



Department  
for Education

# **Methodology document**

**Notifications of private fostering  
arrangements in England: year ending 31  
March 2014**

**July 2014**

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# 1. Background

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.

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.

The figures in Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements in England Statistical First Release (SFR) are taken from the PF1 statistical return for 2013-14, along with historical figures taken from the collections for 2006-07 to 2012-13. The PF1 return provides the Department for Education (DfE) with aggregate data on the number of children reported to be cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements at 31 March, and the number of reported new arrangements and the number of arrangements reported to have ceased during the year to 31 March. The PF1 statistical return was introduced from 1 April 2004, this is the eleventh year of collection.

## 2. Methodology

Local authorities (LAs) return their information on the number of private fostering arrangements to DfE via the COLLECT (Collections On-Line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers) system.

### 2.1 Data cleaning

COLLECT has built-in validation rules which flag up data which is invalid or the quality is questionable. This allows LAs to identify errors and clean the data before they submit it to DfE. Validation rules can either be errors (data is invalid) or queries (data quality is questionable but could be accurate in certain circumstances). LAs are encouraged to clean all errors and double-check data where queries are flagged. LAs can add notes to their return if there is a genuine reason for “unusual” data. The following table details the validation rules which are ran against section 1 of the data in COLLECT:

Validation rule	COLLECT Message	Error or query
Local authority code (Item 1) needs a standard 3 digit local authority education code.	LA number is invalid.	Error
Item 2 is the number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements received during the year. Item 3 is the number of cases (i.e. notifications) where action was taken in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 4(1) of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 for carrying out visits.  <i>If Item 3 &lt; 0.9 * Item 2 then the following warning should appear:</i>	Please check: Number of children where action was taken in accordance with the requirements for carrying out visits is less than 90% of the number of notifications.	Query
Item 3 should be less than or equal to Item 2.	Item 3 should be less than or equal to Item 2.	Error
Item 4 is the number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days of receipt of notification of the private fostering arrangement.  <i>Item 4 should be less than or equal to Item 3.</i>	Item 4 should be less than or equal to Item 3.	Error
<i>If Item 4 &lt; 0.7 * Item 3 then the following warning should appear:</i>	Please check: Number of cases where required action was taken within 7	Query

Validation rule	COLLECT Message	Error or query
	working days is less than 70%.	
Item 5 is the number of new private fostering arrangements that began during the year. Item 6 is the number of new private fostering arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2013 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks.  <i>Item 6 should be an integer and should be less than or equal to item 5.</i>	Item 6 should be an integer and should be $\leq$ Item 5.	Error
If $\text{Item 6} < 0.7 * \text{Item 5}$ then the following warning should appear:	Please check: Number of arrangements where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks is less than 70%.	Query
Item 7 is the number of private fostering arrangements that began BEFORE 1 April 2013 that were continuing on 1 April 2013. Item 8 is the number of private fostering arrangements that began before 1 April 2013 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks.  <i>Item 8 should be an integer and should be less than or equal to Item 7.</i>	Item 8 should be an integer and should be $\leq$ Item 7.	Error
If $\text{Item 8} < 0.7 * \text{Item 7}$ then the following warning should appear:	Please check: Number of arrangements where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks is less than 70%.	Query
All boxes should be greater than or equal to zero – applies to all items in section 1.	This item should be greater than or equal to zero.	Error
All items are mandatory (sets all fields to mandatory)	[Data item name] is mandatory.	Error

Section 2 data is a table which splits the number of reported new private fostering arrangements that began during the year by the age of the child and their place of birth. Additional validation checks are ran to ensure (i) all rows and columns sum together in the table, (ii) all items are greater than or equal to zero and (iii) all items are completed.

## 2.2 Data processing

Once all England LAs have submitted and cleaned their data, a final dataset is formed which contains the variables listed in the table below. The underlying data used in this publication is available to download from the publication webpage.

The underlying data zip file contains the data itself in .csv format and metadata in .txt format. The metadata document contains a list of the variables and their definitions.

## 2.3. Production of Statistical First Release

The SFR contains 6 tables which cover:

1. Number of children reported to local authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements, years ending 2007 to 2014
2. Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, and of those the number that were carried out within 7 working days, years ending 2007 to 2014
- 3a. Number and percentage of reported new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2014 and place of birth
- 3b. Number and percentage of reported new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child and place of birth, years ending 2007 to 2014
- 4a. Number and percentage of reported new arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within 6 weeks, years ending 2010 to 2014
- 4b. Number and percentage of reported ongoing arrangements where scheduled visits were completed in 12 weeks, years ending 2010 to 2014

Data in Tables 1, 2, 4a and 4b is presented at region level, Table 3a and Table 3b at national level. The majority of the data items in the tables are taken directly from the dataset. Extra analysis is only required for the calculation of percentages. The numerator and denominator used to calculate the percentages in each table are shown below:

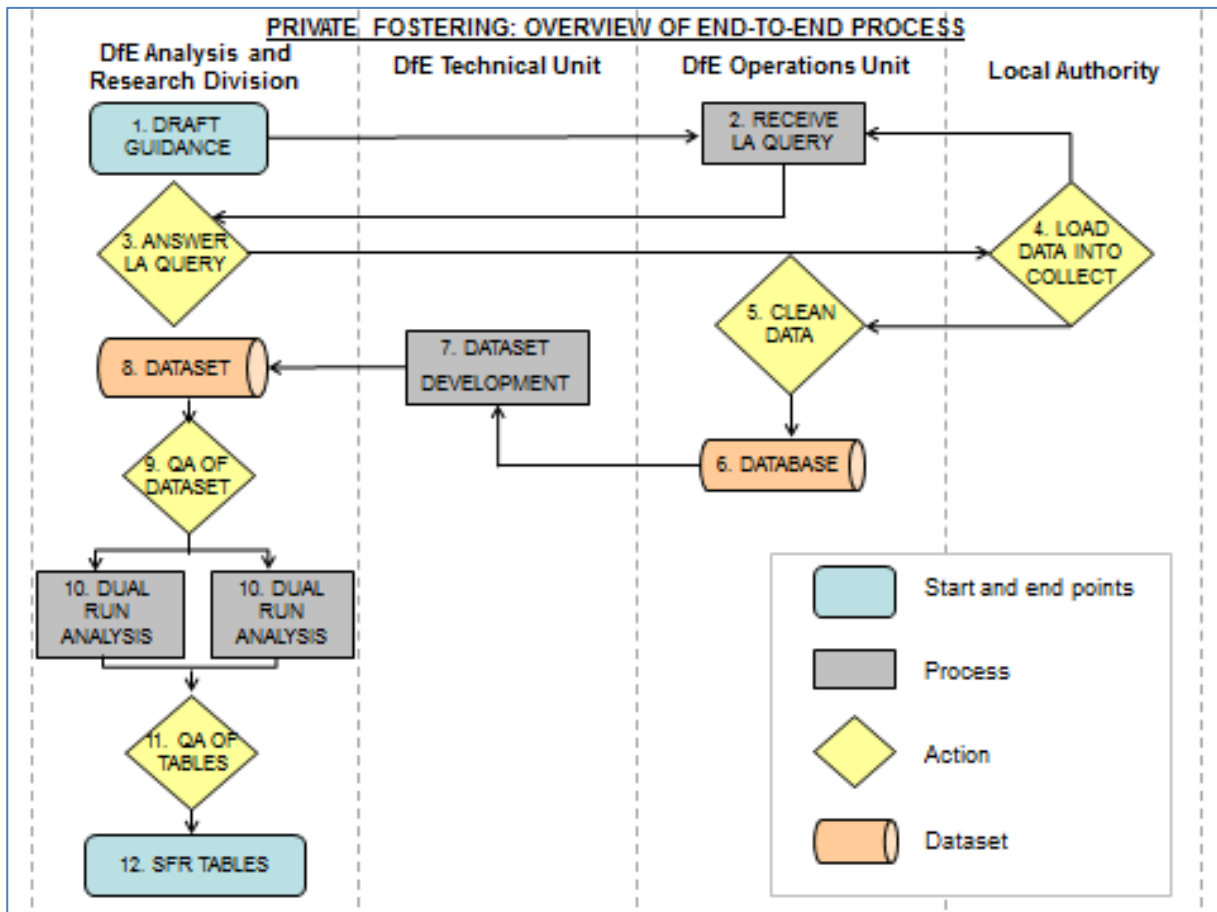
Table	Percentage(s)	Numerator	Denominator
Table 2	Percentage of cases where action was taken within 7 working days	Number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits
Table 3a	Percentages of all children who were born in each country	Number of all children who were born in the UK, Europe, Africa, Asia or other countries	Number of all children
Table 3a	Percentages of all	Number of all children who	Number of all children

<b>Table</b>	<b>Percentage(s)</b>	<b>Numerator</b>	<b>Denominator</b>
	children in each age group	were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	
Table 3a	Percentages of all UK children in each age group	Number of UK children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all UK children
Table 3a	Percentages of all Europe children in each age group	Number of Europe children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all Europe children
Table 3a	Percentages of all Africa children in each age group	Number of Africa children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all Africa children
Table 3a	Percentages of all Asia children in each age group	Number of Asia children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all Asia children
Table 3a	Percentages of all children from other countries in each age group	Number of children from other countries who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all children from other countries
Table 3b	Percentages of all children who were born in each country	Number of all children who were born in the UK, Europe, Africa, Asia or other countries	Number of all children
Table 3b	Percentages of all children in each age group	Number of all children who were aged (i) under 1, (ii) 1-4, (iii) 5-9, (iv) 10-15 and (v) 16 & over	Number of all children
Table 4a	Percentage of arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2012 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks	Number of arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2012 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks	Number of new arrangements that began during the year
Table 4b	Percentage of arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2012 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks	Number of arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2012 where visits were made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks	Number of private fostering arrangements which began before 1 April 2012 that were continuing on the 1 April 2011

### 3. Process Map

The process map shown in Figure 1 covers the end to end process of the Private Fostering return, from data collection through to publication of the SFR.

**Figure 1: Overview of end to end process of Private Fostering collection and publication**







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