



Official statistics: Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2019

27 February 2020

There were 30,700 FTE (32,900 headcount) children and family social workers in post at 30 September 2019, an increase of over 4% on last year

Children's social workers at 30 September 2019 (FTE)



Vacancies (FTE)



Agency social workers (FTE)



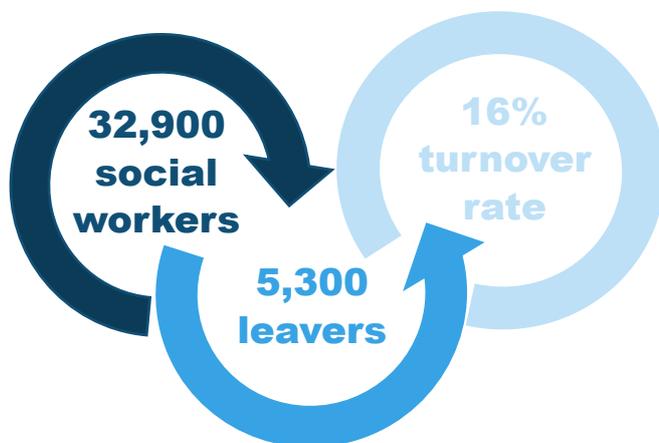
There were 30,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers in post at 30 September 2019, an increase of 4.2% from the same point in 2018.

The average caseload per children and family social worker was 16.9, down from 17.4 last year.

The number of FTE children and family social worker vacancies increased to 6,000 in 2019, up by 3.9% compared to last year.

There were 5,800 FTE agency children and family workers, an increase of 7.4% compared to the same point in 2018.

The headcount turnover rate was 16% during the year ending 30 September 2019



There were 32,900 (headcount) children and family social workers in post on 30 September 2019

The headcount of children and family social workers leaving in the preceding 12 months was 5,300.

The corresponding turnover rate, defined as number of leavers divided by the number of workers in place at 30 September, was 16% and relatively unchanged compared to last year.

Source: Children and family social worker workforce census 2018-19

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About this release

The information in this statistical release is based on data collected in the annual statutory census collection on the children's social work workforce. The census collects information from local authorities in England on the children and family social workers and agency workers they employ within their children's services department. Children and family social workers are social workers registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) working in a local authority children's services department, or, if working in an authority where the services are joined up, working exclusively with children and families.

This is the seventh children's social work workforce census, collecting data over each full year ending 30 September. The latest collection covers the year from 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 and is the third year in which data has been collected on an individual-level social worker basis. Data for earlier years was collected at an aggregate (local authority) level.

Figures are provided on both a full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount basis at national, regional and local authority level.

The main internal users of these statistics are officials within the department, to provide advice to ministers on current and future policies.

The main external users of these statistics are local authorities, who use the data to compare information for their own local authority with national and regional statistics and those for other local authorities.

Official statistics

This year the children and family social worker statistics are published as official statistics, whereas in previous years they have been classified as experimental statistics. More information on [official statistics](#) is available from the UK Statistics Authority.

In this publication

The following documents are included in the statistical release:

- National and local authority tables (Excel .xls)
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .pdf)

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

Feedback

We are currently assessing the range of tables produced from this collection, along with changing how our releases look.

We would welcome feedback on any aspect of this publication and its supplementary documents at CSWW.STATS@education.gov.uk

1. Number of children and family social workers (tables 1a, 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c,7d)

Definition of a children and family social worker

A children and family social worker is a social worker that is registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC), working in a local authority 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 the Director of Children's Services.

Children and family social workers comprise the following job roles: senior manager (for example area director); middle manager (for example service manager); first line manager (for example 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 (for example assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), independent reviewing officer (IRO), youth custody worker, family support).

In this publication, information on agency workers working as children and family social workers is shown separately to children and family social workers employed by local authorities.

FTE and headcount

Throughout the publication, figures are provided on both a full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount level basis.

FTE is 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, part-time staff are converted into an equivalent number of 'full-time' staff. This allows for meaningful comparisons of measures such as caseload across local authorities.

Headcount is a count of all individual social workers, regardless of their working pattern.

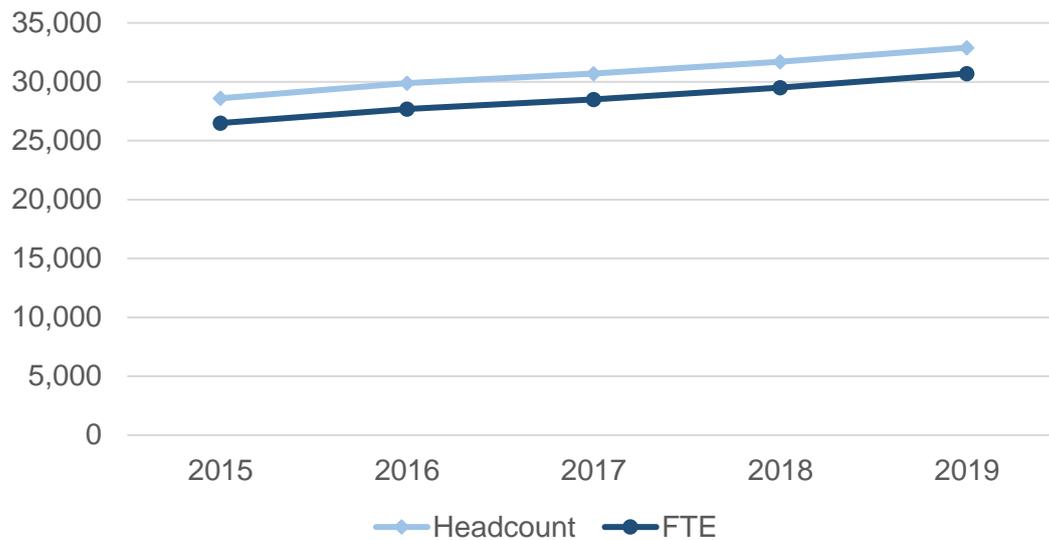
Number of social workers in post at 30 September 2019

There were 30,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers in post at 30 September 2019, an increase of 4.2% compared to the same point in 2018. The corresponding headcount was 32,900, an increase of 3.8% from last year. These increases continue the upward trend seen in recent years.

Note on year-on-year changes

Year on year comparisons should be treated with caution, as the data collection method changed between 2016 and 2017. Prior to the 2017 collection, data returns were made at an aggregate local authority level, whereas for the past three years all local authorities have completed an individual social worker level data return.

Figure 1: Number of children and family social workers in post at 30 September England, 2015 to 2019



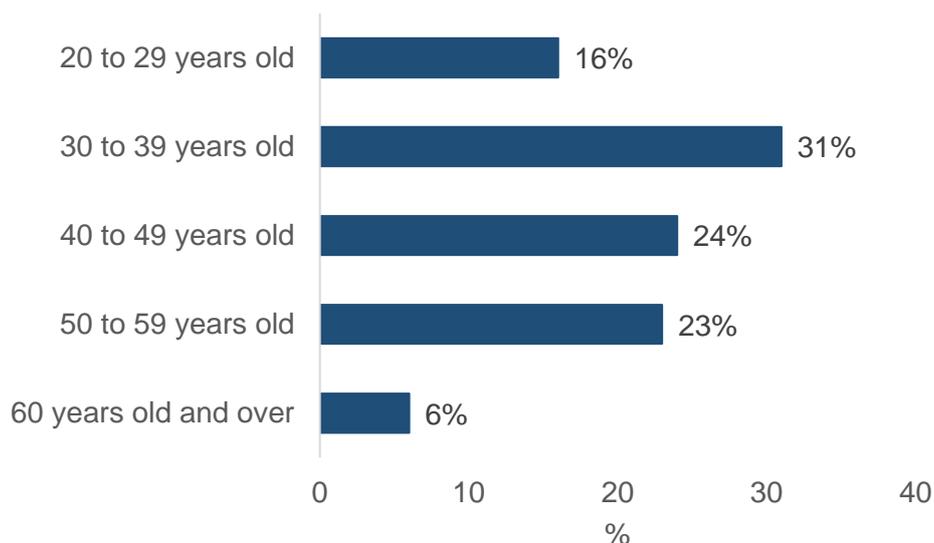
Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2014-15 to 2018-19

Age and gender of children and family social workers

In 2019, 55% of FTE children and family social workers were between 30 and 49 years of age, with 16% aged 20 to 29 and a 6% aged 60 years or over. The overwhelming majority of FTE children and family social workers were female (86%), compared to male (14%).

Figure 2: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2019 by age

England, 2019

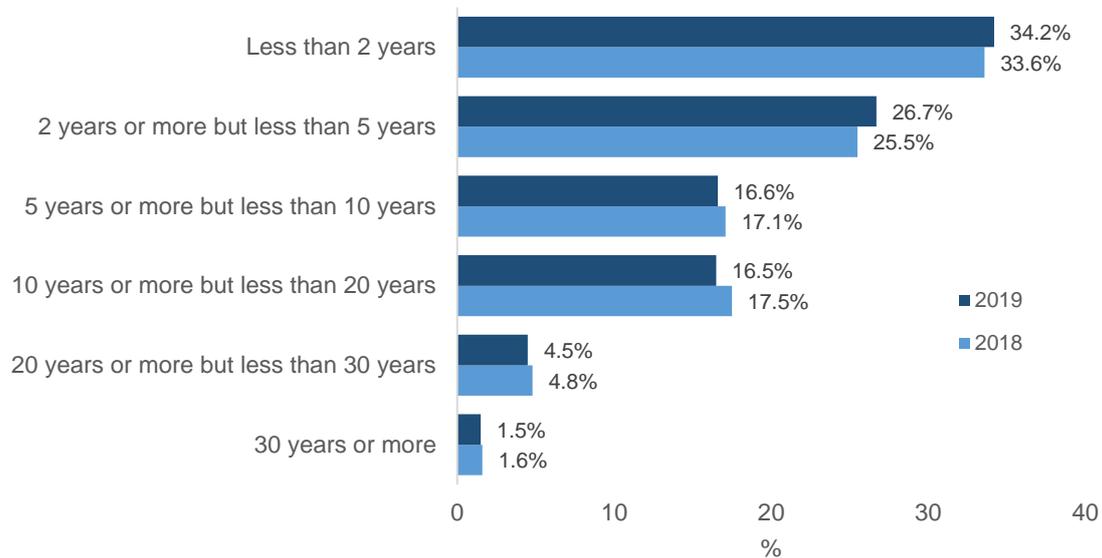


Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19

Time in service at local authority

At 30 September 2019, 61% of FTE children and family social workers had been in service at their current local authority for less than 5 years, up from 59% in 2018. In contrast, there were slight decreases in the proportion of social workers that had been in service for longer periods of time.

Figure 3: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 by time in service at local authority
England, 2018 and 2019



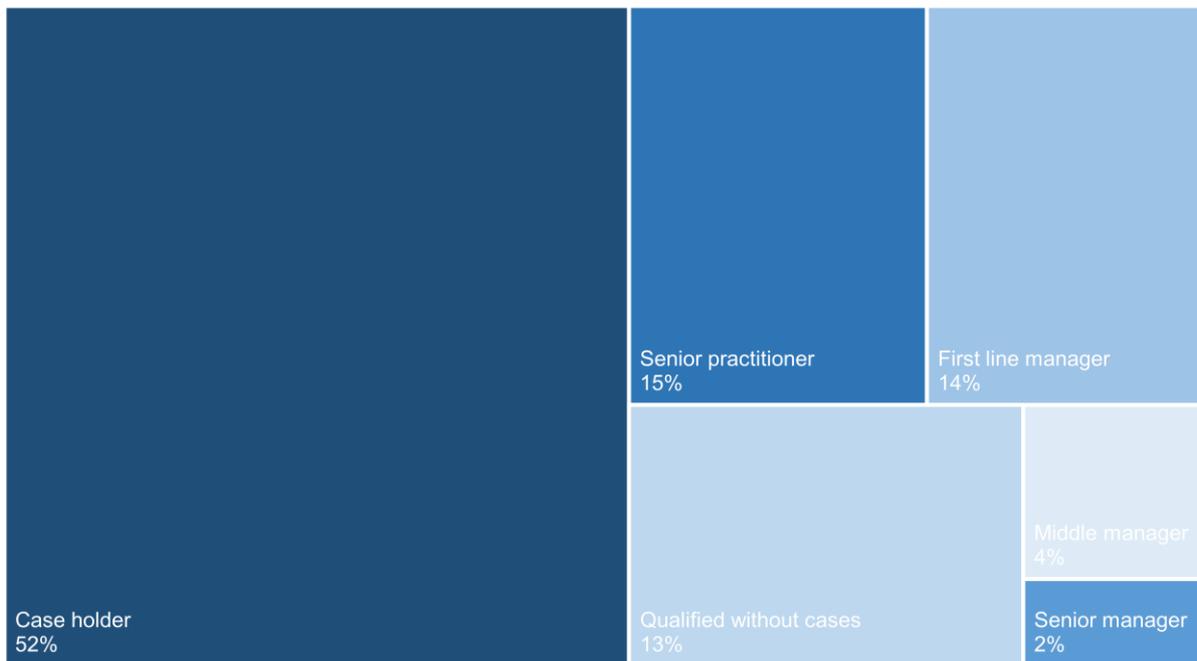
Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2017-18 and 2018-19

Social worker role

At 30 September 2019, just over half (52%) of FTE children and family social workers were reported as being in a case holder role, which was up slightly from 51% at the same point in 2018.

The percentage of children and family social workers that were qualified without cases fell to 13.1%, which was down from 13.8% at the same point last year and 15.0% in 2017.

Figure 4: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers by role
England, 2019



Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19

Ethnic origin

Ethnicity was known for 82% of social workers (by headcount) in 2019, compared to 83% in 2018. Of those social workers whose ethnicity was known, 78% were white, 12% black, 6% Asian and 4% mixed. There was a slight decrease in the percentage of the work force that was white and a slight increase in the percentage that was black compared to last year. Otherwise, the ethnic distribution of children and family social workers was very similar to the previous two years.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and family social workers (headcount) by group of ethnic origin
England, 2019



Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19 – based on 82% of children and family social workers with known ethnicity

Number of cases and average caseload

Cases

A case is defined as any person allocated to a named social worker, where the work involves child and family social work.

This may include:

- an individual child allocated to a social worker (for example a family of three siblings would be three individual cases) including those on a child protection plan, children in need, fostering and adoption cases and care leavers;
- a carer or carers allocated to a social worker for the purposes of fostering or adoption

Cases may be held by children and family social workers regardless of their role in the organisation and not just those specifically in a 'caseholder' role.

Average caseload calculation

The caseload is derived as the total number of cases held by FTE social workers in post at the 30 September divided by the number of FTE social workers at 30 September that hold one or more cases:

$$\frac{\text{Number of cases held at 30 September by agency and non – agency FTE social workers}}{\text{Number of agency and non – agency FTE social workers at 30 September with cases}}$$

There were 337,400 cases held by 20,000 FTE children and family social workers and agency workers at 30 September 2019. This was equivalent to an average caseload of 16.9, which is lower than the averages of 17.4 and 17.8 reported in 2018 and 2017 respectively.

A majority of local authorities (60%) reported a decrease in caseload compared to 2018. However, average caseload varied significantly between local authorities, with Kensington and Chelsea (12.1) reporting the lowest caseload and North East Lincolnshire (32.7) the highest. Some of this variation may be explained by different local practices in case management.

The number of cases held is typically smaller than the number of [children in need](#) at 31 March. This may be explained by a number of factors, including different count dates for the data collections and variance in the interpretation of the department's guidance. Furthermore, not all disabled children are allocated to a social worker.

The collection of individual level data for the past three years enables us to calculate an average caseload measure. However, it should be noted that local authorities have reported some difficulties in linking cases to the social worker holding those cases.

The above issues should be taken into consideration when interpreting caseload figures.

2. Agency workers (tables 1d, 2, 6)

Calculation of the FTE agency worker rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of FTE agency staff working as social workers at 30 September}}{\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{Number of FTE agency staff working as social workers at 30 September} \\ + \\ \text{Number of FTE children and family social workers} \end{array} \right)}$$

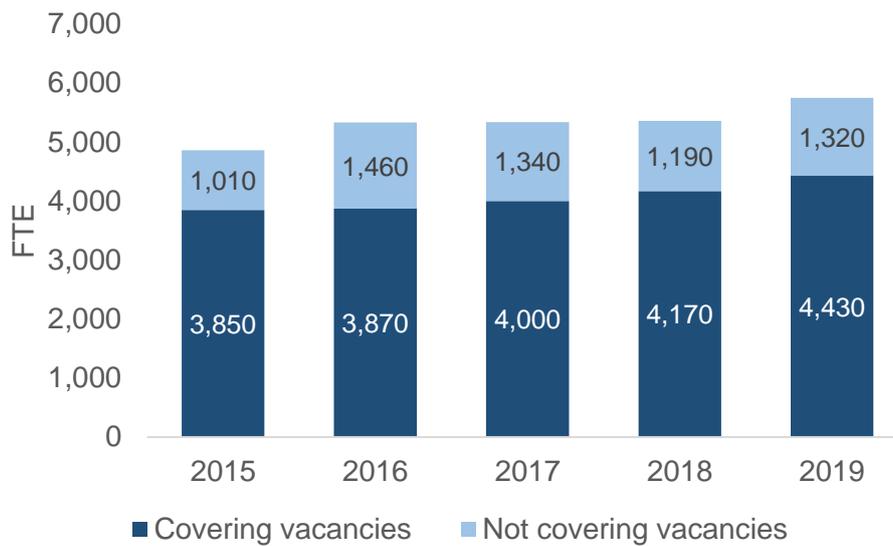
There were 5,800 FTE agency children and family social workers at 30 September 2019, up by 7% from the same point in 2018. The corresponding headcount was 6,100, an increase of 10%.

The FTE agency worker rate at 30 September 2019 was up slightly to 16%, from 15% in 2018. The percentage of these FTE agency children and family social workers that were covering vacancies fell slightly to 77%, compared to 78% last year. This rate varied considerably between local authorities. Some local authorities reported that less than 10% of their agency workers were covering vacancies, while others reported all of their agency workers were covering vacancies.

In situations where agency workers are not covering vacancies they may be employed by a local authority to manage seasonal peaks, or deal with acute backlogs, as an alternative to employing social workers on a permanent basis. For this reason, high agency worker rates do not necessarily imply a local authority has recruitment and retention issues.

Figure 6: Number of FTE agency workers working as children and family social workers

England, 2015 to 2019



Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2014-15 to 2018-19

3. Vacancies (tables 1d, 2)

Calculation of the vacancy rate

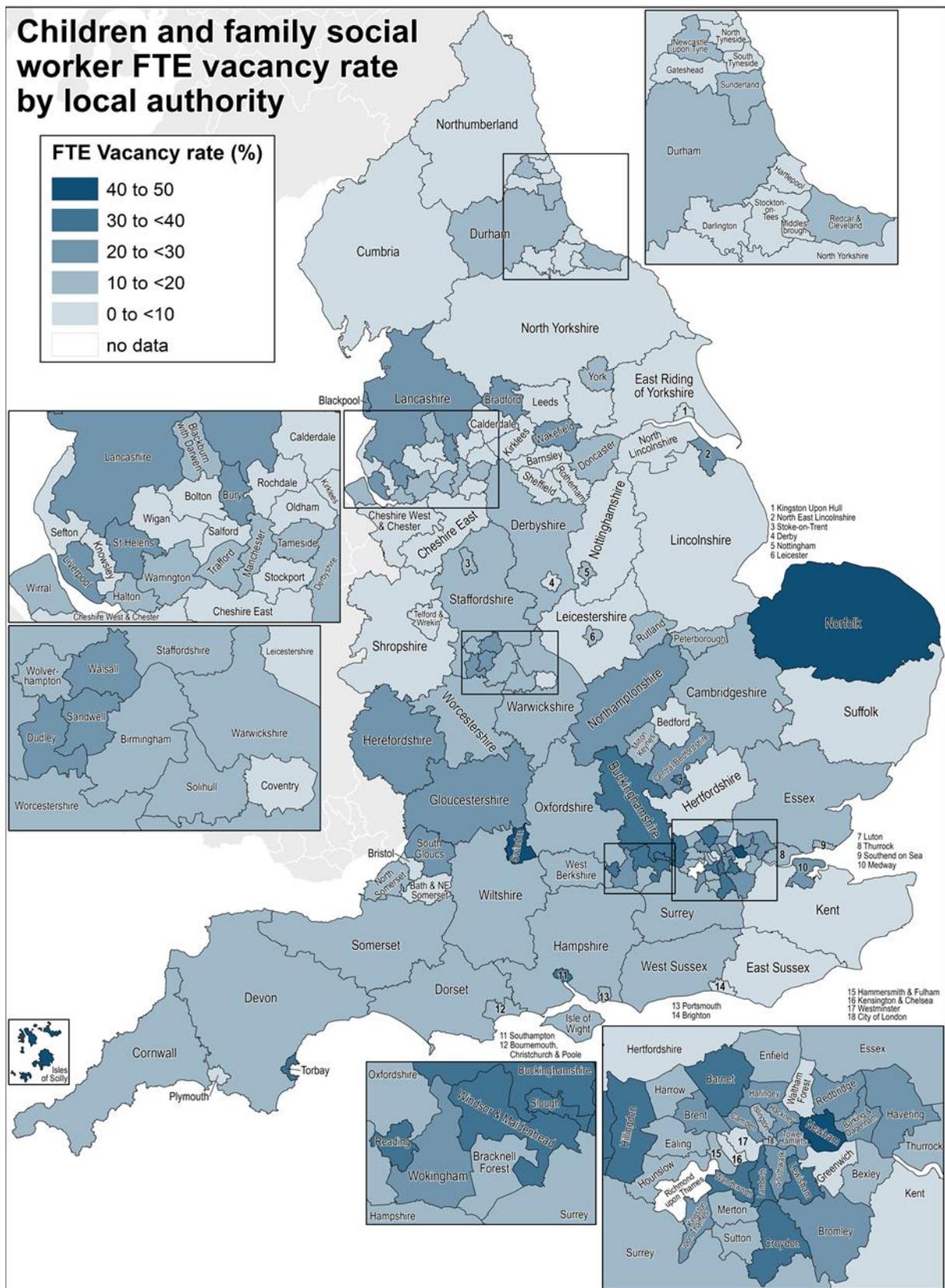
For the purpose of this collection vacancies are defined as any FTE vacancy within a local authority's organisational structure, including vacancies that are not being actively recruited for, and those covered by agency workers.

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

There were 6,000 children and family social worker FTE vacancies at 30 September 2019, up from 5,800 compared to the same point in 2018. Despite this increase, the overall vacancy rate was relatively unchanged at 16.4%. As in previous years, there was considerable variation in vacancy rate between the regions, with the North East of England (8%) having the lowest vacancy rate and London (24%) the highest.

Overall, 73% of children and family social worker vacancies were covered by agency workers in 2019, up slightly from 72% in 2018.

Figure 7: FTE vacancy rate by local authority
 England, 2019



Source: Children and family social work workforce collection 2018-19

4. Absence (tables 1d, 2)

Calculation of the absence rate

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

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

This measure covers all absences, including long-term sickness.

The absence rate in the year ending 30 September was 3.1%, relatively unchanged from last year. This rate varied regionally, with London having the lowest absence rate of 2.0% and Yorkshire and the Humber the highest at 4.2%.

5. Starters and Leavers to the local authority (tables 1b, 1c, 2, 4, 5a, 5b, 6, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b)

Starters and leavers figures

Starters

Starters are child and family social workers who joined a vacant child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who have previously worked in the same local authority, but in a non-child and family social worker role.

A move or promotion from one child and family social work position to another child and family social work position within the same local authority is not counted as a starter. Similarly, child and family social workers returning from maternity or sick leave are not counted as starters.

Leavers

Leavers are child and family social workers who left a child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who are staying at a local authority, but moving to a non-child and family role, for example moving to adult social care.

Leavers also include child and family social workers who have begun a career break, those seconded out of an organisation or those leaving the profession altogether. They do not include social workers who have started maternity or sick leave.

Turnover rate

The turnover rate is based on FTEs and calculated by taking the number of social workers leaving a child and family social work role in the year divided by the number of social workers in post at the 30 September.

Calculation of the FTE turnover rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of FTE children and family social workers leaving in the year ending at 30 September}}{\text{Number of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September}}$$

Number of starters and leavers to the local authority

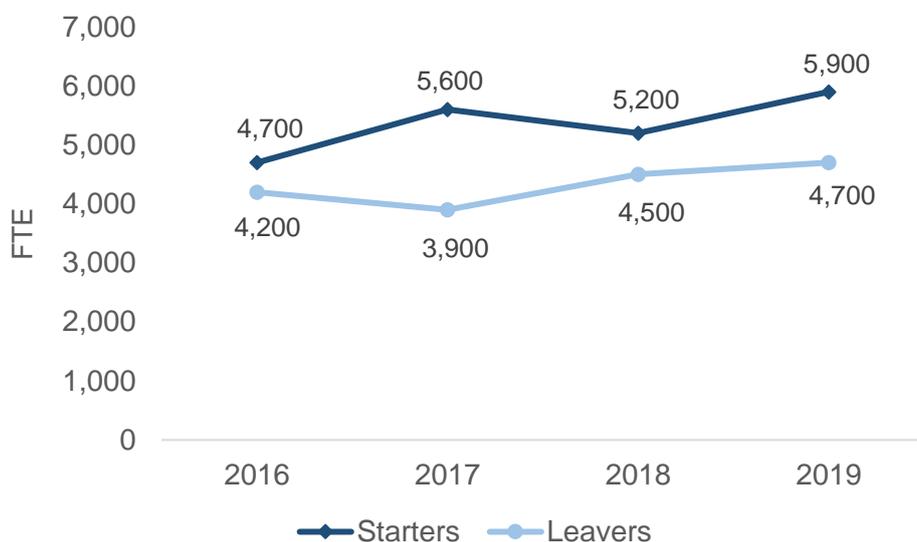
As in previous years, there were more children and family social worker starters than leavers, with the gap between the two widening this year.

There were 5,900 FTE child and family social worker starters in the year ending 30 September 2019, an increase of 13.4% compared to 2018. The corresponding headcount of starters was 6,500, an increase of 13.2%.

The number of FTE leavers during the year also increased, but at a slower rate and was up by 3.6% from last year to 4,700. The corresponding headcount of leavers showed a similar increase and was up by 2.6% to 5,300.

Despite this increase in leavers, the FTE turnover rate remained relatively unchanged at 15.1%. The corresponding headcount turnover rate was 16.1% and again was relatively unchanged compared to 2018.

Figure 8: Number of FTE starters and leavers with Local Authorities in the year
England, 2016 to 2019

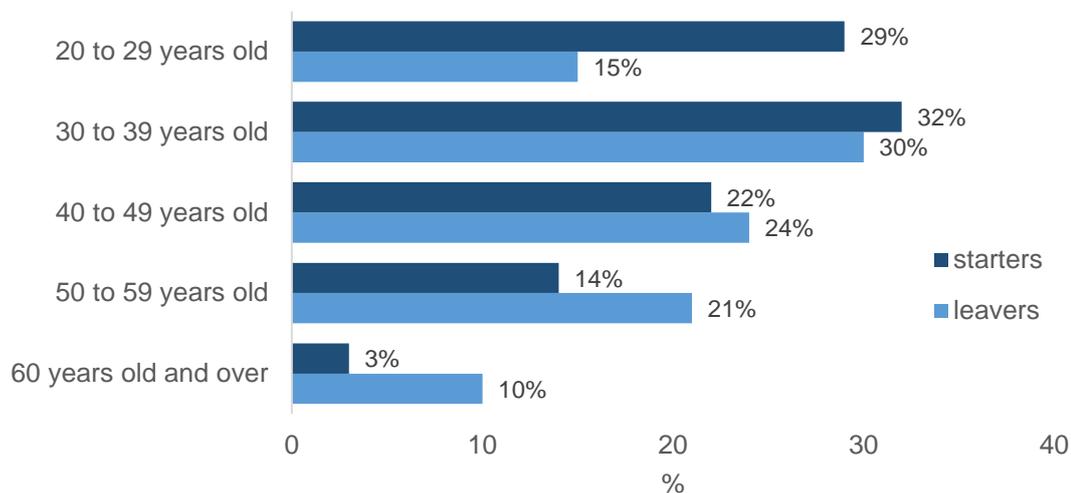


Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19

Age of starters and leavers

As might be expected, a greater proportion of FTE starters (29%) were aged 20 to 29 years compared to leavers (15%), whereas a greater proportion of FTE leavers (31%) were aged 50 or over compared to starters (17%). For 30 to 49 year olds, a similar percentage were recorded as starters and leavers.

Figure 9: Percentage of FTE starters and leavers in the year by age group
England, 2019



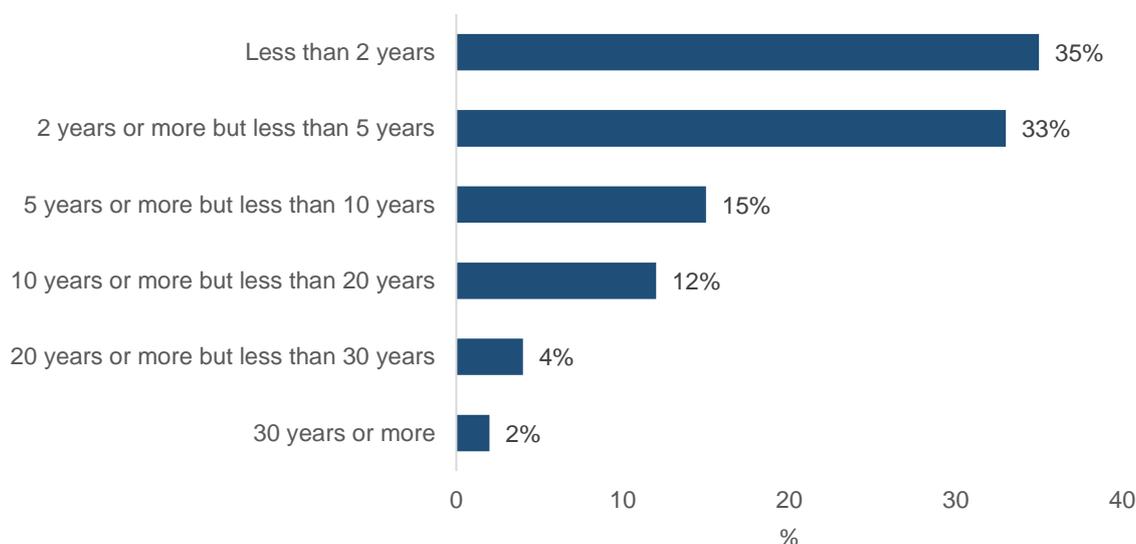
Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19

Time in service of leavers

During the year ending 30 September 2019, 68% of FTE children and family social worker leavers had been in service in their local authority for less than 5 years, which was the same as 2018.

Figure 10: Percentage of FTE leavers in the year by time in service

England, 2019



Source: Children and family social work workforce census 2018-19

6. Accompanying tables

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

National level

Table 1a	National summary of key statistics of children and family social workers
Table 1b	National summary of key statistics of children and family social workers starting during the year
Table 1c	National summary of key statistics of children and family social workers leaving during the year
Table 1d	National summary of key workforce statistics and rates for children and family social workers

Regional and local authority level

FTE tables

Table 2	Key statistics of children and family social workers by full-time equivalent (FTE), region and local authority
Table 3a	Full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 3b	Full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority
Table 3c	Full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers by role, region and local authority
Table 3d	Full-time equivalent (FTE) caseholders and average caseload by region and local authority
Table 4	Full-time equivalent (FTE) family social workers starting during the year by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 5a	Full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers leaving during the year by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 5b	Full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers leaving during the year by time in service at local authority, region and local authority

Headcount tables

Table 6	Key statistics of children and family social workers by headcount, region and local authority
Table 7a	Headcount of children and family social workers by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 7b	Headcount of children and family social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority
Table 7c	Headcount of children and family social workers by role, region and local authority
Table 7d	Headcount of children and family social workers by ethnicity, region and local authority
Table 8	Headcount of children and family social workers starting during the year by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 9a	Headcount of children and family social workers leaving in the year by age, gender, region and local authority
Table 9b	Headcount of children and family social workers leaving in the year by time in service at local authority, region and local authority

7. Further information is available

Department for Education, England:

- Previous releases: [Children's social care workforce](#)
- Children in Need: [Characteristics of children in need](#)
- Children Looked After: [Children Looked After in England](#)

Rest of the UK:

Information on the children and family social work workforce of devolved administrations can be found at the following links:

- The Scottish Government: [Children's social work statistics](#)
- The Welsh Government: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Staffing>
- Northern Ireland: [Department of Health](#)

8. Official Statistics

This year the children and family social work statistics are published as official statistics, whereas in previous years they have been classified as experimental statistics. More information on [official statistics](#) is available from the UK Statistics Authority.

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

9. Technical information

A technical document accompanies this statistical publication. 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.

10. Data items not covered in the tables

Some data items collected in the children's social work workforce census are not included in this statistical release because of low response rates or concerns regarding the quality of the data. These are all data items that are relatively new to the data collection or collected on a voluntary basis. We will work to improve the quality of this data, including making voluntary items mandatory, with a view to publishing information in future releases. For more information on unpublished data items, refer to the accompanying technical guide.

11. Get in touch

Media enquiries

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Department for Education

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