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NOTIFICATIONS OF PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLAND: YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2013

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides figures on notifications received by local authorities (LAs) 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.

Over the past 5 years, the number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements has steadily increased but the number of arrangements at 31 March is at its lowest in 5 years. This is because not all notifications go on to be classified as private fostering arrangements if they do not meet the requirements. The decrease in arrangements at 31 March can also be explained by more arrangements ending in the year than new arrangements starting.

In previous years the majority of children reported to be privately fostered were born in the UK, however numbers from overseas have been increasing meaning for the first time the majority are now born overseas.

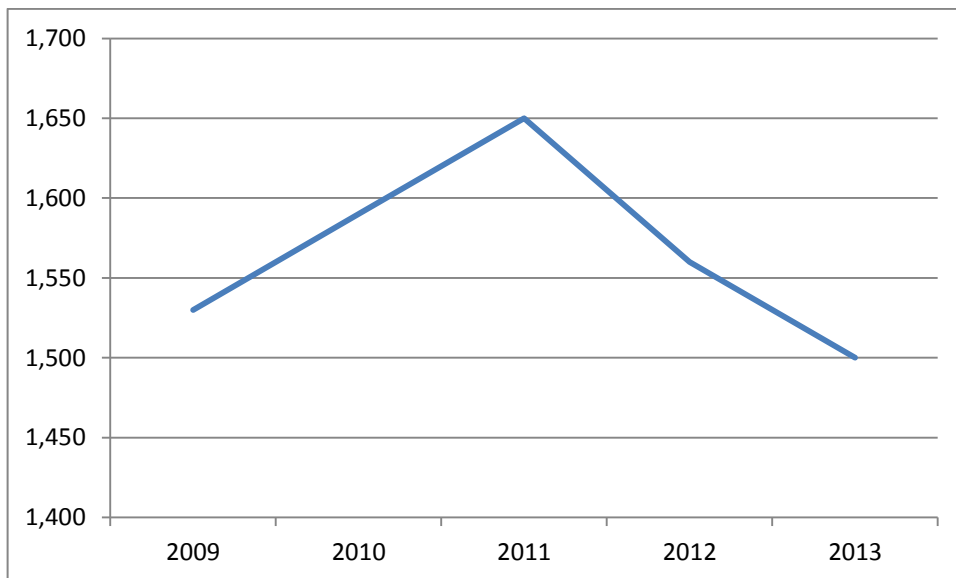
The figures reported in the SFR are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. This is because there is doubt over whether all parents, carers and other relevant third parties currently report the existence of these arrangements to their LA. We are not clear whether the changes in the number of arrangements seen is due to changes in activity in private fostering or a change in the reporting of such arrangements. Readers are cautioned against using the figures in this SFR as an estimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. Further information on the issue of under-reporting can be found in the Quality and Uses document, which accompanies this SFR and can be found on the publication webpage.

The figures in this SFR are still important as they allow the Department to monitor LA performance against the requirements for carrying out visits under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. LAs are required to visit the child and the foster carer to satisfy themselves about the child's welfare. Further details of these visits can be found in the Technical Notes.

MAIN POINTS

- At 31 March 2013, 1,500 children were reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. This is a decrease of 4% compared with 1,560 children reported at 31 March 2012 and a decrease of 2% compared with 1,530 at 31 March 2009.
- The number of children reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements steadily increased between 2009 and 2011 where it peaked at 1,650 reported arrangements. Since then the number has decreased and it is now at its lowest level in 5 years.

Figure 1: Number of children reported as being under private fostering arrangements at 31 March in England



- Compared to the previous year, 5 regions saw a fall in the number of reported arrangements and 4 regions saw an increase. The East of England had the greatest increase of 18% and the North East the greatest decrease at 29%.
- 2,500 new private fostering arrangements were reported to have begun during the year to 31 March 2013. This is an increase of 3% compared with 2,420 new arrangements reported in the previous year and a 26% increase compared with 1,980 beginning during the year to 31 March 2009.
- During the year to 31 March 2013, 2,590 private fostering arrangements were reported to have ended. This is a 3% increase compared with 2,520 arrangements reported as ending during the previous year and a 52% increase compared with 1,700 reported as ending during the year to 31 March 2009. This figure has steadily increased over the past 5 years.
- The proportion of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits within 7 working days is at its lowest level in the past 5 years, at 72%. This figure was 77% in both 2009 and 2012.

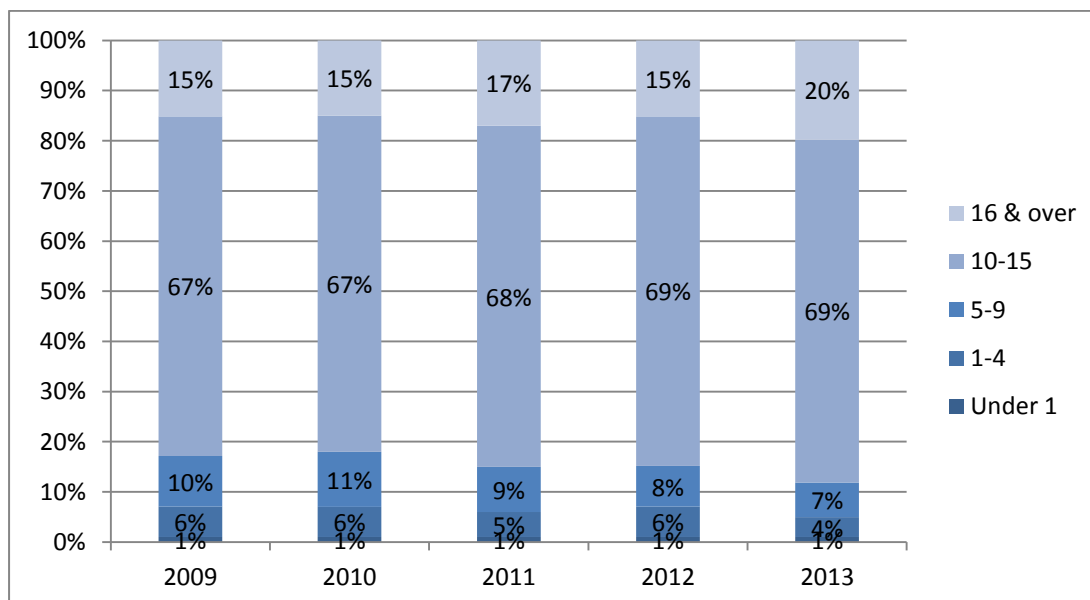
Table 1: Number of children reported to be in private fostering arrangements

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Children reported as cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements as at 31 March	1,530	1,590	1,650	1,560	1,500
New arrangements reported during the year	1,980	1,940	2,310	2,420	2,500
Arrangements which were reported to have ended during the year	1,700	1,950	2,330	2,520	2,590
Cases where action was taken in accordance with the requirements for carrying out visits	1,880	2,040	2,420	2,420	2,820
<i>of which; dealt with within 7 working days (%)</i>	77	75	77	77	72

Characteristics of children reported to be privately fostered

- The majority of children reported to be privately fostered are aged 10 to 15, the same as in previous years.
- Compared to the previous year, there has been an increase in the proportion of older children and a decrease in the proportion of younger children.
- The proportion of children reported to be privately fostered who are aged 16 and over had increased from 15% to 20%, and the proportion aged 1 to 9 has decreased from 15% to 12%.

Figure 2: Age breakdown of children reported to start private fostering arrangements

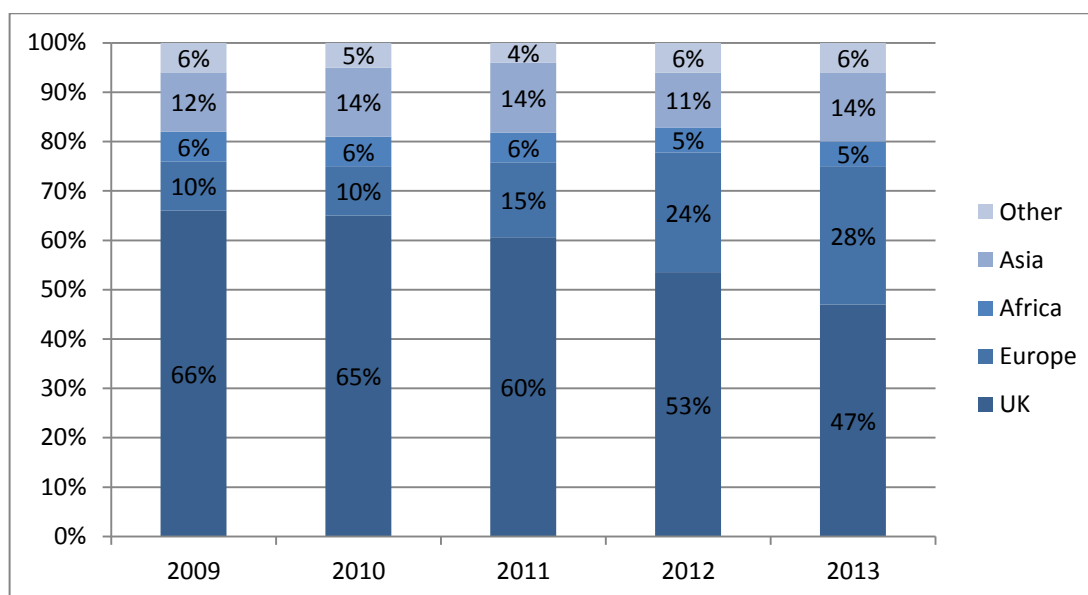


Note: Age breakdowns for 2012 will differ from those published in the 2012 publication. Bournemouth local authority reported an error in their 2011-12 PF1 return after publication. All their new private fostering arrangements were incorrectly reported as aged 5 to 9, rather than aged 10 to 15. The correct data is shown in this chart.

- The proportion of children reported to be privately fostered who were born in the UK has decreased over the past 5 years. In 2013 it was 47% meaning for the first time since the data collection began in 2005, the majority of children are now born overseas.
- The percentage of children reported to be privately fostered who were born in Europe

was 28%, an increase from 24% in 2012 and 10% in 2009.

Figure 3: Breakdown of place of birth for children reported to start private fostering arrangements



Percentage of reported arrangements where visits were made within the required timescales

- 2,500 arrangements were reported to have begun on or after 1 April 2012 and of these, 69% (1,710) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than 6 weeks¹. This has increased from 65% in the previous year and 64% in 2010 (the first year this data was collected²).
- Performance varied across the regions, the South East achieved the highest percentage of visits within the timescales, at 83%, and the South West achieved the lowest, at 62%.
- 1,490 arrangements were reported to be ongoing at 1 April 2012 and of these, 67% (1,000) were visited within the required timescales of intervals of not more than 12 weeks¹. This has increased from 66% in the previous year and 62% in 2010.
- The proportion of ongoing arrangements which were visited within the required timescale ranged from 48% in the South West to 83% in East of England.

¹ See Technical Note 7 for further information.

² For more information, see the Private Fostering data quality note

TABLES

Table 1: Number of children reported to local authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements, years ending 31 March 2009 to 2013.

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 2013.

Table 3: Number and percentage of reported new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2013 and place of birth.

Table 4: Number and percentage of reported arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within the timescales, year ending 31 March 2013.

All of the tables above are available in Excel format on the publication webpage.

As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications and to make data more accessible, supporting underlying data will be published at the same time as the publication. Further detail on the underlying data can be found in the Quality and Uses Document on the publication webpage.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Background

1. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (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. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but if a child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.

2. Parents and carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority when entering into a private fostering arrangement; local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment, and to monitor the arrangement. Some notifications are received from parties involved in private fostering arrangements, often private foster carers or young people. These notifications tend to occur once the arrangement is well underway, and often come about as a result of a private foster carer approaching the authority for general support or advice. On occasion authorities are notified of private fostering when the arrangement is in crisis and in danger of breaking down. Reasons for such crises could be because of a breakdown in financial arrangements between the private foster carer(s) and the birth parent(s), or conflict between the privately fostered child and their carer.

Methodology

3. Details of the methodology used in this SFR are published in a separate document which can be found on the publication webpage.

Legislation

4. 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.

5. The requirements of Regulation 4(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority have received notification under regulation 3 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 7 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.

6. The requirements of Regulation 7(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for

Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority have received a notification under regulation 5 or 6 they must for the purposes of discharging their functions under section 67(1) of the Act, arrange for an officer of the authority within 7 working days to:

- (a) visit the premises where the child is being cared for and accommodated;
- (b) visit and speak to the 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 3 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

7. 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 6 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

8. 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 on the publication webpage.

Rounding

9. 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 10.
- Percentages are displayed to the nearest whole number and are calculated using unrounded numbers.

10. In line with the Department for Education's Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality (link below), numbers in the publication are rounded to the nearest ten. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-official-statistics-published-by-the-department-for-education>

National Statistics

11. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

Research

12. Provisions on private fostering in the Children Act 2004 and the new Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into effect on 1 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/stats/private/a00216789/pf1-2012-13>

13. There have been long-running concerns about the under-reporting of private fostering arrangements as evidenced in a leaflet for professionals produced by the Department of Health (2001)³. This suggested there were around 10,000 children under private fostering arrangements at any given time. However, this figure is 11 years out of date and there are also concerns around the accuracy of this figure. These concerns were reiterated in a research document funded by DCSF (Research into Private Fostering) was published in March 2010 and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-into-private-fostering>

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.

14. The DCSF-funded research explored the sources of private fostering notifications. Overall, most local authorities' notifications were received from statutory agencies, particularly from other social workers and education. Analysis revealed that the groups most likely to notify local authorities of private fostering arrangements are (in order):

- Social workers (this group was a long way ahead in terms of making 'frequent' or 'occasional' notifications)
- Teachers in state schools
- 'Others' (including agencies outside of the Children's Trust/children's workforce)
- Health workers

The same research identified some common circumstances where private fostering arrangements occurred through surveys and case studies:

- African and Caribbean children with parents and family abroad
- Children attending language schools
- Children sent to the UK for educational purposes
- Local children living apart from their families due to parental problems
- "Sofa-surfers" – teenagers making their own arrangements to stay with friends' families or adults

The research also cited the following as some reasons why private fostering arrangements are failed to be reported:

- Lack of awareness or confusion as to what constitutes as a private fostering arrangement
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Agencies not aware of their responsibility to notify
- Insufficient awareness among parties involved in private fostering arrangements

Related Publications

³ <http://lx.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Private%20fostering.pdf>

15. 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/researchandstatistics/statistics/a00213762/>

16. 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 2012 are available at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2012/1210311/;jsessionid=2FF3D9867129F1314A09737654FC196D?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

17. 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

18. Any queries or comments on the statistics in this publication should be addressed to:

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