



Department
for Education

Characteristics of children in need in England: 2013-14

Methodology document

October 2014

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1. Collection summary

The Children in Need (CIN) census collects information on:

- any child referred to children's social care services within the year and
- any cases open at the beginning of the year for whom local authorities were providing a service

The collection of the data from each local authority allows the local and national level calculation of information on the numbers of referrals and assessments carried out by children's social care services, along with the identification of the number of children assessed to be in need and the numbers who were the subject of a child protection plan.

2. Background

The CIN census is a child level data collection which records individual assessment information and child characteristics for each child who has been referred to children's social care services.

The 2013-14 Children in Need (CIN) census captured child level information on children referred to and assessed by children's social care services within the 12 month period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. The census includes any child referred to children's social care services within the year and also any cases open at 1 April 2013 for whom local authorities were providing a service, for example:

- active case work
- making regular payments
- where funding or on-going services such as respite care has been agreed
- maintaining a child with care and accommodation
- a commitment to review the case at a predetermined date
- maintaining a child's name on a register that ensures the child and family receives targeted information or other special consideration

The 2013-14 census was the fifth full year of the new CIN census. A collection covering a reduced 6 month period was carried out in 2008-09 to collect information from the 1 October 2008 to 31 March 2009 and following this a full year collection was introduced from 2009-10.

A number of local authorities struggled to provide a complete, clean CIN return in the first full census in 2009-10. On completion of the collection, a Departmental review of the CIN census was carried out alongside the Munro review which resulted in some data items being removed from the 2010-11 collection onward. Local authorities were no longer asked to return information on:

- duration and types of services provided to children in need
- information on the status of cases open at the end of the year
- a flag to identify looked after children who had been adopted
- a flag to identify asylum seeking children and the date they ceased to be asylum seeking
- reasons for missing Unique Pupil Numbers (UPN)

For 2008-09 and earlier, information on referrals, assessments and child protection plans was collected through the aggregate 'Child Protection and Referrals' (CPR3) return. The introduction of the CIN census meant there was no longer a need to collect CPR3 and so it was discontinued after the 2008-09 collection. 2008-09 was a year where both collections were dual run. As mentioned, the CIN census was for 6 months of the year only, so CPR3 was the definitive data source for 2008-09.

Although the information collected between the two returns is similar, the move from the emphasis being on local authorities to calculate indicators and return aggregate level information, to a child level national return where indicators are calculated by the Department for Education, mean that the figures are not directly comparable between the two returns. An example of this issue is that the aggregate returns were subject to a limited degree of local interpretation of definitions, for example, one key indicator looked at whether reviews were within the required timescales of three and six months. On moving to a centrally calculated indicator we identified that three and six months had been interpreted differently in different local authorities.

Further information on the comparability of figures between the CIN census and the CPR3 collection can be found in section 3 of the accompanying data quality document.

The data items collected in the CIN census includes child identifiers and characteristics along with the dates of any referrals, initial, continuous or core assessments, section 47 enquiries and child protection plans and reviews. Local authorities submitted data for 2013-14 to DfE in summer 2014 and information has been published in this Statistical First Release.

3. Data cleaning

The data is collected through the DfE COLLECT system. Local authorities upload their data extract into COLLECT where a series of validation rules run against each upload upon loading into the system to identify any errors and queries with the data. Local authorities then have a period of time in which to resolve these errors and clean the data in their return before submitting a final return by the end of July. The full list of validation rules can be accessed through the collection [business and technical specification](#).

Guidance notes advising on the content of the return are also available on the [CIN census collection website](#).

Once data has been submitted by the local authority the DfE carry out a series of further data credibility checks so that we can make an assessment of the confidence we have in the data returned. Further details of these checks can be found in the 'Data Confidence Indicator' section (section 4) of the accompanying Data Quality document.

4. Data processing

4.1 Defining counts of children in need

The number of children in need is a key indicator, however there is no flag on the dataset to identify these children. Instead, it must be derived using a combination of other data items provided in the data return. Key data items for calculating the numbers of children in need are:

- referral date
- referral NFA (flag identifying whether the referral resulted in no further action)
- reason for closure code

The methodology used to calculate the children in need numbers (table B1) of the publication is in the table below.

Children in Need	We have defined these as referrals excluding cases where: a. The referral is flagged as being a referral resulting in no further action in 2013-14; or b. The only activity recorded was an initial or continuous assessment and the reason for the closure of the case being that the case was closed after assessment with no further action.
Children starting an episode of need	These are Children In Need (defined above) where the referral is within the 2013-14 year.
Children ending an episode of need	These are Children In Need where the case was closed in 2013-14.
Children in Need throughout the year	These are Children In Need with an episode of need open at some point within the 2013-14 year. Note: These are NOT children who have been in need for the whole of the year.
Children in Need at 31 March	These are Children in Need where the referral date is on or before 31 March 2014 and there is no closure date.

4.2 Counting number of referrals and assessments completed

Number of referrals

Figures are a count of referrals within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

Number of initial assessments completed

Figures are a count of initial assessments with an end date recorded within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

Number of core assessments completed

Figures are a count of core assessments with an end date recorded within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

Number of continuous assessments completed

Figures are a count of continuous assessments with an end date recorded within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

Duration of assessments

The durations of completed assessments published this year are consistent with last year but differ from those pre 2012-13. For 2013-14 and 2012-13 the actual assessment start date has been collected. But for 2011-12 and earlier, we collected the date the statutory timescale began. So, whereas in past publications the durations represented the timeliness of completing the assessment in relation to the trigger event, from 2012-13 the durations show are the actual number of working days between the assessment being started and being authorised.

Calculating referrals within 12 months of a previous referral

Figures are calculated by using the 2012-13 data and the 2013-14 data. Figures are a count of the number of referrals within 12 months of a previous referral, calculated as follows:

1. Select the referrals that occurred between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 in the 2013-14 data.
2. Select the referrals that occurred between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 in the 2012-13 data, but remove any duplicated children, keeping the latest referral for the child.
3. The two datasets are merged together and the difference in days between consecutive pairs of referral dates is counted by comparing referral 1 to referral 2, referral 2 to referral 3, etc. The pair is added to the count of re referrals if the difference between the pair of dates is 365 days or less.

Calculating referrals resulting in no further action

For referrals within 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, if the 'ReferralINFA' flag is equal to '1' or 'true' then count the referral as one which resulted in no further action and exclude the case from any other populations.

Calculating children assessed at initial assessment not to be in need

If the referral is within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014) and is not counted as a referral resulting in no further action, consider whether any other activity has been recorded against the referral (for example assessments, child protection plans). If the referral has only an initial assessment or continuous assessment, and the referral has a closure reason of 'RC8 – Case closed after initial assessment, no further action', then count as a child assessed at assessment not to be in need.

4.3 Section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences

Number of section 47 enquiries

Figures are a count of cases where the S47 Actual Start Date is present and within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014). Any duplicates (based on S47 Actual Start Date) are removed.

Number of initial child protection conferences taking place

Figures are summed from two parts of the return:

1. From the section 47 module (where conferences should be recorded when they are the result of section 47 enquiries). Using data in the S47 module of the return, cases are selected where the date of initial child protection conference is present and within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014). Any duplicates (based on date of initial child protection conference) are removed.
2. From the CIN Details module (where conferences should be recorded when children who are the subject of a child protection plan transfer into the local authority). Using data in the CIN Details module of the return, cases are selected where the date of initial child protection conference is present and within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014). These cases are merged with the cases identified in part 1 so that where the recorded date of initial child protection conference is the same, we remove these duplicates from the count.

4.4 Children who were the subject of a child protection plan

The methodology used to calculate the children who were the subject of a child protection plan is given in the table below.

Child protection Plans starting in the year	A count of the child protection plan start dates where the date lies within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).
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Child protection Plans throughout the year	A count of the child protection plans where the start dates are before 31 March 2014 and the end date is on or after 1 April 2013 (or is missing).
Child protection plans ending in the year	A count of the child protection plan end dates where the date lies within the collection year (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

5. Accounting for missing data

All 152 local authorities provided a return in summer 2014, however not all local authorities could provide all items in the return. As in 2013, we did not accept any aggregate data from local authorities for 2014.

5.1 Estimates

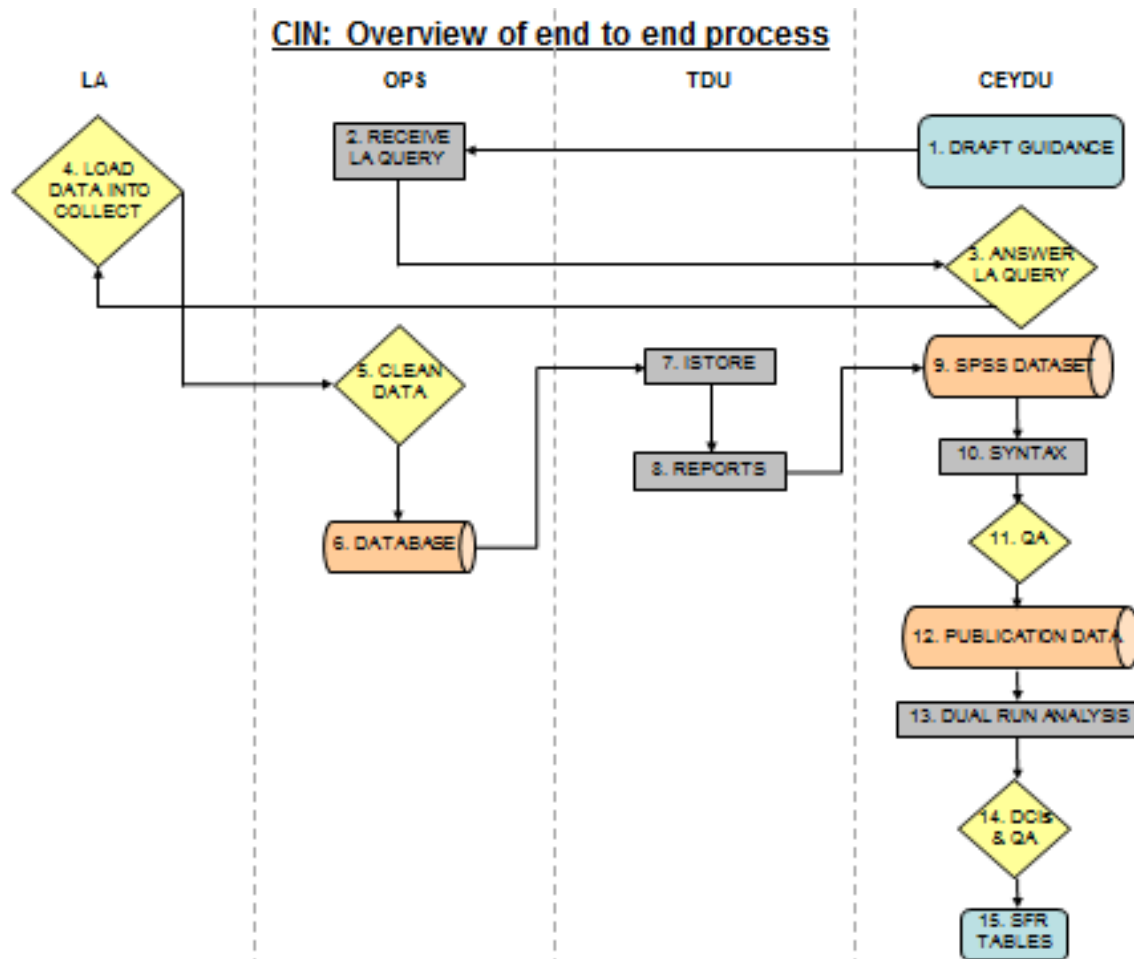
In cases where no data was available, the missing data was estimated and incorporated into the headline total figures for England.

Estimates of Children in Need at 31 March 2014, throughout the year and the number starting and ending an episode of need and numbers who were the subject of a child protection plan were estimated by applying the 2013-14 national rate for the number of children in need per 10,000 children based upon known data, to the 2013-14 population estimate for the missing authority.

Where further breakdowns of the key figures (described above) are provided, e.g. Children In Need at 31 March by primary need, the national totals for these breakdowns (e.g. primary need) are derived by applying the grossing factor used to arrive at the national total in the table (e.g. Children In Need at 31 March) to the known totals in each category (e.g. primary need).

6. Process map

The process map that is shown in Figure 1 covers the end to end process of the Children in Need (CIN) census, from data collection through to publication of the Statistical First Release.



Definitions:

- LA: Local authority
- OPS: DfE Operational Helpdesk
- TDU: DfE Technical Development Unit
- CEYDU: DfE Children and Early Years Data Unit
- DCIs: Data Confidence Indicators
- QA: Quality Assurance
- SFR: Statistical Release

7. Definitions

The full Guidance Notes and Frequently Asked Questions relating to the CIN census can be viewed on [CIN census collection website](#).

The definitions of the key aspects of the referral, assessment and registration process are shown below.

Referrals

A referral is defined for the purposes of the CIN census as 'a request for services to be provided by children's social care services.' This is in respect of a case where the child is not previously known to the council, or where the case was previously open but is now closed. A referral cannot be received on an already open case. A referral can be made by a professional from one of many different agencies (typically in the health and education sectors) but the term as used here is a broad one which encompasses referrals from any source, including self-referrals.

Referrals leading to no further action

On receipt of a referral the local authority has one working day to decide what further work needs to be done. If more investigation is needed then an initial assessment will be carried out. However, it may be that the referral can be resolved by providing some information, or referring to another agency or in some cases, no further action at all is needed.

Initial assessment

An initial assessment is defined as a brief assessment of any child who has been referred to children's social care services with a request that services be provided. An initial assessment is deemed to have started either at the point of referral to a social care services department, or when new information on an open case indicates that an initial assessment should be repeated. The expected timescale for the completion of an initial assessment is a maximum of 10 working days. Initial assessments may lead to three types of outcome:

1. no further action
2. the immediate provision of services
3. a more detailed type of assessment (known as a 'core assessment') being carried out. This may be carried out even where there is immediate provision of services.

Continuous assessment

A continuous assessment is defined as an in depth assessment of any child who has been referred to children's social care services with a request that services be provided. A continuous assessment is deemed to have started either at the point of referral to a social care services department, or when new information on an open case indicates that a continuous assessment should be repeated. The expected timescale for the completion of a continuous assessment is a maximum of 45 working days. Continuous assessments may lead to two types of outcome:

1. no further action
2. the immediate provision of services

Child in Need

A child in need is a child who has been assessed through an initial or continuous assessment to be in need of social care services.

Core assessment

A core assessment is defined as an in-depth assessment which addresses the central or most important aspects of the child's needs. There are several junctures at which a core assessment may start, depending on the child's circumstances, and the existence of child protection concerns ('risk of significant harm') is not a pre-requisite. The expected timescale for the completion of a core assessment is a maximum of 35 working days, recognising that where specialist assessments are required they may not take place within this timescale.

Initial Child Protection conferences and child protection plans

Where concerns about a child's welfare are substantiated and the agencies most involved judge that a child may continue to suffer, or be at risk of suffering significant harm, the social care services department should convene an initial child protection conference. The purpose of the conference is to draw together the information that has been obtained and to make judgements on whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and whether he or she therefore requires a child protection plan to be put in place. It is set out in the inter-agency guidance "Working Together to Safeguard Children" that an initial child protection conference should take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion which decided whether s.47 enquiries should be initiated. The conference will result in a decision on whether the child will become the subject of a plan or not.

Child protection plan reviews

Once a child becomes the subject of a child protection plan, their plan should be reviewed within the first 3 months and then at intervals of not more than 6 months.

Children who cease to be the subject of a plan

A child will cease to be the subject of a plan if:

1. it is judged that the child is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm requiring safeguarding by means of a child protection plan (e.g. the risk of harm has been reduced by action taken through the child protection plan; the child and family's circumstances have changed; or re-assessment of the child and family indicates that a child protection plan is not necessary). Under these circumstances, only a child protection review conference can decide that the child being the subject of a plan is no longer necessary
2. the child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In such cases, the receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move, only after which event may a child cease to be the subject of a plan in respect of the original local authority's plan
3. the child has reached 18 years of age, has died or has permanently left the UK.



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