



Department  
for Education

# **Admissions appeals in England, academic year 2016 to 2017: background and methodology information.**

**Quality and methodology information  
document**

**August 2017**

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## Introduction

This document provides background information on the ‘Admissions appeals in England – academic year 2016 to 2017’ statistical first release, including the improvements made in the school census collection since 2015 and the resulting break in the time series of appeals data.

It also explains the concepts and methods used to calculate the figures and provides an overview of the data sources and other relevant information.

## Recent improvements to the collection

Appeals relating to voluntary controlled and community schools are the responsibility of the local authority who report the appeals directly as an aggregate figure via the school admission appeals (APAD) collection. All voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools are required to report their admissions appeals directly in the spring school census.

Previously, the school census returns provided only total appeals figures (plus the infant appeal subsets). For all through schools it was not possible to identify between appeals relating to the primary national curriculum years and those relating to secondary years. As some of these schools would have recorded infant appeals, all such all-through schools had to be recorded as primary in the appeals dataset.

For the January 2017 school census the admissions appeals module was extended to separately record appeals for the primary and secondary national curriculum years. This means that appeals in all through schools can now be correctly recorded as relating to either the primary or the secondary phase. Middle-deemed primary and middle-deemed secondary schools will still have all of their appeals recorded in their respective level.

It is estimated that this results in a difference of about 1,100 appeals being correctly designated as secondary appeals (in all through schools) rather than having to be recorded as primary appeals (in order to align with infant appeals already recorded separately). The figures for the number of new admissions, which are used as a denominator to calculate the proportion of appeals lodged and heard, were also recalculated to designate new admissions into all through schools according to the national curriculum year being entered. Thus the proportions of appeals being lodged and heard are all unaffected by the improvement.

Further checks were undertaken with regard to the increase in 2016 in the proportion of schools reporting via the school census that they had received appeals, assisted by improvements in the school census validation. The proportion of schools submitting appeals in 2017 is very similar to that for 2016, at all levels.

The changes to the census are permanent and will continue to help schools accurately record the number of appeals they receive and process, and the school phase within which those appeals fall.

## **About the output: interpretation of the figures**

The appeals collections gather data on the progress of all appeals (against not receiving a place at a requested school) from initial submission through to their resolution. All received appeals are described as being lodged. If not withdrawn by the parent the appeals will be considered by a panel hearing – this is described as being heard. The heard appeals breaks down into those which have been rejected and those which have been upheld (that is, decided in favour of the parent). This release looks at the number and percentage of appeals which have been lodged, heard and found in favour.

The total number of appeals initially lodged by parents can be misleading. Some appeals are resolved before they reach a panel hearing (for example a place at the school could become available via the school's waiting list) and will therefore be withdrawn. In addition parents can lodge appeals for more than one school but only require a single school place.

Figures for the total number of admissions appeals lodged are provided in this publication but, as described above, the number of appeals actually heard by an appeals panel is considered to be a more reliable indicator. Therefore in tables 2 and 3 rates are calculated for appeals heard and those upheld only.

Because the number of appeals heard can be very small at LA level, there can be significant variation in rates found in favour (calculated as percentage of the appeals heard) which only relate to a numerical difference of one or two appeals being upheld.

## **Methodology**

The appeals data is derived from two sources:

The local authorities provided aggregate appeal data for all of their community and voluntary controlled schools via the school admission appeals data collection (APAD), returned to the department in January 2017.

Foundation, voluntary aided and academy schools provided their own appeal data via the spring 2017 school census (admissions appeals module). This is because they are responsible for the administration of their own appeals, even if they contract the actual running of those appeals to a third party.

Community and voluntary controlled schools who were in the process of converting to academies provided their data via either the local authority or school census based on their school type on census day, 19 January 2017.

In each collection, figures are provided on the number of appeals lodged, withdrawn, heard, found in favour and rejected.

In order to allow us to report on the current academic year, only appeals lodged by 1 September and relating to entry into the start of the academic year (for any school year) are collected. Therefore appeals relating to an application for a child to move schools during the school year are not included.

Appeals for entry into infant age classes are listed individually. These are a subset of the primary appeals figures. This subset relates to the national curriculum year of the class only, they are not necessarily infant class size appeals (relating to regulations limiting the maximum size of an infant class), although these will be included.

The local authority figures for community and voluntary controlled schools reported on appeals by phase: that is, whether the appeal related to entry into primary (including infant) or secondary school (including middle deemed schools at both levels). As of 2017, the school census returns made by foundation, voluntary aided and academy schools also divide their appeals into those relating to the primary and secondary national curriculum years. This enables us to correctly allocate appeals into the correct school phase for all voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools, including all through schools.

Appeals against non-admission to a school sixth form and 14-19 schools such as UTCs and studio schools are included.

The admissions dataset used to calculate the rates of appeals lodged and heard is calculated from the spring 2017 school census. It includes all pupils who were on roll on census day and who were identified as a new entrant into a mainstream maintained or academy school between 1 August 2016 and 8 October 2016 (autumn school census day).

In 2017 both appeals and admissions into all through schools recording their appeals in the school census could be correctly designated as primary or secondary level (see methodology note above). As a consequence the 'other' primary appeals and admissions numbers are higher than in 2016 and the secondary admissions numbers lower. Although the effect will be small at England level, it could be more pronounced for certain local authorities. The proportions are unaffected throughout.

The designation of the governance and phase of each school was aligned to those used in the SFR Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2017, published on 28 June 2017.

## **The appeals process**

Each LA coordinates admissions to all the state-funded schools in its area. It receives applications for all children resident in its area, and sends offers of a school place on National Offer Day.

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 parents have the right to submit an appeal, to an independent appeal panel, against a decision to refuse their child admission to a school for which they have expressed a preference. The process by which this works, including the required timetable for the lodging and hearing of appeals, is set out in the admissions and appeals codes. These were last updated in February 2012.

Applicants have the right of appeal against all schools for which they were not offered a place, if that school was placed as a higher preference than the one they were offered.

The appeal is made directly to the relevant admissions authority for that school. This is the local authority for community and voluntary controlled schools and the school's governing body for voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools.

If the appeal panel finds in the favour of the parent, then that decision is binding on the admissions authority concerned, who are therefore required to find the child a place at the school.

## **Accuracy and reliability**

150 LAs provided a return for all of their mainstream community and voluntary controlled schools via the school admission appeals data collection (also known as APAD) in January/February 2017. City of London has no community or voluntary controlled schools and the Isles of Scilly has one school which all children attend – therefore these two LAs are not required to submit a return.

The APAD return includes 'clean data submit' which means that an LA can only submit its return if it contains no errors or queries. The return then undergoes additional checks and verification within the department.

Mainstream voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools submitted their appeal data as part of their 2017 spring school census return (in the admissions appeals module). The data was submitted to the standard school census checks made by the department. A school's appeals figures were designated to their school phase and governance based on how each school was recorded in the underlying data of the 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2017' SR. This holds the phase and governance, as recorded in Edubase, on spring census day, 19 January 2017.

The final appeals dataset was calculated, using the above returns, within the department. The school census admissions module requires schools to provide their total number of

appeals loaded, withdrawn, heard, rejected and upheld, and of those which were for infant classes. In 2017, for the first time, the appeal figures were divided into those relating to primary and secondary years. As a result appeals to all through schools recorded in this dataset have been divided into those relating to primary or secondary appeals, based on national curriculum year.

The admissions denominator used to create the rates for the number of appeals lodged and heard was calculated within the department from the pupil module of the spring 2017 school census. It calculated the number of new admissions (i.e. a pupil starting at a new school between 1 August 2016 to 8 October 2016 (autumn census day)) using the entry date of the pupil and the LA and Estab codes of the school the pupil is recorded as attending. Additional checks were made to identify if a school converting to an academy adjusted all pupils to a new entry date, and to identify if the child was in reality an existing pupil of that school.

The admissions figure calculations depend on the LAs correctly recording the pupils' entry dates in the school census. It also requires additional processing to identify past and present establishment codes for converting schools (required to identify whether a pupil has moved schools), correct recording of the phase and governance of the schools, and correct recording of the conversion dates of academies. Processes have been put in place by the department in recent years to validate the recording of the governance and phase of all schools in the school census.

The number of new admissions is calculated using information on the school each pupil is listed as attending in the pupil level school censuses for both 2017 and also the previous academic year. Schools converting to academies or amalgamating (for example individual infant and nursery schools combining into a single primary school) sometimes change one or both of the entry dates of all of their existing pupils and their school codes. All attempts have been made to allow for this when calculating the number of new admissions but it is likely that in each year a very small number of schools have the number of their new admissions incorrectly counted. This can result in significant differences in the total admissions figures for a few LAs between years. It is not known the margin of uncertainty for these figures but the processing methodology has been thoroughly reviewed and the actual processing quality assured.

There are no planned revisions to this statistical release. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the departmental revisions policy which is published at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/policy%20statement%20on%20revisions.pdf>

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires us to take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality. The tables produced for this SFR have been assessed and it has been determined that suppression was not required to protect confidentiality.

## **Accessibility**

The SR text is published in pdf format so that it is accessible to all users irrespective of their choice of software. Care is also taken to ensure that the document meets accessibility guidelines. Key figures are highlighted in the SR text which draws out the key messages such as changes over. Small tables or charts illustrating key figures are also included in the text.

Each SR is accompanied by formatted excel tables with clear titles which allow general users to find more detail than can be provided in the SR text. Any important limitations or inconsistencies in the data are mentioned in footnotes so that users don't have to refer to the text or this document.

## **Revisions and further information**

The APAD collection and admissions appeals module in the spring School Census are collected annually. This publication was produced using the January 2017 APAD collection and January 2017 School Census and there are no plans to make any revisions to this publication. If a revision is necessary, this will be made in accordance with the Department's revisions policy.





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