



28 February 2019

There were 29,470 FTE (31,720 headcount) children and family social workers at 30 September 2018, an increase of over 3% on last year

FTE for Children's social workers at 30 September



Vacancies



Agency Social Workers



= 4,000 FTE

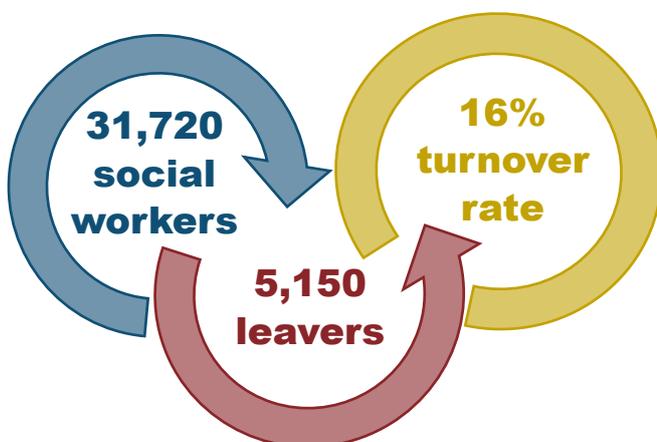
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 was 29,470, an increase of over 3% from the same point in 2017. The headcount (number of individuals regardless of working pattern) was 31,720, an increase of over 3% compared to 2017. These increases continue a longer-term trend, but may be explained 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 FTE agency workers at 30 September 2018 was 5,360, similar to the previous year.

The number of FTE vacancies in 2018 was 5,810, again similar to the previous year.

During the year ending 30 September 2018, headcount turnover rate was 16%



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

The number of children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 was 31,720 (headcount). The number of children and family social workers leaving in the preceding 12 months was 5,150 (headcount).

The turnover rate (defined as number of leavers divided by the number of workers in place at 30 September 2018) was 16% (headcount) compared to 15% in the previous year.

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About this release

This experimental statistical 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 2018. This is the sixth 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 second publication based on the individual-level social worker collection, previous years were 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 Government Statistical Service website [here](#).

Users are advised to read 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 years’ published statistics should be made 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 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 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

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.

FTE and headcount

Throughout the publication we present figures at both full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount level. Headcount is a count of all distinct social worker records and FTEs are 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.

Number of social workers in place as at 30 September 2018

The number of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 was 29,470, an increase of 3% from 28,500 at the same point in the previous year. The corresponding headcount of children and family social workers was 31,720, also an increase of 3% and up from 30,670 in the previous year.

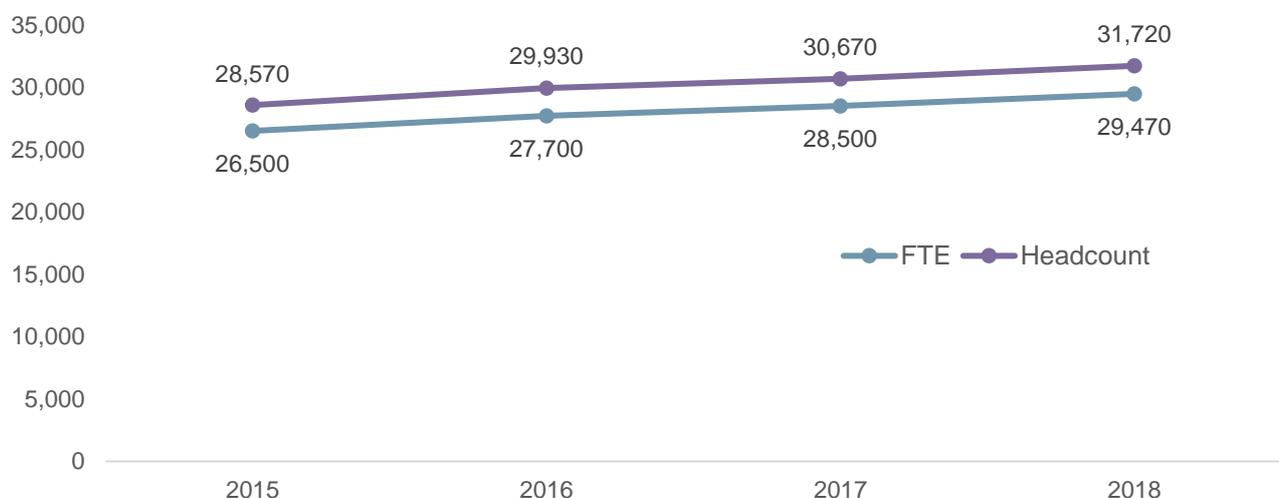
These increases continue the upward trend from previous years. However, it is possible that they are explained by improvements in the data collection over time, rather than an actual increase in the number of social workers (see note below).

Note on year-on-year changes

Year on year comparisons should be treated with caution as the data collection method changed between 2016 and 2017. Prior to the 2017 collection, data returns were made at an aggregate level, whereas for the past two years all local authorities have completed an individual social worker level data return. The individual level data collection is relatively new and therefore the increase in the number of children and family social workers may be due to improved data quality and better interpretation of the department's guidance.

This is supported by the 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 and validation of the data a number of local authorities have confirmed that the method for counting social workers is more robust this year compared to last year.

Figure 1: Number of children and family social workers at 30 September
England, 2015-2018

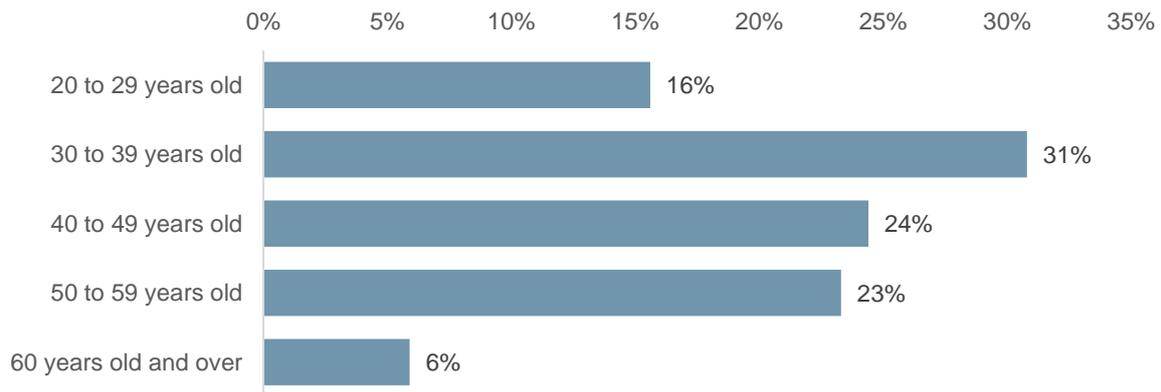


Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2014-15 to 2017-18.

Age and gender of children and family social workers

At 30 September 2018, 55% of FTE children and family social workers were between 30 and 49 years of age. The overall age distribution of children and family social workers remains similar to last year and is shown below.

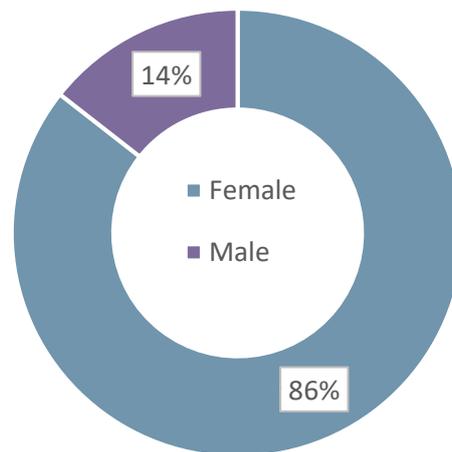
Figure 2: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 by age
England, 2018



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

At 30 September 2018 the majority of children and family social workers were female; 86% were female and 14% male. This remains relatively unchanged from 2017.

Figure 3: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 by gender
England, 2018



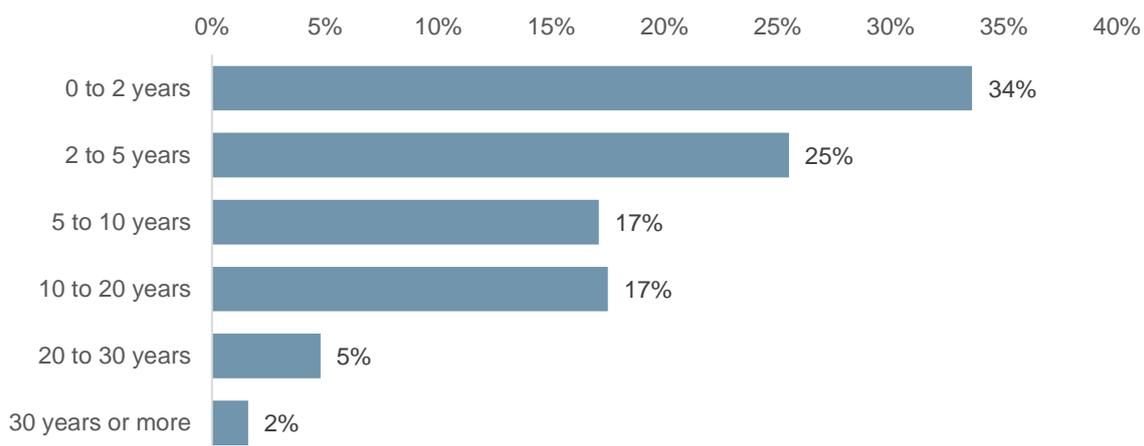
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

Time in service at local authority

At 30 September 2018, 59% of FTE children and family social workers had been in service at their current local authority for less than 5 years.

We are aware that some local authorities record start date as the start of the current role, rather than the date at which a social worker began working for the local authority. Start date is used to derive the time in service measure, therefore the data for this measure should be treated with caution. We will work to improve the guidance and data quality for this item for the future.

Figure 4: Percentage of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September 2018 by time in service at local authority England, 2018



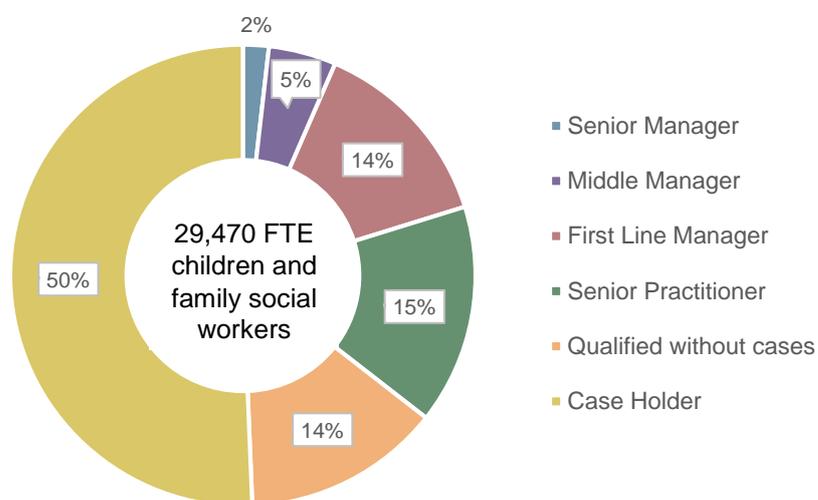
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

Social worker role

At 30 September 2018, just over half (51%) of FTE children and family social workers were reported as being in a case holder role.

The proportion of workers in each role varies across local authorities. Some local authorities had difficulty mapping the roles they use locally to those identified in the data collection. In future years we plan to improve this data item so that it more closely matches the role definitions used by local authorities.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and family social workers by role (FTE) England, 2018



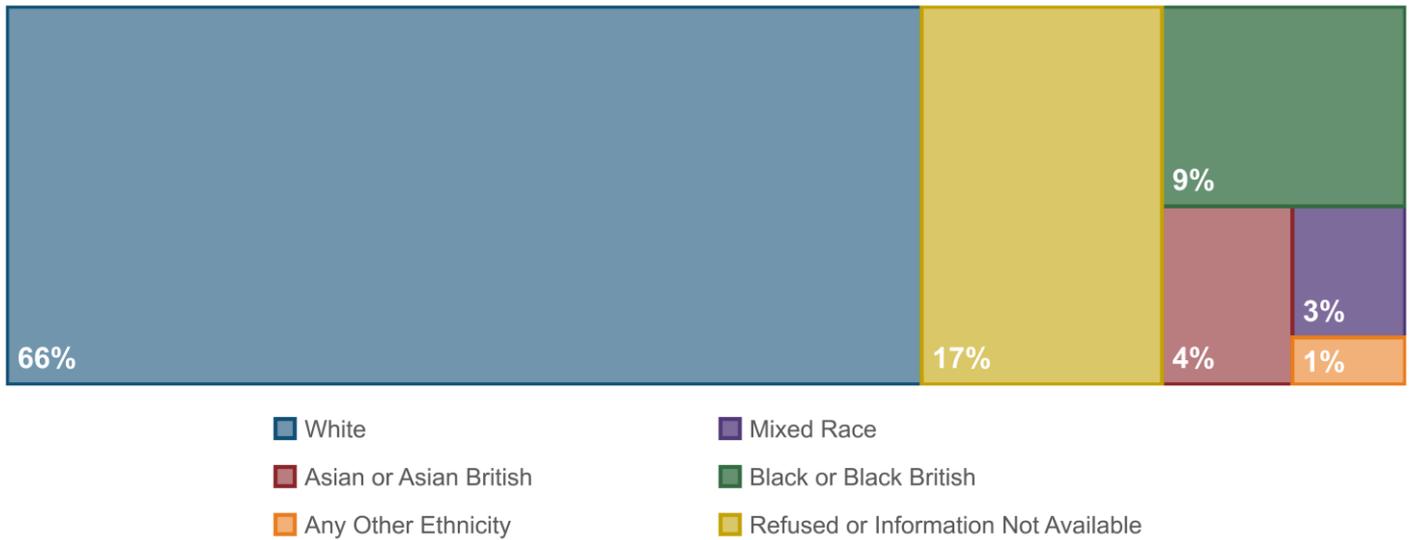
Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

Ethnic Origin

The ethnicity of social workers was collected on a mandatory basis for the second time this year. Of the headcount of 31,720 child and family social workers in post at 30 September 2018, 65% (or 79% of those for whom ethnicity data was available) were of a white ethnic origin. The next largest ethnic group was Black or Black British, which made up 9% of the workforce (or 11% of those with data available). Overall the ethnicity distribution of children and family social workers was very similar to last year.

For 17% of social workers ethnicity data was not available or had been refused to be disclosed, down slightly from 18% last year.

Figure 6: Percentage of children and family social workers by group of ethnic origin (Headcount)
England, 2018



Source: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

Number of cases and average caseload

Cases

A case is defined as:

- 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

Average caseload

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

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

The number of cases held by children and family social workers (including agency workers) at 30 September 2018 was 327,420, with 18,790 social workers and agency workers holding these cases.

The number of cases held 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 issues. As a result caution should be used when interpreting these figures.

Collecting individual level data for the past two years allows us to calculate an average caseload measure. Local authorities have reported difficulties with linking the number of cases to the social worker holding those cases, therefore care should be taken interpreting caseload figures.

The average caseload per children and family social worker was 17.4 cases (based on FTE counts), which is down from an average of 17.8 in 2017. Average caseload varied between local authorities from 12.0 for Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames to 26.8 for North East Lincolnshire. Some of this variation may be explained by different local practices in case management.

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

Calculating the FTE agency worker rate

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

There were 5,360 FTE agency children and family social workers at 30 September 2018, which is relatively unchanged from the 5,340 reported the previous year. The corresponding headcount of agency workers was 5,530, down from 5,690 last year. Last year some agency worker records didn't have an FTE recorded so would have been reflected in the headcount figure but not in the FTE.

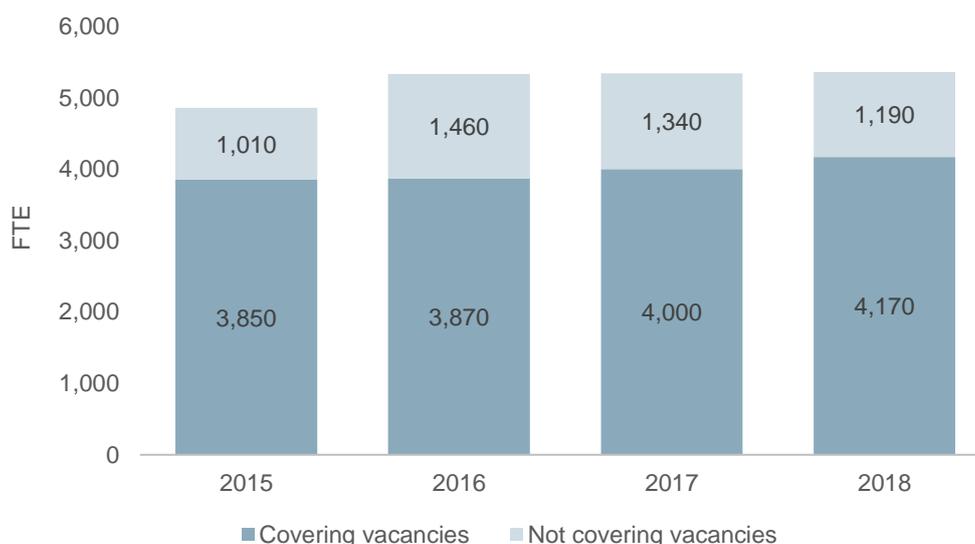
The FTE agency worker rate at 30 September 2018 was 15%, down from 16% last year.

At 30 September 2018, 78% of FTE agency children and family social workers were covering vacancies, up from 75% last year.

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 others 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 a local authority has recruitment and retention issues.

Figure 7: Number of FTE agency workers working as children and family social workers
England, 2015 to 2018



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2014-15, to 2017-18.

3. Vacancies (tables 1d, 2)

Calculating the vacancy rate

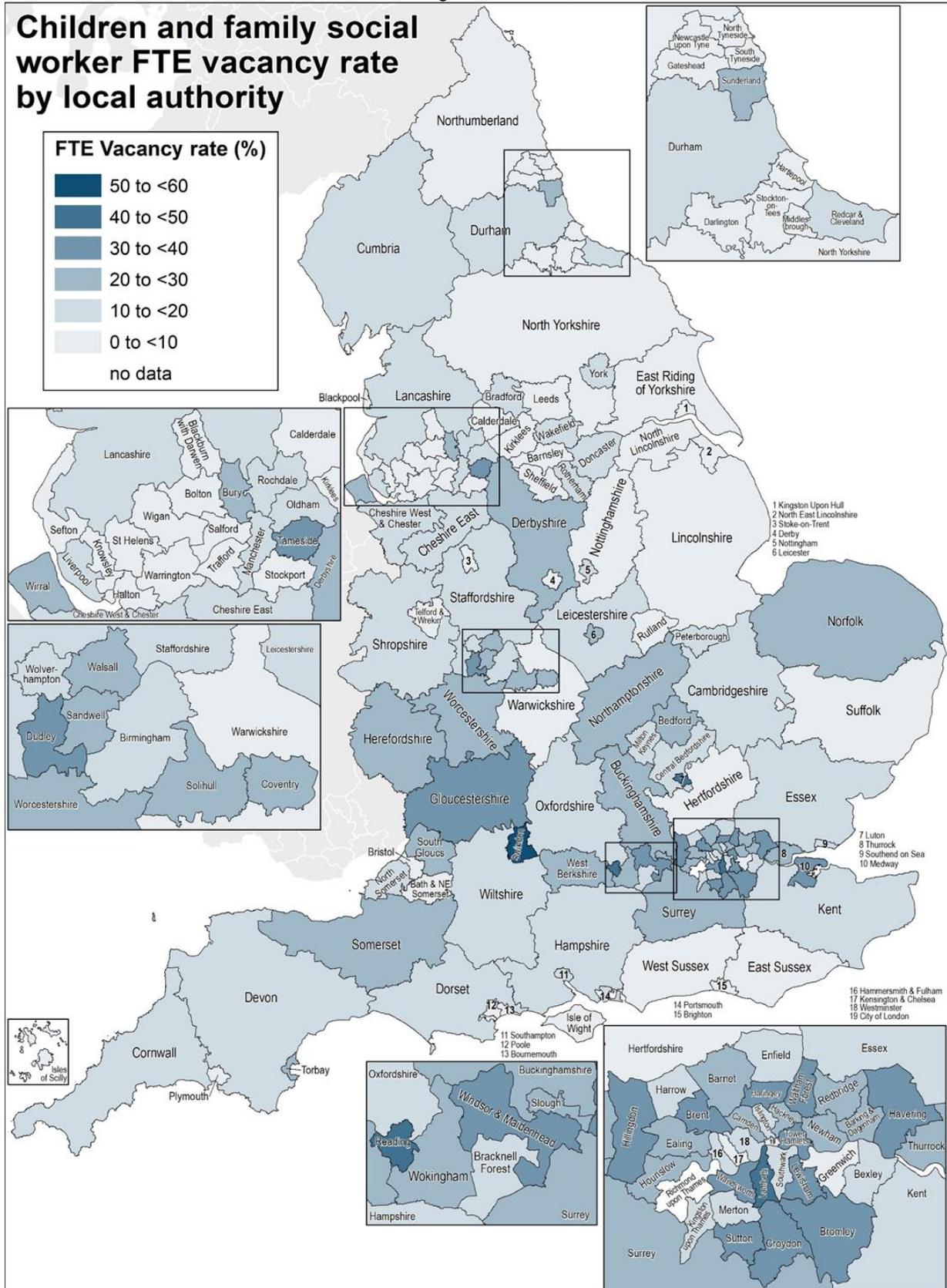
For the purpose of this collection vacancies are defined as any FTE vacancy within a local authority's organisational structure, including vacancies that are not being actively recruited for, and those covered by agency workers.

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

The number of children and family social worker FTE vacancies at 30 September 2018 was 5,810, which was relatively unchanged from the 5,820 reported at the same point in 2017.

The overall FTE vacancy rate at 30 September 2018 was 16%, which again was relatively unchanged from 2017. There were large variations between regions, however: Yorkshire & Humber had the lowest vacancy rate at 6% and London the highest at 26%.

Figure 8: FTE vacancy rate by local authority
England, 2018



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

4. Absence (tables 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 2018 was 235,660 days. This equates to an absence rate during the year of 3%, which is unchanged compared to 2017.

The absence rate varies across the regions, from 2% in London to 4% in the North West and West Midlands.

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

Note on starters and leavers figures

Users should be cautious when looking at the starters and leavers figures. Local authorities have advised that there may be some confusion or differing interpretations of the guidance regarding these data items.

Starters – individuals who moved between children and family social worker roles within the department may have had their start date recorded as the date of the current role rather than the date they started work in the children's services department.

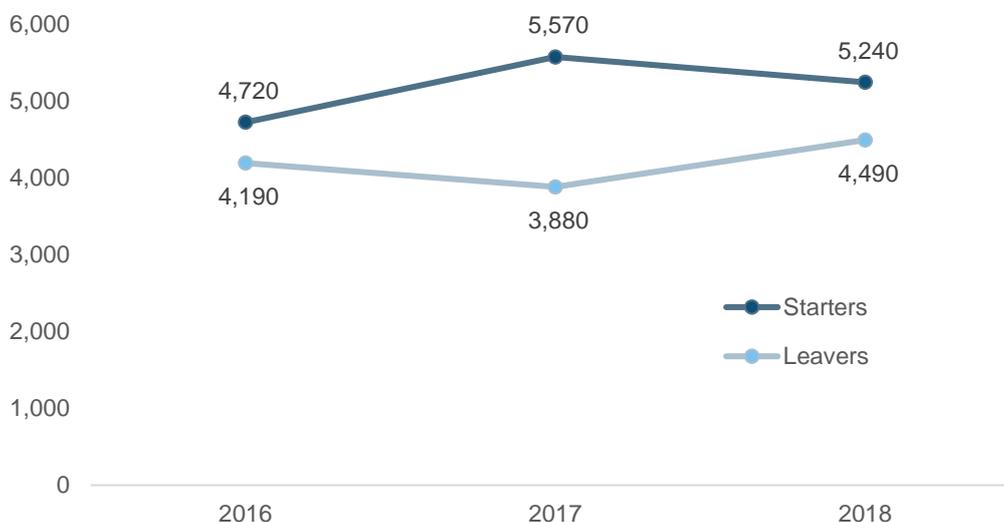
Leavers – it should be noted that these are leavers from a child and family social worker role in the local authority, rather than leaving the social work profession altogether: for example, leavers may be moving to a different local authority, to a non child and family social work role within the same LA, or leaving the profession.

In addition, there is the potential for the 2017 figures to be out of line, as this was the first year of the individual level collection. This is shown in Figure 9.

As in previous years the number of social workers starting within the year is higher than the number leaving during the year.

For the past three years there have been more starters than leavers (see chart below), reflecting the overall increase in the number of social workers. However, the increase in the number of children and family social workers differs from the net increase based on the difference between starters and leavers.

Figure 9: Number of FTE starters and leavers in the year
England, 2016 - 2018



Starters during 2017-18

This year's data shows a decrease in the number of starters during the year ending 30 September 2018 compared to 2017. There were 5,240 FTE starters (5,750 headcount), down by 6% (4% headcount) compared to last year.

Leavers during 2017-18

In contrast to starters, the number of leavers increased during the year ending 30 September 2018 compared to last year. There were 4,490 FTE leavers (5,150 headcount) during the year, an increase of 16% (15% headcount) on 2017.

The FTE turnover rate was 15%, an increase from 14% in 2017.

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.

Leavers are defined as leaving a child and family social worker role in the local authority: for example, leavers may be moving to a different local authority, to a different social work role, or leaving the profession altogether.

Calculating the turnover rate

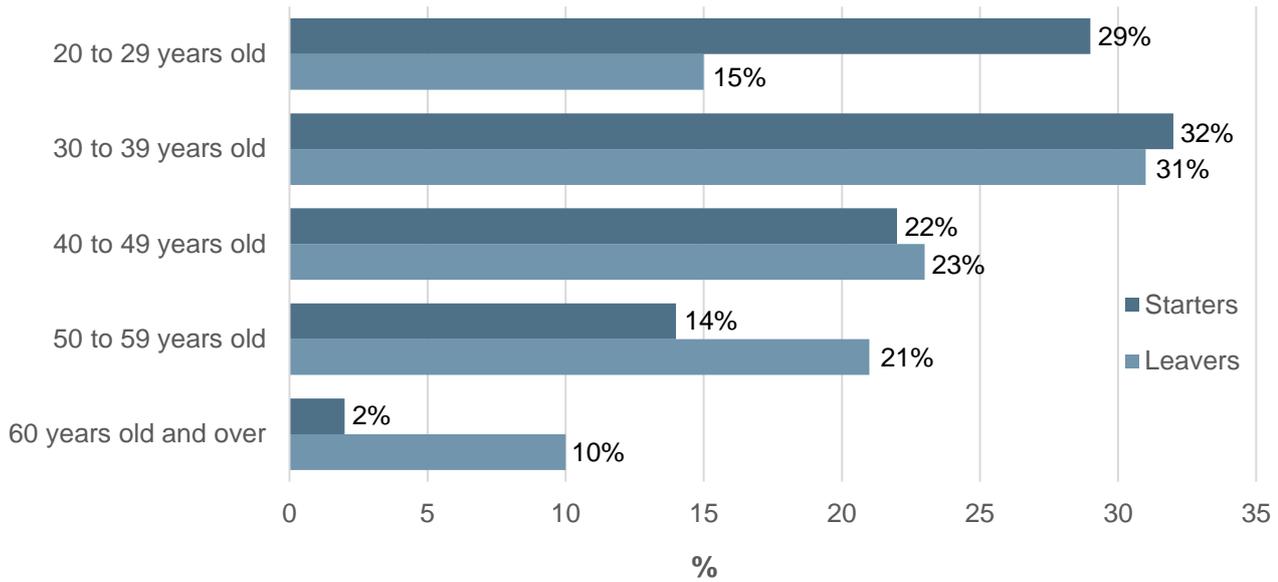
$$\frac{\text{Number of FTE children and family social workers leaving in the year ending at 30 September}}{\text{Number of FTE children and family social workers at 30 September}}$$

Information on the number of starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September has been collected on a mandatory basis since 2013. Since moving to an individual data collection last year we have collected additional characteristic information for both groups.

Age of starters and leavers

As would be expected, more 20 to 29 year olds (FTE) were starters (29%) than leavers (15%), and more 50 to 59 year olds were leavers (21%) than starters (14%), during the year ending 30 September 2018. For 30 to 39 and 40 to 49 year olds, similar percentages were recorded as starters and leavers.

Figure 10: Percentage of starters and leavers in the year by age group (FTE)
England, 2018

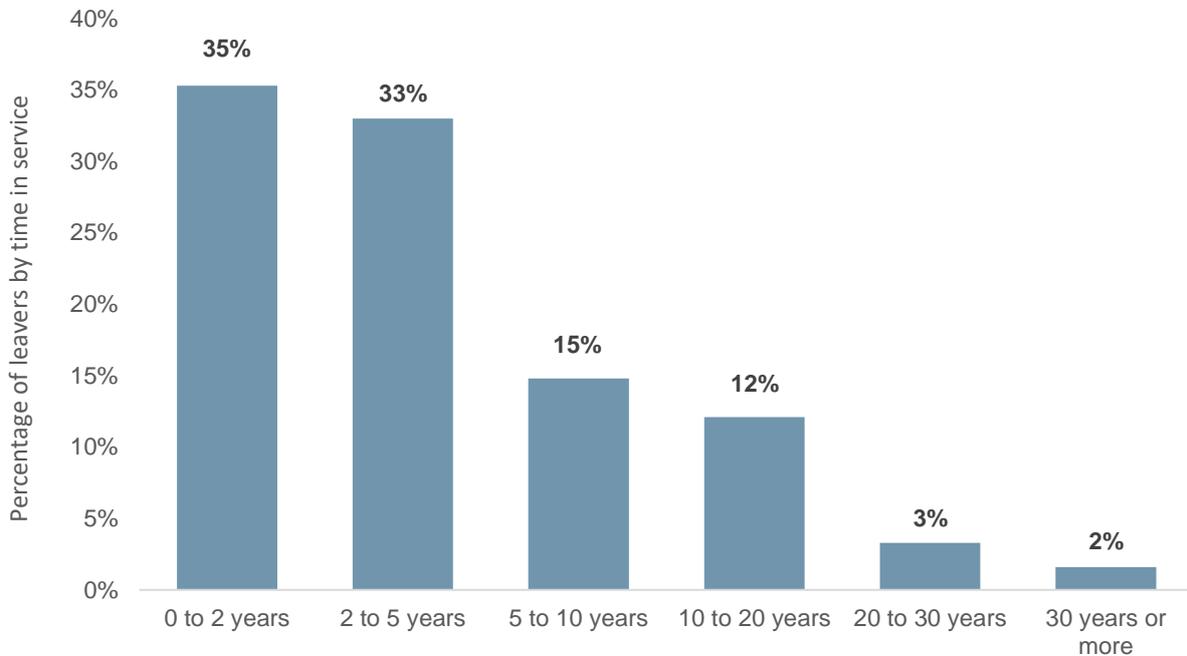


Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

Time in service of leavers

During the year ending the 30 September 2018, 68% of FTE children and family social workers leaving in the year had been in service in their local authority for less than 5 years, up from 63% in 2017.

Figure 11: Percentage of leavers in the year by time in service (FTE)
England, 2018



Sources: Children and family social worker workforce collection 2017-18.

6. Data items not covered in the tables

Warning about variable response

The following section covers other data items from the data return which are not provided in the accompanying tables and are not provided below national level because of low response rates or concerns regarding the quality of the data. The response rate varied for each data item and is detailed below, the figures should be considered in conjunction with their response rates.

These are all data items that are relatively new to the data collection or are collected on a voluntary basis. We will work to further improve data quality for these items going forward with a view to publishing information in future releases.

Qualification level

This is the second year we have collected the qualification level for children and family social workers. Of those in post at 30 September, 97% had the qualification level populated.

Of those, 50% were recorded as having an undergraduate degree which qualified them to work as a social worker, 29% a postgraduate degree and 19% other. Some local authorities have reported difficulty in providing this data item, with some authorities recording all individuals against one category so results should be viewed with caution.

Qualifying institution

- Populated for only 38% of children and family social workers at 30 September

Origin when started

- Populated for all starters, however 70% are recorded as 'Not known' or 'Not yet collected'

Destination of leaver

- Populated for all leavers, however 76% are recorded as 'Not known' or 'Not yet collected'.

Reason for leaving

- Populated for all leavers but 11% recorded as 'Not known' or 'Not yet collected'; this data item is mandatory for the first time this year

Voluntary data items

Absent on 30 September

- Populated for only 69% of children and family social workers at 30 September

Length of current post/assignment (agency workers only)

- Only populated for 67% of agency workers

Knowledge and skills statement

Populated for only 21% of social workers in post at the 30th September

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 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

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: [Characteristics of children in need](#)
- Children Looked After: [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 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.

11. Get in touch

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