

Official Statistics Release

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Introduction

This official statistics release reports on the numbers and profile of foster carers and foster placements, in both local authority and independent services, covering the period between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. It also gives data relating to types of foster care, registrations and de-registrations, and a range of other subjects.

These statistics are based on data supplied by local authority fostering agencies and independent fostering agencies. Ofsted will publish these data annually and the next release is currently scheduled for autumn 2013.

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Response rates

- Of the 152 local authorities (LA) in England, a maximum of 150 could have responded to the 2011-12 survey. Central Bedfordshire and City of London, on the 31 March 2012, did not have an individual LA fostering service, but instead were linked to the provision of another LA: Central Bedfordshire with Bedford Borough and City of London with Hackney.¹
- Of the 150 possible returns, 148 were received; a response rate of 99%.² Of a possible 295 independent fostering services (IFS), 270 returned data; a response rate of 92%. The overall response rate was 94% (Intro and summary table).³ This was higher than the 91% response rate for the 2010-11 survey (97% for LA and 88% for IFS).

Key findings

- On 31 March 2012, there were 50,752 children who were in a foster placement. 47,420 (93%) were in permanent placements and 3,332 (7%) in short break or respite placements.⁴ (A1.2)
- Of the permanent placements at that date, 32,781 (69%) were in LA provision and 14,639 (31%) in IFS provision. Two thirds (2,220) of those in short break placements were in LA provision, one third (1,112) in IFS provision. (A1.2)
- At the same time, there were 75,561 approved places: 66,107 permanent and 9,454 short break. This indicates an increase of around 14% of the number of approved places since the previous year, though the data collected last year did not differentiate between permanent and short break places. While the better response rate may account for some of the increase, the amount of fostering provision has grown in response to the increase in the numbers of children foster care.⁵ (A1.1)
- As at 31 March 2012, there was 72% overall occupancy of permanent places: around 78% for LA provision and around 61% for IFS provision. While capacity seems to have increased, therefore, the patterns of occupancy, both nationally and by sector, are broadly what they were the previous year.
- The number of foster children, at any point between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, in permanent placements was 75,605 and in short break placements 10,854. (A1.3)
- Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, 514 sibling groups were not placed together by LAs, when their assessment was for them to be placed together. (A3.1)

¹ Both local authority and independent fostering services can also be referred to as agencies. Where Ofsted use the term 'service' in this document we are referring to provision that can also be called fostering agencies.

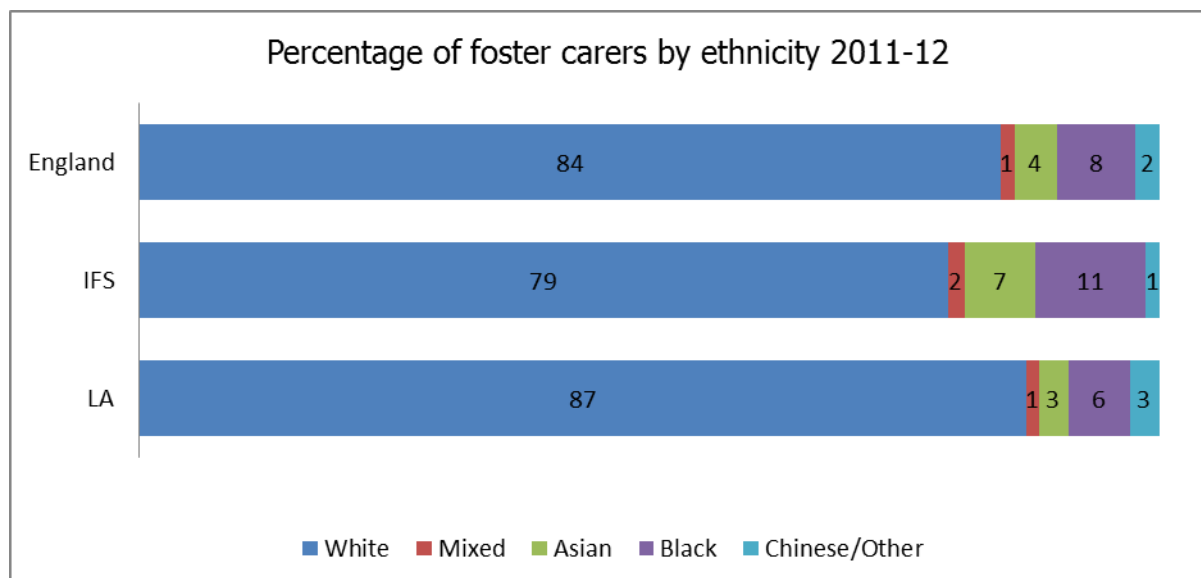
² Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

³ Data throughout refers to only those agencies that responded to the survey and is not necessarily representative of the national picture.

⁴ Permanent placement relates to all fostering that is not short break. It includes, for example, all non-short break foster care, including short term and bridging to permanence placements.

⁵ For which see DfE: Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2012, table A3 (<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001084/sfr20-2012.xls>)

- Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, there were 4,362 unplanned endings of placements, where 4,036 children and young people were the subject of these unplanned endings. (A4.1-A4.2)
- There were 2,037 exemptions to the usual fostering limit, where a foster carer is asked to look after more than three children who are not all part of the same sibling group, between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. This is a reduction, from the previous year, of around 12%. (A5.1)
- LAs supported 2,020 young people to remain in their foster placement after their eighteenth birthday between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, which was an increase from the same period in 2010-11 of around 16%. (A6.2)
- A total of 4,295 disabled children were placed in foster care, including those in short break placements, as at 31 March 2012. (B3.1)
- On 31 March 2012, there were a total of 67,340 approved foster carers. Of these, a large majority of carers were White (84%). The next largest number were Black (8%), followed by Asian (4%), Chinese and 'Other' (2%) and Mixed (1%). This was very similar to the ethnicity profile of foster carers for 2010-11. (B1.1 and B2.1-B2.16)



- Although data on the ethnicity of fostered children has not yet been published, the overall ethnic breakdown of those looked after indicates a likely different pattern to that for foster carers. The most sizeable difference being with Mixed ethnicity carers (1% of foster carers compared to 9% of all children looked after).
- On 31 March 2012, there were a total of 40,842 fostering households, which was an increase of around 7% from the previous year. Of these, 67% were registered with LA and 33% were registered with IFS. (C1.1)
- There were 16,833 applications received from new prospective fostering households in 2011-12, and, in addition, 4,367 applications were received the previous year and carried

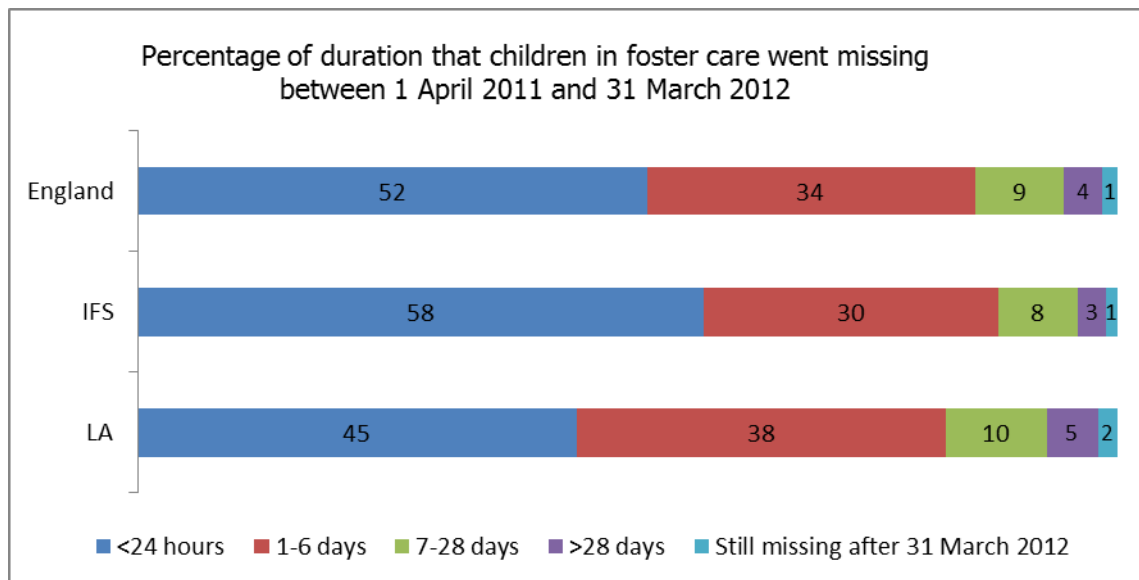
forward. This gave an overall total of 21,200 applications for prospective new fostering households between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. (C1.2 and C1.3)

- Overall, there were 7,427 new fostering households approved during 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, including applications that were received before 1 April 2011, which was an increase of 9% from the same period in 2010-11. LAs approved 4,648 (63%) of new households and 2,779 (37%) were approved by IFS. (C1.4) This compares with 60% of new households approved in 2010-11 by LA and 40% by IFS.
- By the 31 March 2012, 33,351 approved foster carers, or 50% of all foster carers, had completed the Children's Development Workforce Council's (CDWC) certificate in "Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care".⁶ This was a 74% rise on the number who had the certificate in 2010/11. (C3.1)
- There were 86 applications made between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 for a review to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) of which 36 (42%) resulted in a recommendation being made to the service to review the decision, the number of applications made was slightly fewer than those made in 2010-11.⁷ (C4.1 and C4.2)
- There were 1,812 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, which was an increase of around 9% from the previous year. (D1.1) In comparison to this rise, the number of approved foster carers increased by 20% in 2011-12 from the previous year.
- There were 196 referrals made to the Independent Safeguarding Authority, most of which 119 (61%) were made by LAs. (D1.1-1.2)
- Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, there were 905 section 47 enquiries involving allegations against foster carers. Most of these enquiries were originated by LAs themselves (544 or 60%). (D2.1)
- There were a total of 1,247 incidents of physical restraint recorded by foster carers between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, the majority of which, 831 (67%), were recorded by IFS. Of the incidents of physical restraint, 596 foster carers were reported to have restrained children or young people and a total of 554 foster children were subject to restraint. The number of reported physical restraints increased by around 45% from the same period in 2010-11. (D3.1-D3.3)
- There were 9,480 reported incidents of children going missing during the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012, involving a total of 3,151 children. Although IFS place 31% of all fostered children, they account for 59% (5,588) of incidents of missing children, and 56% (1,755) of the children who go missing. The reported incidents of children going missing, have increased by around 19%, and the number of children involved had increased by around 18% from the same period in 2010-11. (D4.1 and D4.2)

⁶ The Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards provide a national minimum benchmark that set out what all foster carers should know, understand and be able to do. All foster carers approved under the Fostering Services Regulations are expected to complete the TSD within 12 months of their approval, however there are concessions in place for completion in 18 months, for example family and friends carers.

⁷ The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process for foster carers when they do not agree with a decision given to them by their fostering service. The review process is independent of the fostering service provider. The review panel is not a higher appeals authority and it cannot overturn the fostering services decision, but can make a fresh recommendation to the provider on a carer's suitability to foster a child and/or the terms of their approval.

- More than half of the children (1,645) went missing for less than 24 hours, 34% (1,061) went missing between 1 and 6 days, 9% (287) went missing between one week and 28 days and 126 (4%) went missing longer than 28 days over the course of the year. At 31 March 2012 there were a reported 46 (1%) foster children still missing from care. (D5)



- On 31 March 2012, there were a total of 34,846 foster children and young people who were of compulsory school age. A total of 1,820 (5%) children and young people in foster care changed educational placement, or school, as a result of a foster placement change; an increase of around 6% from 2010-11. (D7.1 and D7.2)
- Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, the number of children and young people in foster care who attended alternative educational provision was 1,931 (6%). There were a reported 316 (1%) children and young people in foster care that had no educational arrangements at some point in the year. There were 1,556 (4%) children and young people in foster care reported as having persistent absence from school between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. (D7.3-D7.5)
- There were a total of 1,593 complaints about fostering services (including foster carers) between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, which was an increase from the same period in 2010-11 of around 25%. The largest number of complaints were made by foster carers, 31%, followed by children and young people, 22%. Of the total number of complaints received, 42% were not upheld. (E1.1-E1.6)

Methodology

1. The data in this publication are taken from returns made to Ofsted by local authority and independent fostering services. Data are related to the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.
2. For more information on how Ofsted regulates and inspects children's social care, please go to the Ofsted website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Care-and-local-services/Children-s-social-care>.

Additional information

All the tables shown in this release, along with data at England, total local authority fostering services and total independent fostering services levels, are available in Excel format on the Ofsted website in the same location as this document.

Please see data tables listed below:

Table 1: Percentage of returns of the fostering quality assurance and data forms 2011-12

Introduction			
The fostering quality assurance and data form (2011-12)			
Fostering Services 2011-12: Quality assurance and data form returns analysis			
	Local authority fostering services	Independent fostering services	Total
Returns in analysis	148	270	418
Number of registered providers (as at 31 March 2011)	150	295	445
Percentage of returns	99%	92%	94%

Table 2: Percentage of returns of the fostering datasets 2010-11

Fostering dataset (2010-11) - experimental statistics			
Fostering agencies and fostering services survey 2010-11: Survey returns analysis			
	Local authority fostering services	Independent fostering agencies	Total
Returns in analysis dataset	145	253	398
Number of registered providers (as at 30 September 2011)	149	287	436
Percentage of returns	97.3%	88.2%	91.3%

Glossary

Alternative educational provision

This includes provisions outside of mainstream and special schools. This includes: provision directly managed by a local authority; pupil referral units; hospital schools; hospital and home teaching services; tuition centres; e-learning centres; and provision that is brokered or arranged by a local authority, school or group of schools, such as placements in FE colleges, extended work experience, projects provided by the voluntary or private sector or multi-agency initiatives.

Approved foster carers

These are individual foster carers who are currently approved by a fostering service as at 31 March 2012.

Complaints not upheld

This only includes those complaints where no action on any aspect was necessary.

Disabled

The Disability Discrimination Act Part 1 defines a disabled person as someone who has 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. Examples include cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and heart conditions; hearing or sight impairments; or a significant mobility difficulty; and mental health conditions or learning difficulties.

Exemption

An exemption is required in the specific situation in which a foster carer is asked to look after more than three children who are not all part of a sibling group, under sections 63(12) and Schedule 7(2) of the Children Act 1989.

Fostering services

Local authority fostering services are defined by section 4 of the Care Standards Act 2000. Local authority fostering services and independent fostering agencies recruit, prepare, assess, train and support foster carers. Independent fostering agencies (IFS) are private companies or charities, which are registered with Ofsted and provide placements to children and young people with foster carers approved by them. IFS work closely with Local Authorities to deliver these placements.

Misconduct

Considered to be where the conduct of a foster carer is subject to a formal investigation under a local authority's or independent fostering agency's procedures for investigating such allegations.

Missing

In this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their foster placement, have been abducted, or whose whereabouts is unknown. Please include these children and young people. Missing does include child abduction where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence. Missing does not include unauthorised absence where a looked-after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed, they are not missing and may instead be considered as absent without authorisation from their placement.

Persistent absence from school

Is defined by the Department for Education. The figure for persistent absence, between 1 April 2011-11 March 2012 is 20% absenteeism. (This figure has been reduced down to 15% from July 2011).

Physical restraint

Means stopping a foster child/young person from doing something they appear to want to do by physical means. For example, the foster carer moving the child/young person or blocking their movement to stop them hurting themselves or others or from seriously damaging property.

Section 47

Refers to section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and relates to the local authority's duty to investigate child protection concerns.

Withdrawn

Applications which are stopped by the applicant.

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