workers they are covered separately within the publication.

If the social worker left their post on the 30 September they will be counted as both in post and as a leavers during this reporting year.

Number of social worker starters during year ending 30 September

A count of the number of individuals with a start date during year ending 30 September 2017.

FTE is calculated using the FTE at 30 September 2017.

Please see data quality section for details of data quality concerns on this measure. This is individual starters in the local authority rather than starters within the social work profession.

Number of social worker leavers during year ending 30 September

A count of the number of individuals with a leaving date during year ending 30 September 2017.

FTE is calculated using the FTE at 30 September 2016.

This measure counts the individuals leaving the local authority rather than leaving the social work profession.

Number of agency workers in post at 30 September

A count of the number of agency workers at 30 September 2017. Data was only collected on agency workers in post at the 30 September 2017 but where a leaving date has been provided these cases have not been counted.

Number of agency workers covering vacancies (FTE and headcount)

This is an aggregate variable collected by the local authority, at both FTE and headcount level.

Vacancies

The FTE number of vacancies within the local authority at the 30 September 2017. This is an aggregate variable provided by the local authority.

Age and gender

Age and gender breakdowns are provided at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September
- Starters
- Leavers

Age is derived from the date of birth provided and is the age as at 30 September 2017.

Gender is taken from the data item collected.

Time in service at local authority

Time in service breakdowns are provided at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September

- Leavers

This measure is derived from the 'role start date' which is collected and calculated as either the role start date to the 30 of September 2017 (for those still in post) or role start date to the leaving date for those that left a social work post within the year.

Caseload measure

For the first time this year we have collected the number of cases held by each social worker at an individual level. This allows us to calculate a more accurate caseload measure than in previous publications. Some local authorities have raised issues around the reporting the 'number of cases held at 30 September' data item and linking cases to this to social workers at an individual level. Given that and the fact this is the first year that data has been collected in this way, care should be taken and comparisons across years should not be made due to methodology differences.

The caseload is derived as the total number of cases held divided by the number of social workers that hold one or more cases (as at 30 September).

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Average caseload | $\frac{\text{Number of cases held at 30 September by agency and non – agency SW}}{\text{Number of agency and non – agency social workers at 30 September with cases}}$ |
|------------------|--|

Interpretation of tables

Data was collected at an individual social worker level and as such both figures are presented at both headcount and full-time equivalent basis. The only exception to this is the number of vacancies (FTE) and the number of agency workers covering vacancies (both headcount and FTE) which were collected at an aggregate level.

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. |
|----------------------------|---|

This data item is collected for each individual and the value is summed to produce figures at an FTE level.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Starters/ Leavers | This SFR includes the number of starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September 2017. |
|-------------------|--|

Starters and leavers are defined as any individual with a start/end date during year ending 30 September 2017

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Vacancy rate | The vacancy rate is calculated using the formula: |
|--------------|---|

(FTE)

$$\frac{\text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}}{\left(\frac{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September}}{\quad} + \text{Number of vacancies at 30 September} \right)}$$

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Turnover rate | The turnover rate is calculated using the formula: |
|---------------|--|

(FTE and headcount)

$$\frac{\text{Number of social workers leaving in the year}}{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September}}$$

Agency worker rate The agency worker rate is calculated using the formula:

(FTE and headcount)

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September}}{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September} + \text{Number of non – agency social workers at 30 September}} \right)$$

Absence rate The absence rate is calculated using the formula:

(FTE)

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

Where 253 is the number of working days in a year taking account of bank holidays

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

Average caseload The average caseload per children and family social worker is calculated by taking the total number of cases held by each individual divided by the number of individuals who have a number of cases greater than zero in the individual level data return.

Note: This is a new measure and should not be compared to last year’s average caseload as due to data quality and issues with interpretation it was an indicative measure only.

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.

| | |
|---|--|
| 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. |
|---|--|

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 wouldn't have been suppressed as it's 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](#).

Where a headcount of 2 or fewer is suppressed and also part of a breakdown we not only suppress the value of 2 or below, but suppress the next lowest value as well to ensure that no one could work out the suppressed value by subtracting the remaining values from the total. This is referred to as 'secondary suppression' and is done to ensure the confidentiality of social workers by ensuring no one can trace any statistic to one person.

Revisions

There are no revisions planned for this release. However, where we find that a substantial error has occurred because of the compilation or dissemination process the statistical release and accompanying tables will be updated with a correction notice as soon as this is practical.

The Department's Statistical Policy Statement on Revisions can be found [here](#).

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 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 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, where applicable, 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:

| | |
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| 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. |
|---------------------------|---|

For the first time this year we have collected data at an individual social worker level we have presented the data from previous years alongside the new data at an England level. But given the change in data collection any comparisons should be treated with caution.

There are still discrepancies between the years that are a result of data quality improvements and changes in data collection. For example, we would expect that the headcount of staff at 30 September 2016 plus the starters for this year minus the leavers would give the headcount as at 2017, but this is not the case for a number of local authorities due to the way the guidance has been interpreted in previous years and improved data quality. 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.

Starters

The number of starters during the year has been derived based on the individual start date. The data this year shows a large increase in the number of starters in the year compared to previous data returns. During quality assurance of the data a number of local authorities advised that, in some instances, individuals who moved between children and family social worker roles within the same department had their start date recorded as the date of the current role. As such the number of starters presented within the publication is inflated as we cannot decipher between new starters and individuals who changed roles, based on the data we have available.

Duplicate records

Duplicates have been removed at a headcount level to account for cases where individuals have split roles, this avoids double counting. At FTE level duplicates haven't been removed so that the FTE for each role is captured.

There are some occasions where the sum of the FTE in these cases is greater than 1. As such there are cases in the data where the FTE is greater than the headcount figure, listed below.

FTE

There are records within the data where the FTE is recorded as zero and leaving dates aren't recorded, these cases are included in the tables but at an FTE level will be recorded as zero.

FTE for leavers Within the data collection there are a number of individuals who leave their post during the year and have a valid leaving date provided but don't have an FTE recorded at September 2016. This is the value used to calculate the FTE value for leavers.

This has an impact on the turnover measure at an FTE level as these individuals will not be accounted for in the calculation.

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 have been outlined in the footnotes of the relevant tables.

Returns were received from all 152 local authorities. The majority of local authorities returned data for the statutory data variables, although concerns were raised on the data quality in some instances. Some local authorities reported that certain data items were not available within their I.T systems; in both cases 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.

Time Series Compatibility

This is the fifth year that local authorities have been under a statutory obligation to return data on children and family social workers and the first time data has been collected at an individual level for all local authorities. 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 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 2016-17 individual level data collection. The Department first collected these data on a statutory basis for 2012-13 as an aggregate return. Until this year the data was collected on an aggregate basis.

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, 2015-16 and 2016-17 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](#):

Uses of the data

The main users of these statistics are officials in the department and the statistics are 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:

CSWW.Stats@education.gov.uk



Department
for Education

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