



# Experimental statistics: Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2017

SFR 09/2018, 15 February 2018

There were 28,500 FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 (30,670 headcount), an increase of around 3% on last year

### Children's social workers (FTE)



### Vacancies (FTE)



### Agency Social Workers (FTE)

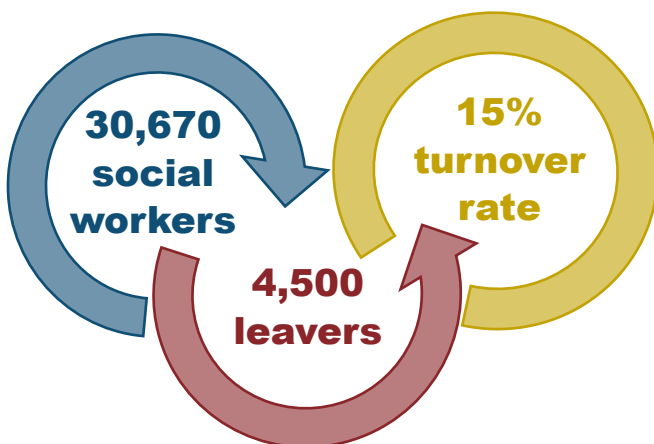


Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

The full-time equivalent (FTE) number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 28,500, an increase of 3% from 27,700 at 30 September 2016. The number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 30,670 (headcount), an increase of 2% from 29,930 (headcount) at 30 September 2016. These increases continue a long-term trend, but may be driven partly by improved data quality (see section 1).

Agency workers are recorded separately from children and family social workers employed directly by the local authority. The number of agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 5,340 (FTE), this is similar to the number at 30 September 2016, which was 5,330.

During the year ending 30 September 2017, headcount turnover rate was 15%



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

The number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 30,670 (headcount). The number of children and family social workers leaving in the year ending 30 September 2016 was 4,500 (headcount).

The turnover rate (defined as number of leavers divided by the number of workers in place at 30 September 2017) was 15% (headcount).

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## About this release

This experimental statistical first release provides national and local level information on the children and family social work workforce in English local authorities for the year ending 30 September 2017. This is the fifth year that statistics have been published based on data collected from local authorities on the children and family social work workforce. This year is the first publication based on the individual social worker level collection, previous years have been based on an aggregate data return.

## Experimental statistics

Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics as “new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.” For more information on experimental statistics, please visit the ONS website [here](#).

Users should read and understand all footnotes and caveats presented in this release and the accompanying tables to fully understand the practical applications and limitations of the data. In particular, comparisons with previous year’s published statistics should be done with caution as changes from year to year may not reflect actual changes in figures, but may simply indicate improvements in data quality. Known data quality issues and explanations are listed in the technical document.

## In this publication

The following documents are included in the SFR:

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

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 the 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](mailto: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 social worker that is registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC), working in a local authority in a 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. For the purpose of this publication the following job roles are included: 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).

For the purposes of this publication, agency workers working as children and family social workers are counted and reported separately to children and family social workers employed by local authorities.

## Number of social workers in place as at 30 September 2017

The full-time equivalent (FTE) number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 28,500, an increase of 3% from 27,700 at 30 September 2016. The number of children and family social

workers at 30 September 2017 was 30,670 (headcount), an increase of 2% from 29,930 (headcount) at 30 September 2016.

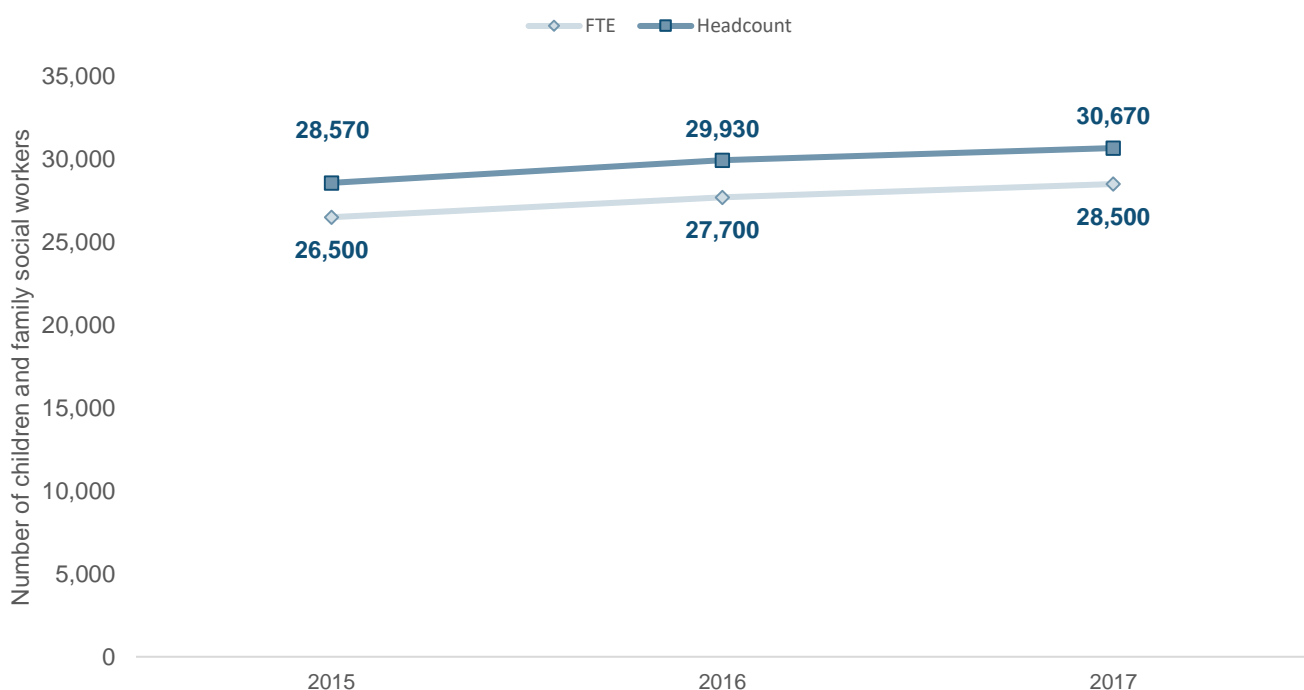
The increase follows the general trend from previous years although, it may be that the increases are explained by more accurate data collection over the different years, rather than genuine increase in social workers (see note below).

#### Note on year-on-year changes

Year on year comparisons should be treated with caution as the data collection method has changed between 2016 and 2017. Last year the majority of data returns were done at an aggregate level, this year all local authorities have completed an individual social worker level data return. As such part of the increase in the number of children and family social workers may be due to improved data quality and better interpretation of the guidance. This is supported by fact that the net increase based on the recorded number of starters and leavers does not fully account for the increase from last year. During the quality assurance of the data we have contacted a number of local authorities and many have confirmed that the method for counting social workers is more robust this year compared to last year. The data quality is further improved as we are collecting individual level data.

Figure 1: Number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2017

England, 2014-2017



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2014-15 to 2016-17.

#### Age and gender of children and family social workers

At 30 September 2017, 55% (FTE) of children and family social workers were between 30 and 49 years of age, broadly similar to the 54% (FTE) reported at 30 September 2016. The overall age distribution of children and family social workers remains similar to the previous year.

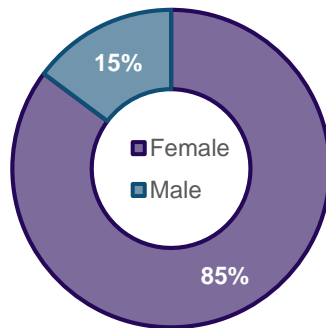
**Figure 2: Percentage of children and family social workers by age**  
England, 2017



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

At 30 September 2017, 85% of children and family social workers were female, and 15% were male. This is the first time that this data item has been collected on a mandatory basis.

**Figure 3: Percentage of children and family social workers by gender**  
England, 2017



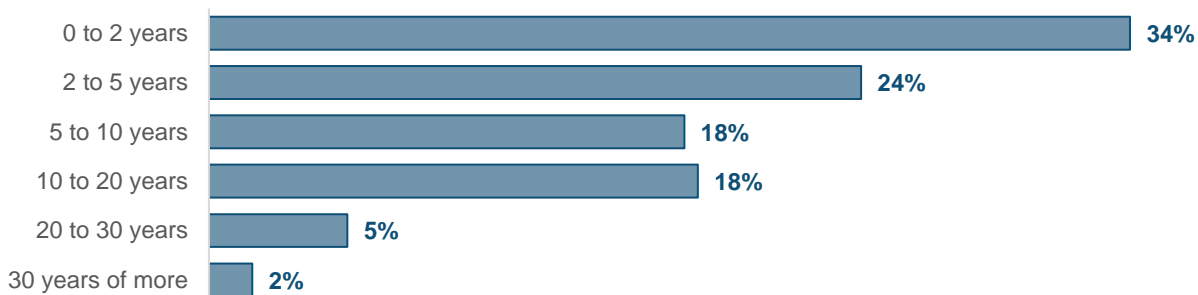
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

### Time in service at local authority

At 30 September 2017, 58% (FTE) of children and family social workers had been in service at their current local authority for less than 5 years. Previously this data item has been collected at an aggregate level, for the first time this year we are able to derive time in service directly from a social workers start date.

We are aware that in some local authorities the start date is recorded as of the current role, rather than the date at which the worker begin working for the local authority. We will be working to improve the guidance and data quality for this item in future years.

**Figure 4: Percentage of children and family social workers by time in service at local authority (FTE)**  
England, 2017



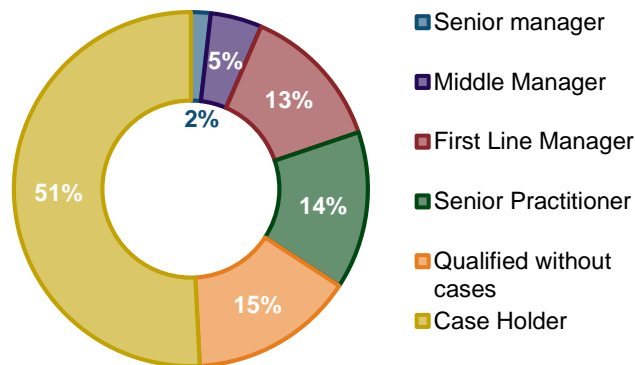
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

### Social worker role

At the 30 September 2017, 51% (FTE) of children and family social workers were reported as being in a case holder role compared to 54% in the aggregate return last year.

The proportion of workers in each role varies across local authorities. Some local authorities had difficulty mapping the roles used locally to those identified in the data collection. In future years we aim to replace this data item with one that more closely matches the role definitions used by local authorities.

**Figure 5: Percentage of children and family social workers by role (FTE)**  
England, 2017



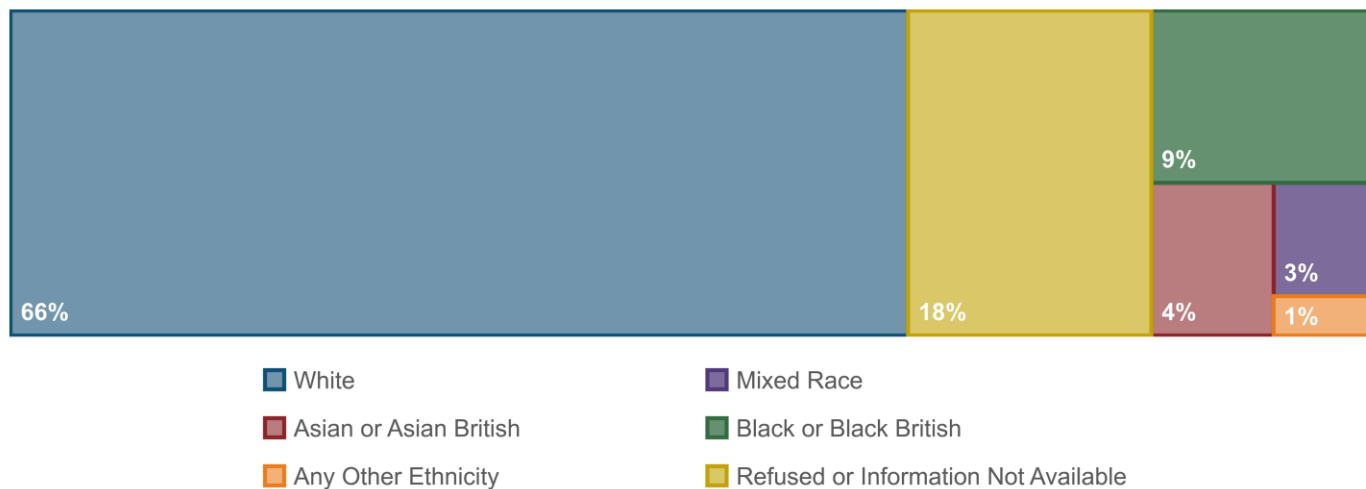
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

## Ethnic Origin

The ethnicity of social workers was collected on a mandatory basis for the first time this year. Of child and family social workers in post at 30 September 2017 66% (80% of those for whom ethnicity data were available) were of a white ethnic origin. The next largest ethnic group were Black or Black British, which made up 9% of the workforce (or 11% of those with data available).

For 18% of social workers, this data was not available, or had been refused to be disclosed.

**Figure 6: Percentage of children and family social workers by group of ethnic origin (Headcount)**  
England, 2017



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

## Qualification level

For the first time this year we have collected the qualification level for children and family social workers. Of those in post at 30 September, 91% had the qualification level populated.

Of those 46% were recorded as having an undergraduate degree which qualified them to work as a social worker, and 27% a postgraduate degree. Local authorities reported difficulty in providing this data item, with many authorities recording all individuals against one category so results should be viewed with caution.

## Number of cases and average caseload

The number of cases held by children and family social workers (including agency workers) at 30 September 2017 was 317,690, with 17,840 social workers and agency workers holding these cases.

This figure is significantly smaller than the number of children in need at 31 March. This could be due to a number of factors including differing count dates, differing interpretations of the guidance around what constitutes a case, or, as this is a new data item, data quality. As a result caution should be used interpreting this figure.

The average caseload per children and family social worker was 17.8 cases (based on FTE counts). Average caseload varied between local authorities, between 10.2 for Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames, to 26.4 for Staffordshire. Some of this variation may be down to differing local practices in case management, with some local authorities raising this as an issue during the collection.

The data items have been collected at an individual social worker level for the first time this year and allow us to calculate a specific caseload measure but they are not comparable to data from previous years. Local authorities have reported difficulties with linking the number of cases and the social worker holding those cases so care should be taken interpreting the figures.

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

### Calculating the agency worker rate

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

Agency workers are identified and recorded separately from children and family social workers employed directly by the local authority within the data collection. The number of agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September 2017 was 5,340 (FTE), this remains consistent with the number reported at 30 September 2016, 5,330 (FTE).

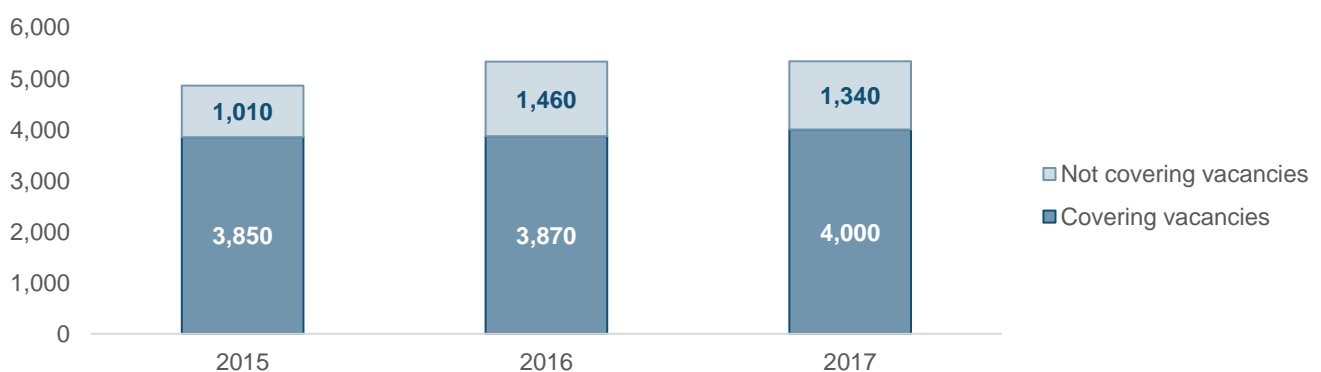
The agency worker rate at 30 September 2017 was 16% (FTE), remaining stable from 30 September 2016 when it was also 16%.

At 30 September 2017, 4,000 (FTE) of the 5,340 (FTE) agency workers working as children and family social workers at 30 September 2016 were covering vacancies – this equates to 75% (FTE) of all agency workers covering vacancies. This data item is collected on an aggregate level and is mandatory within the collection.

The percentage of agency workers covering vacancies varies between local authorities. Some local authorities report that none of their agency workers are covering vacancies whilst for other authorities all of their agency workers were covering vacancies.

Agency workers not covering vacancies could be used to manage seasonal peaks, or deal with acute backlogs, as an alternative to employing permanent social workers. For this reason, high agency worker rates do not necessarily imply recruitment and retention issues.

**Figure 7: Number of agency workers (FTE) working as children and family social workers at 30 September**  
England, 2014-15 to 2016-17



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2014-15, to 2016-17.

### 3. Vacancies (table 1d, 2)

#### Calculating the vacancy rate

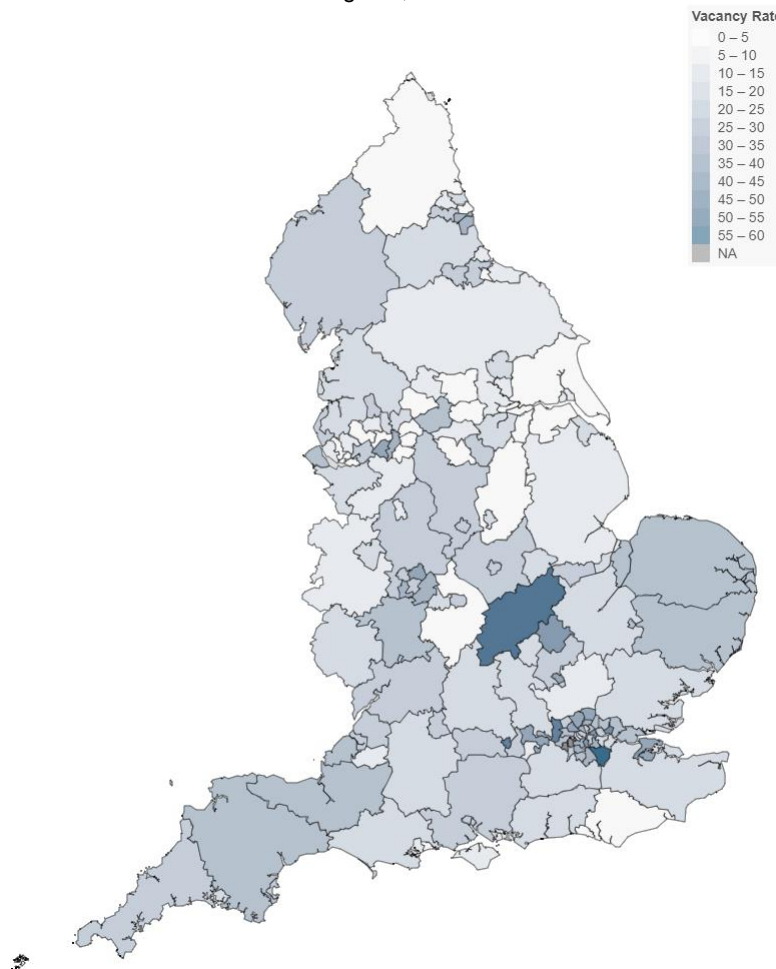
For the purpose of this collection vacancies are defined as any vacancy within a local authorities organisational structure (as FTEs), including vacancies that are not being actively recruited for, and those covered by agency workers.

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

The number of children and family social worker vacancies at 30 September 2017 was 5,820 (FTE), an increase of 5% from 5,540 (FTE) at 30 September 2016.

The vacancy rate at 30 September 2017 was 17% (FTE), remaining at 17% from 30 September 2016. There are large variations between the regions from 8% in Yorkshire & Humber to 27% (FTE) in Outer London and 24% (FTE) in Inner London.

**Figure 8: Vacancy rate by local authority (FTE)**  
England, 2017



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

### 4. Absence (table 1d, 2)

#### Calculating 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 includes all absences including long-term sickness.

The number of days missed due to sickness absence in the year ending 30 September 2017 was 226,310 days.

The absence rate during the year to 30 September 2017 was 3%; the rate varies across the regions, between 2% in Inner London and 4% in the West Midlands. These data are only mandatory for the second time this year; hence caution should be used when making year on year comparisons.

## 5. Starters and Leavers (table 1b,1c,2,4,5a,5b,6,8a,8b,9a,9b,9c,9d)

### Calculating the turnover rate

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

The FTE number of children and family social workers starting in the year ending 30 September 2017 was 5,570 (6,020 headcount). The FTE number of children and family social workers leaving in the year ending 30 September 2017 was 3,880 (4,500 headcount). The FTE turnover rate was 14% (15% headcount).

**Table 1: Number of children and family social workers leaving and starting in the year**  
England, 2017

|           | At 30 September 2017 | Starters in the year ending 30 September 2017 | Leavers in the year ending 30 September 2017 | Turnover rate |
|-----------|----------------------|---|--|---------------|
| FTE       | 28,500               | 5,570   | 3,880  | 14%           |
| Headcount | 30,670               | 6,020   | 4,500  | 15%           |

Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

### Starters during 2016-17

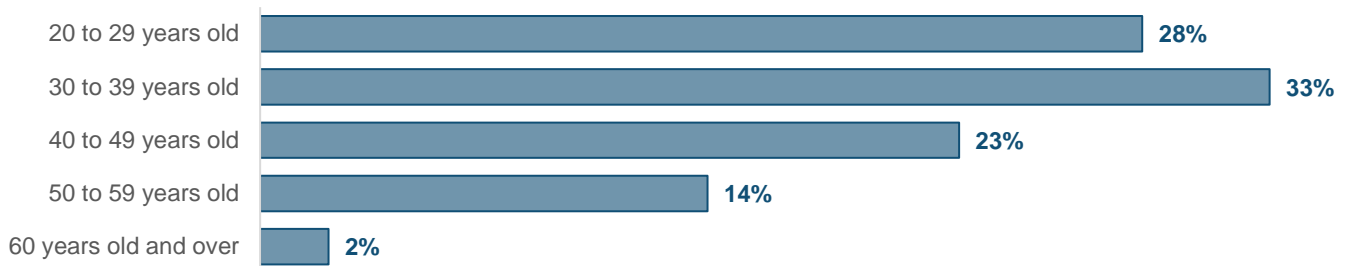
The data this year shows a large increase in the number of starters in the year compared to previous data returns. During quality assurance of the data a number of local authorities advised that, in some instances, individuals who moved between children and family social worker roles within the same department had their start date recorded as the date of the current role. As such the number of starters presented within the publication is inflated as we cannot decipher between new starters and individuals who changed roles, based on the data we have available.

Information on the number of starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September has been collected on a mandatory basis since 2013. However, for the first time at an individual level, we have collected further characteristic information for both groups. As these are new data items, they should be viewed with caution.

### Age of starters

During the year ending the 30 September 2017, 61% (FTE) of children and family social workers starting in the year were aged 39 or below.

**Figure 9: Percentage of starters in the year by age (FTE)**  
England, 2017

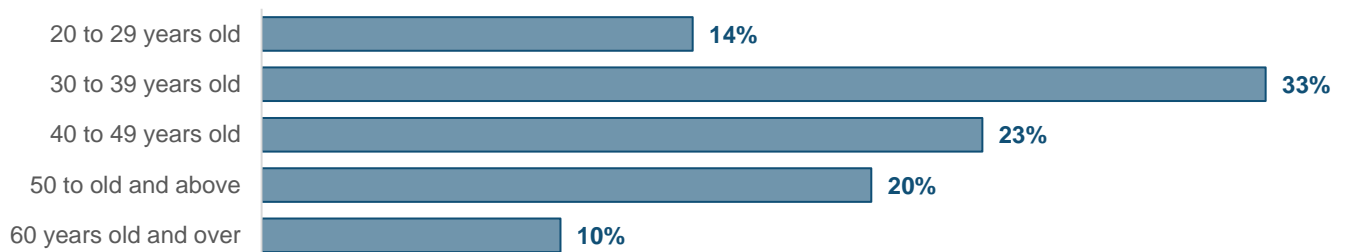


Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

### Age, and time in service of leavers

During the year ending the 30 September 2017, 56% (FTE) of children and family social workers leaving in the year were aged between 30 and 49.

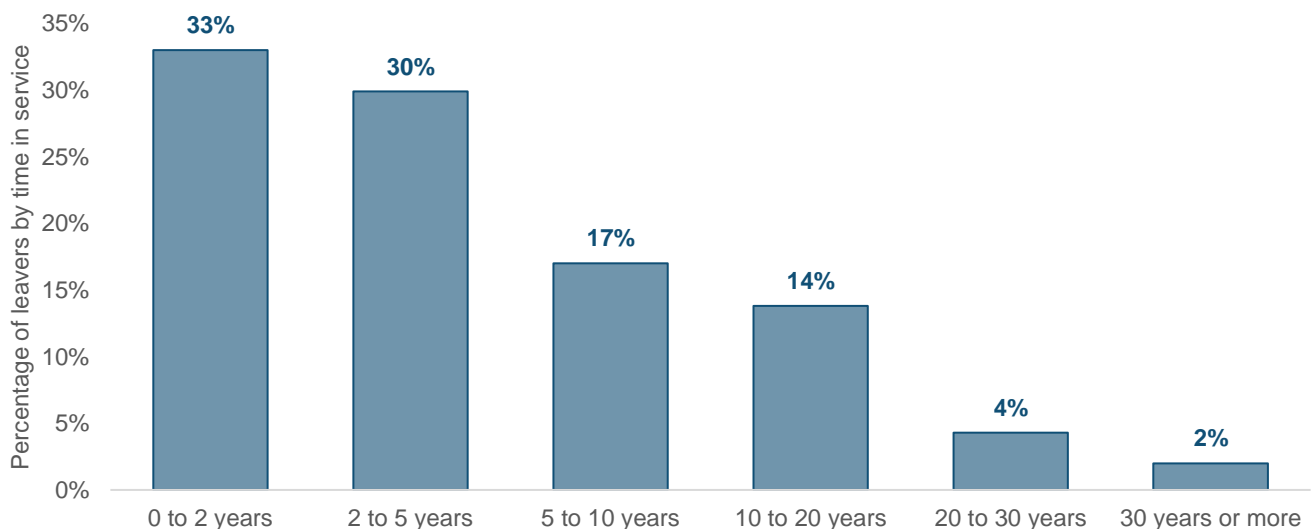
**Figure 10: Percentage of leavers in the year by age (FTE)**  
England, 2017



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

During the year ending the 30 September 2017, 63% (FTE) of children and family social workers leaving in the year had been in service for less than 5 years, compared to 60% in 2016.

**Figure 11: Percentage of leavers in the year by time in service at local authority (FTE)**  
England, 2017



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2016-17.

## 6. Information collected on a voluntary basis from individual level returns

### Warning about response rates for voluntary variables

The following section covers the new voluntary data items from the individual return, the response rate varied for each data item. The figures should be considered in conjunction with their response rates. Particular care should be taken when looking at variables that had very low response rates.

The figures in this section are not provided in the accompanying tables and are not provided below national level due to the response rates.

For the first time in 2016-17, individual social worker level data was collected on a mandatory basis. As part of the individual return, there were new voluntary data items collected which are summarised below:

- Frontline graduate
  - 48% populated in children and family social workers at 30 September
- Qualifying institution
  - 34% populated for children and family social workers at 30 September
- Reason for leaving
  - 84% for leavers within the year
- Absent on 30 September
  - 60% for children and family social workers at 30 September
  - 'Reason for absence at 30 September' was populated for all records marked as absent on 30 September. However this remains unpublished due to the partial return of data on the 'absent on 30 September' item.
- Length of current post/assignment (agency workers only)
  - 48% populated for agency workers

The completion and data quality of these data items varies by local authority.

## 7. 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 in the year |
| Table 1c | National summary of key statistics of children and family social workers leaving in the year  |
| Table 1d | National summary of key workforce statistics and rates for children and family social workers |

### Regional and local authority level

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Table 2  | Key statistics of children and family social workers by region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)                             |
| Table 3a | Number of children and family social workers by age, gender, region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)                        |
| Table 3b | Number of children and family social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs) |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Table 3c | Number of children and family social workers by role, region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)   |
| Table 3d | Number of cases held by children and family social workers, agency social workers, all social workers combined, and average caseload, by local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs) |
| Table 4  | Number of children and family social workers starting in the year by age, gender, region and local authority based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)  |
| Table 5a | Number of children and family social workers leaving in the year by age, gender, region and local authority based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)   |
| Table 5b | Number of children and family social workers leaving in the year by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on full-time equivalents (FTEs)                       |
| Table 6  | Key statistics of children and family social workers by region and local authority, based on headcount  |
| Table 7a | Number of children and family social workers by age, gender, region and local authority based on headcount  |
| Table 7b | Number of children and family social workers by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on headcount  |
| Table 7c | Number of children and family social workers by role, region and local authority based on headcount   |
| Table 7d | Number of children and family social workers by ethnicity, region and local authority, based on headcount   |
| Table 8  | Number of children and family social workers starting in the year by age, gender, region and local authority based on headcount   |
| Table 9a | Number of children and family social workers leaving in the year by age, gender, region and local authority based on headcount  |
| Table 9b | Number of children and family social workers leaving in the year by time in service at local authority, region and local authority, based on headcount  |

## 8. Further information is available

- Previous releases: [Children's social care workforce](#).
- Rest of the UK: Information on the children and family social work workforce of devolved administrations can be found at the following links:
  - [Scotland](#)
  - [Wales](#)
  - [Northern Ireland](#)
- Children in Need: [Statistical First Release Characteristics of children in need](#)
- Children Looked After: Statistical First Release [Children Looked After in England](#)

## 9. Experimental Statistics

The Department has designated these as experimental statistics, which are defined as new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.

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

## 10. Technical information

A technical document accompanies this SFR. 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.

## 11. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

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### Other enquiries/feedback

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