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PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLAND: YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2012

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides figures on notifications of children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

The figures reported in the SFR are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. This is because there is doubt over whether all parents, carers and other relevant third parties currently report the existence of these arrangements to their Local Authority (LA). We are not clear whether the increase in arrangements seen is due to increased activity in private fostering or an improvement in the reporting of such arrangements. Further information on the issue of under-reporting can be found in the Quality and Uses document, which accompanies this SFR, at the following link:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001077/index.shtml>

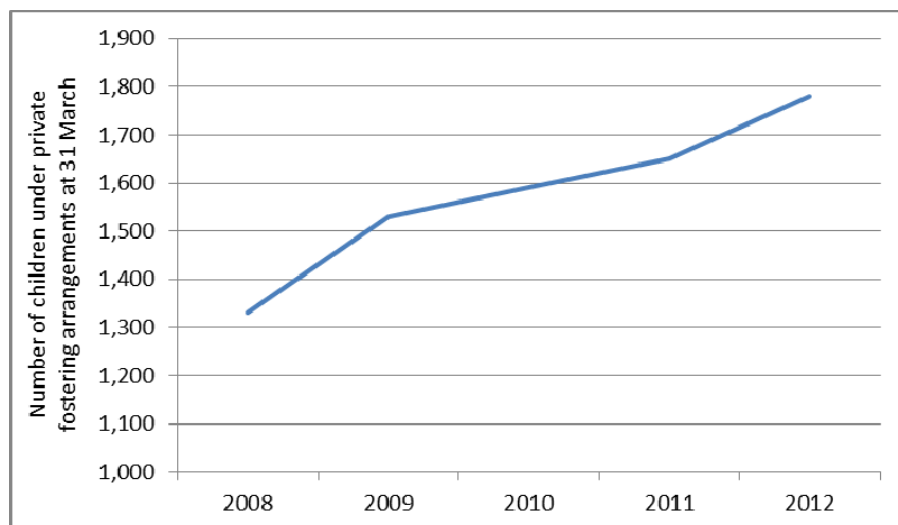
The figures in this SFR are important still though because they allow the Department to monitor the number of notifications of private fostering arrangements against the impact of the legislative changes in 2005 under which LAs have a duty to promote and encourage notification of private fostering arrangements.

Over the past 5 years, the number of notifications of children under private fostering arrangements has steadily increased. The majority of privately fostered children are aged between 10 and 15 years old and were born in the UK. However the proportion from overseas countries has increased over the past 5 years.

KEY POINTS

- At 31 March 2012, 1,780 children were reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. This is an increase of 8 per cent compared with 1,650 children reported at 31 March 2011 and an increase of 34 per cent compared with 1,330 at 31 March 2008.

Figure 1: Number of notifications of children under private fostering arrangements at 31st March in England, 2008 to 2012



- Most regions saw a fall in the number of arrangements at 31 March 2012 compared with 31 March 2011, with only 3 regions seeing an increase. The South West saw the greatest increase in the number of private fostering arrangements. Their figures have more than doubled between 31 March 2011 and 31 March 2012. This is due to one LA in the South West returning a large number of arrangements for language students. This LA has had language students study in local colleges for many years. However the increase in the number of private fostering arrangements between 2011 and 2012 can be attributed to an awareness raising campaign to ensure all colleges in this LA registered language students at their college in order for these children to be recorded as privately fostered in accordance with The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The increase in these regions, the South West in particular, are responsible for the 8 per cent national increase
- 2,420 new private fostering arrangements began during the year to 31 March 2012. This is an increase of 5 per cent compared with 2,310 arrangements beginning in the previous year and a 55 per cent increase compared with 1,560 beginning during the year to 31 March 2008. The large increase in the number of new arrangements in the South West between 2011 and 2012 is responsible for most of the national increase.
- During the year to 31 March 2012, 2,520 private fostering arrangements ended. This is an 8 per cent increase compared with 2,330 arrangements ending during the previous year and a 66 per cent increase compared with 1,520 ending during the year to 31 March 2008. The large increase in the number of arrangements that ended in the South West between 2011 and 2012 is responsible for most of the national increase.
- Of the 2,420 cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, 1,870 (77 per cent) were carried out within the required 7 working days; in 2011 this figure was 77 per cent, and in 2008 it was 78 per cent.

**Table 1: Number of children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements
Years ending 31 March 2008 to 2012**

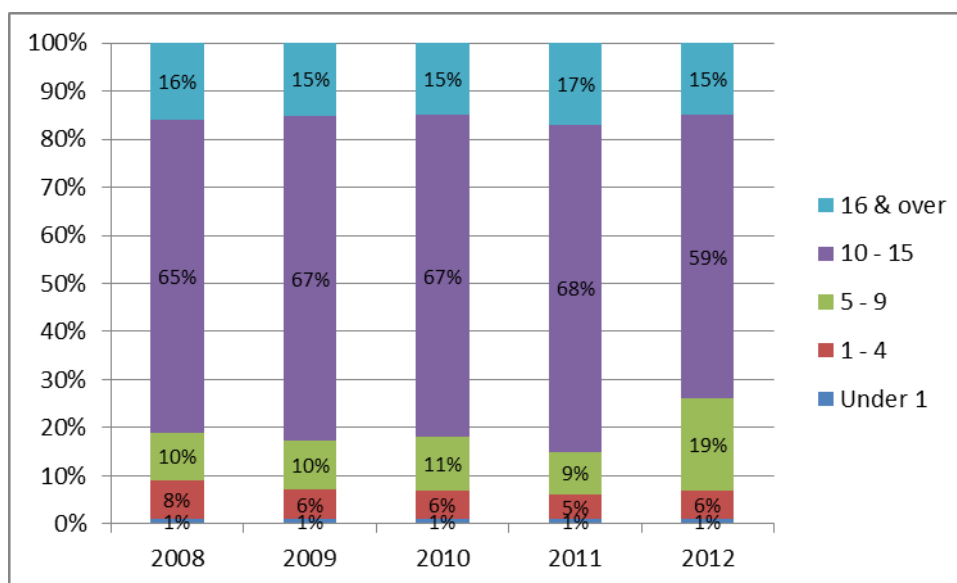
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements as at 31 March	1,330	1,530	1,590	1,650	1,780
New arrangements during the year	1,560	1,980	1,940	2,310	2,420
Arrangements which ended during the year	1,520	1,700	1,950	2,330	2,520
Cases where action was taken in accordance with the requirements for carrying out visits	1,600	1,880	2,040	2,420	2,420
of which; dealt with within 7 working days (%)	78	77	75	77	77

- The data are collected annually from local authorities who supply the aggregate number of arrangements notified to them by 31 March. Local authorities do not update the data submitted in the previous year, which means that it is possible for inconsistencies to arise in the number of arrangements collected between years. For example, a local authority may not have received a notification for all the private fostering arrangements at 31 March when they submit their annual return. The following year it is possible their aggregate return will count an arrangement coming to an end, which was not counted as starting in the previous year's figures.

Characteristics of privately fostered children who have new arrangements which started during the year ending 31 March 2012

- There has been a large increase in the proportion of privately fostered children aged 5-9; from 9 per cent in 2011 to 19 per cent in 2012. This change is due to one LA who reported a large number of new arrangements, all of which were language students aged 5-9.
- The majority of privately fostered children are aged 10-15, although the proportion they represent of all children is smaller than in previous years.

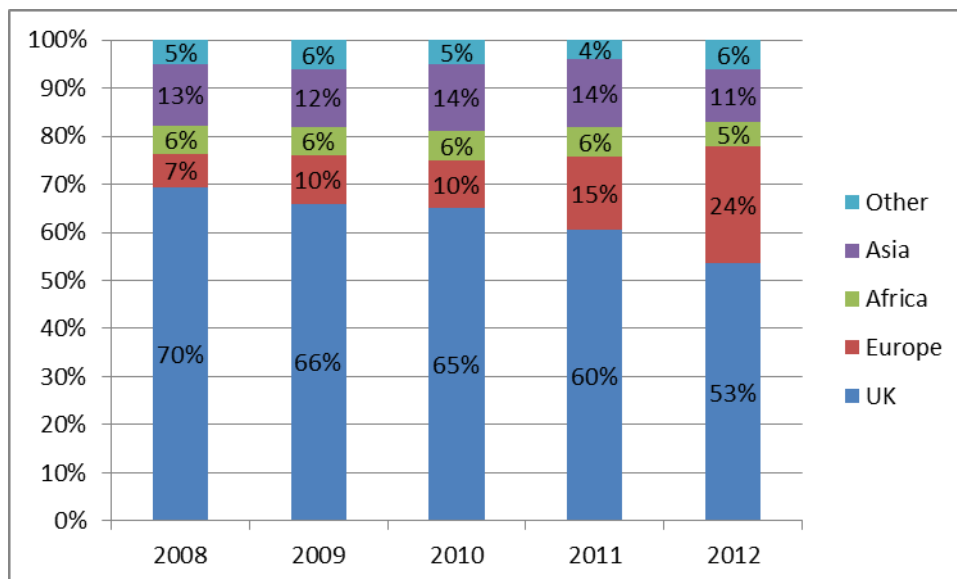
Figure 2: Percentage of new private fostering arrangements which started during the year ending 31 March, by age of child, 2008 to 2012



- 53 per cent of privately fostered children were born in the UK; in 2011 this figure was 60 per cent and in 2008 it was 70 per cent. The percentage of privately fostered children born in Europe was 24 per cent, a large increase from 15 per cent in 2011 and 7 per cent in 2008.

- The changes in the proportions of privately fostered children born in the UK and Europe compared with previous years has been partly caused by one LA who reported a large number of new arrangements for language students who were born in Europe.

Figure 3: Percentage of new private fostering arrangements which started during the year ending 31 March, by child's place of birth, 2008 to 2012



Percentage of arrangements where visits were made within the required timescales

- 2,420 arrangements began on or after 1 April 2011 and of these 65 per cent (1,560) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than six weeks¹. This compares to 65 per cent in the previous year and 64 per cent in 2010 (the first year this data was collected²).
- Performance varied across the regions, the East of England achieved the highest percentage of visits within the timescales, at 82 per cent, and the South West achieved the lowest, at 42 per cent.
- 1,580 arrangements were ongoing at the 1 April 2011 and of these 66 per cent (1,040) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than twelve weeks¹. This compares to 63 per cent in the previous year and 62 per cent in 2010.
- For these arrangements which were on-going at 1 April 2011, the proportion which were within the required timescale ranged from 58 per cent of visits in the South West to 70 per cent in both London and the South East.

¹ See Technical Note 4 for further information.

² For more information, see paragraph 13 in the Private Fostering Quality and Uses document at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001077/index.shtml>

TABLES

Table 1: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements, years ending 31 March 2008 to 2012.

Table 2: Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, and of those the number carried out within working 7 days during year ending 31 March 2012.

Table 3: Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2012 and place of birth.

Table 4: Number and percentage of arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within the timescales, year ending 31 March 2012.

All of the tables above are available in Excel format under the “Additional Information” section on the Department’s website at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001077/index.shtml>

As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications and to make data more accessible, supporting underlying data for this publication will be published at the same time as the publication and available in the ‘Publication’s Underlying Data’ section from the link above.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Background and Methodology

1. Details of the background and methodology used in this statistical first release are published in a separate document which can be found here:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001077/index.shtml>

Legislation

2. The legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989, as amended by section 44 of the Children Act 2004 which came into effect on 1 July 2005, and regulations made under Part 9 of 1989 Children Act (the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005), which also came into effect on 1 July 2005. Local authorities are required to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within their area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

3. The requirements of Regulation 4(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority have received notification of a proposal to foster a child privately they must, for the purposes of discharging their duty under section 67(1) of the Act (welfare of privately fostered children), arrange for an officer of the authority within seven working days to (a) visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated; (b) visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of his household; (c) visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate; (d) speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and (e) establish such matters listed in Schedule 2 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

4. The requirements of Regulation 8(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that each local authority must arrange for an officer of the authority to visit every child who is being fostered privately in their area at intervals of not more than six weeks in the first year of the private fostering arrangement; and intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year.

Data Quality and Uses of the Data

5. A separate document has been published which details issues relating to the quality of the data from the PF1 return along with details of users and the known uses made of the data. This can be found at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001077/index.shtml>

Rounding

6. In order to ensure confidentiality of children, the following rounding conventions have been used in this statistical release:

- All numbers have been rounded to the nearest ten.
- Percentages are displayed to the nearest whole number and are calculated using unrounded numbers.

7. In line with the Department for Education's Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality (link below), numbers in the publication are presented exactly; in previous publications in this series, numbers were rounded to the nearest ten.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns-sp-confidentialityv3.pdf>

National Statistics

8. This is a National Statistics publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

Related Publications and Research

9. Provisions on private fostering in the Children Act 2004 and the new Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into effect on 1st July 2005 and therefore affect arrangements starting from that date. These measures are designed to strengthen the existing notification scheme for private fostering arrangements. For further details, please refer to the Private Fostering Guidance at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/childrenandyoungpeople/a0063874/private-fostering-pf1-return>.

10. A research document funded by DCSF (Research into Private Fostering) was published in March 2010 and can be found at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-RR229>.

The research had two broad aims. Firstly, to collect evidence of the practices and procedures of local authorities in relation to private fostering arrangements, in order to inform thinking on how to increase notification rates; and secondly, to improve understanding of the characteristics and needs of privately fostered children, with particular reference to safeguarding issues. This report cited research from the Department of Health (2001) which suggested there were around 10,000 children under private fostering arrangements in England at any given time. However, this figure is 11 years out of date and there are also concerns around the accuracy of this figure.

11. Information on children who are looked after by their Local Authority in a foster placement is included in the "Children Looked After in England" Statistical First Release available here:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001026/sfr21-2011.pdf>

12. Related publications covering private fostering arrangements for the UK can be found at:

Wales

The statistics on fostering and adoption intermediary services include data for Wales for the period up to the end of March 2011 are available at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/1110262/?lang=en>

Scotland

The Scottish Government do not centrally collect information on Private Fostering arrangements in Scotland.

Northern Ireland

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety does not produce statistics relating to Private Fostering Arrangements in Northern Ireland.

User Consultation

13. We would like to establish a user group to consult of the format and content of this publication. If you would like to be part of that group and involved in future consultations, please get in touch (contact details can be found in the next section).

Queries

14. Any queries of comments on the statistics in this publication should be addressed to:

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SW1P 3BT
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Table 1: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements ^{1,2}

Years ending 31 March 2008 to 2012

Coverage: England

	numbers ³																			
	Number of children under private fostering arrangements at 31 March					Number of new notifications during the year					Number of new arrangements that began during the year					Number of arrangements that ended during the year				
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
England	1,330	1,530	1,590	1,650	1,780	1,790	2,180	2,370	2,680	2,840	1,560	1,980	1,940	2,310	2,420	1,520	1,700	1,950	2,330	2,520
Region																				
North East	60	70	70	70	80	80	80	70	90	90	80	80	70	80	80	70	70	70	90	80
North West	90	160	170	180	170	110	230	250	310	250	90	200	220	270	220	100	160	220	280	230
Yorkshire and Humberside	90	100	130	140	110	120	130	170	180	160	110	110	150	160	160	100	90	140	140	200
East Midlands	110	100	110	120	110	160	170	170	210	170	120	140	120	180	140	120	110	130	170	160
West Midlands	120	170	150	150	110	170	240	210	210	230	160	220	190	200	200	150	190	220	200	220
East of England	140	160	160	200	130	180	240	310	310	230	160	230	230	280	180	150	170	190	240	240
London	370	400	440	410	400	470	400	470	440	470	330	330	360	330	340	310	290	340	390	360
South East	230	220	190	180	190	260	360	340	360	430	290	340	290	260	370	280	340	320	310	370
South West	120	150	190	210	480	240	330	380	580	810	220	340	300	550	750	240	290	320	520	670

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.

2. Notifications received during the year include private fostering arrangements which may have started before 1 April or were due to start after 31 March. The same applies to notifications of private fostering arrangements coming to an end.

3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Regional figures may not sum to the national total due to rounding.

Table 2: Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits¹, and of those the number that were carried out within 7 working days

Year ending 31 March 2012

Coverage: England

	numbers and percentages ²		
	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits	Number of cases where this action was taken in accordance with requirements within 7 working days	Percentage of cases where action was taken within 7 working days
England	2,420	1,870	77
Region			
North East	80	60	77
North West	250	190	77
Yorkshire and Humberside	150	130	84
East Midlands	160	130	78
West Midlands	210	140	67
East of England	200	180	91
London	460	390	86
South East	380	300	79
South West	530	350	65

Source: PF1

1. The table displays figures for visits made in accordance with regulation 4 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Regulation 4 states that where a Local Authority has received notification under Regulation 3 they must, within seven working days, visit the proposed private foster carer at the premises where the child will be accommodated and visit and speak to the child.

2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and are calculated using unrounded numbers.

Table 3: Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2012 and place of birth¹

Year ending 31 March 2012

Coverage: England

	numbers ²					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other
All children	2,420	1,290	590	120	280	150
Under 1	30	20	0	0	0	0
1 - 4	140	110	10	10	0	10
5 - 9	460	140	180	30	50	60
10 - 15	1,420	820	300	60	180	60
16 & over	370	200	100	10	50	20

	percentages ³					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other
All children	100	53	24	5	11	6
Under 1	1	1	0	3	1	2
1 - 4	6	9	1	9	1	5
5 - 9	19	11	31	27	17	39
10 - 15	59	63	51	54	64	39
16 & over	15	15	17	6	16	14
All ages	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.

2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest ten, therefore components may not sum to totals.

3. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and are calculated using unrounded numbers. Components may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Table 4: Number and percentage of arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within the timescales ¹

Year ending 31 March 2012

Coverage: England

	numbers and percentages ²					
	Arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2011	Arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2011, where visits were made at intervals of not more than six weeks	Percentage of arrangements where visits were made at intervals of not more than six weeks	Arrangements that began before 1 April 2011 that were continuing on 1 April 2011	Arrangements that began before 1 April 2011 that were continuing on 1 April 2011, where visits were made at intervals of not more than twelve weeks	Percentage of arrangements where visits were made at intervals of not more than twelve weeks
England	2,420	1,560	65	1,580	1,040	66
Region						
North East	80	60	75	70	50	64
North West	220	150	69	160	100	62
Yorkshire and Humberside	160	110	69	150	100	65
East Midlands	140	110	81	140	90	65
West Midlands	200	120	59	120	80	69
East of England	180	140	82	180	120	65
London	340	260	75	400	280	70
South East	370	300	81	190	130	70
South West	750	320	42	180	100	58

Source: PF1

1. This table displays information on the follow up visits which have been made by Local Authorities. The minimum number of visits required is at intervals of not more than six weeks in respect of the first year of any private fostering arrangement and at intervals of not more than twelve weeks in respect of the second and any subsequent years of any arrangement.

2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten, therefore components may not sum to totals. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and are calculated using unrounded numbers.