



Department
for Education

Children's services statistical neighbour benchmarking tool

Update note

May 2025

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to provide background to the calculation of the Children's services statistical neighbour benchmarking tool (CSSNBT).

Background

Statistical neighbour models provide one method for benchmarking progress. For each local authority, these models designate several other local authorities deemed to have similar characteristics. These designated authorities are known as statistical neighbours. Any local authority may compare its performance (as measured by various indicators) against its statistical neighbours to provide an initial guide as to whether their performance is above or below the level that might be expected.

The CSSNBT was originally produced by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in 2007. There is an accompanying practitioner [user guide](#) and [final report](#) which explain the tool and its development in more detail.

The background variables used in the tool are listed in Table 1 below. These are the variables used to define each local authority's statistical neighbours.

Since 2007 the model has been updated on several occasions. Firstly following the 2011 Census in 2014, and then in 2019 and 2021 to assign statistical neighbours for local authorities affected by local government reorganisations (i.e. Dorset; Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire) and update (in 2021) mean weekly pay and % pupils known to be eligible for FSM for all local authorities.

However, following the 2021 Census, the department undertook an extensive review of the policy indicators and background variables used within the model. Using regression and correlation analysis of just under 300 demographic, socio-economic and geographical characteristics we have identified 23 variables (see Table 2) which were found to align with, and be good predictors of, contemporary children's services policies and priorities. Further details are available in the associated technical note on the [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\) gov.uk landing page](#).

Table 1: Background variables used in original model

Variable	Source for 2007 model	Source for update
Mean Weekly pay – gross	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (resident)	Update
% of pupils known to be eligible for FSM	DfES	Update
% of vehicles that are three years old or less	DVLA 2004	No update
% dependent children in household with occupancy rating of +2 or more	Census 2001	Bespoke

Variable	Source for 2007 model	Source for update
% dependent children in overcrowded household	Census 2001	Bespoke
% dependent children in households with 2 or more cars	Census 2001	Bespoke
% dependent children in one adult household	Census 2001	Bespoke
% dependent children in household where HRP is in any managerial or professional occupation	Census 2001	Bespoke
% dependent children in household where HRP is in any routine occupation	Census 2001	Bespoke
% people with mixed ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Indian ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Pakistani ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Bangladeshi ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Other Asian ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Black Caribbean ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Black African ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% people with Other Black ethnicity	Census 2001	Table: Ethnic Group
% of working age people with higher qualifications	Census 2001	Table: Highest level of qualification
% people in good health	Census 2001	Table: General Health ¹
% households owned outright or owned with mortgage	Census 2001	Table: Tenure
% households with 3 or more dependent children	Census 2001	Bespoke
% of the population living in villages, hamlets or isolated settlements	Census 2001	Table: Usual resident population

¹ The health classification changed in 2011. Figures used in 2011 refer to the percentage of people in good or very good health.

Table 2: Background variables used in new model

Variables	Weight	Source
% matched premises with UFBB (100Mbit/s) availability	3	Ofcom (2022)
% residences with private gardens	1	ONS (2020)
Prevalence of obese or overweight children in Year 6	2	PHE (2022)
Prevalence of obese or overweight children in Reception	15	PHE (2022)
% infants taking a free school meal	1	DfE (2022)
% dependent children ² with a bedroom occupancy rating of 1 (under-occupied)	3	Census 2021
% dependent children deprived in 1 dimension	22	Census 2021
% dependent children deprived in 3 dimensions	5	Census 2021
% dependent children where 0 persons are disabled whose day-to-day activities are limited	21	Census 2021
% dependent children where 1 or more adults are employed	16	Census 2021
% dependent children where 1 or more persons have a non-limiting long-term physical or mental health condition	2	Census 2021
% households with a single family - dependent child	1	Census 2021
% households where the property is owned (outright or with a mortgage)	10	Census 2021
% households where HRP ³ travels less than 60km to work	17	Census 2021
% HRP of working age who are unemployed but have worked in the past 12 months	19	Census 2021
% HRP of working age who have no qualification	21	Census 2021
% HRP of working age who have a highest qualification level of 2	7	Census 2021
% HRP of working age in a routine NS-SEC occupation	1	Census 2021
% HRP of working age, with dependent children, who work part time - less than 30 hours a week	19	Census 2021
% HRP of working age, with dependent children, in a lower managerial or professional NS-SEC occupation	17	Census 2021
% residents aged over 3 where English is their first language	23	Census 2021
% residents with religion – Christian	22	Census 2021
% households in whole house accommodation	11	Census 2021

² Dependent children is shorthand for Households with dependent children

³ Household Reference Person

Impact of the new model

Table 3 below summarises the number of local authorities that have new neighbours. On average, local authorities have five new statistical neighbours.

Table 3: Number of new statistical neighbours by number of local authorities as a result of the review and use of 2021 census data

Number of new statistical neighbours	Number of local authorities
0	1
1	3
2	15
3	17
4	39
5	33
6	28
7	11
8	3
9	1
10	0

The new sets of statistical neighbours will replace the old sets in tools such as the Local Authority Interactive Tool ([LAIT](#)).

Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness, resulting from the 2023 local government reorganisation of Cumbria, are not counted in this table. Each of these new local authorities are statistical neighbours of each other. Cumberland shares 2 neighbours in common with Cumbria in the original model. Westmorland and Furness shares 5 neighbours. The two local authorities have 3 neighbours in common.



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