



Department
for Education

Children's Social Work Workforce during year ending 30 September 2015

Technical document

February 2016

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Summary

Experimental Statistical First Release

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.”

This Experimental Statistical First Release (SFR) provides the latest information at both national and local authority level on numbers of children’s social workers. This is the third year that we have published statistics based on data collected from local authorities on the children’s social work workforce. Users should read and understand all footnotes and caveats presented in this release to fully understand the practical applications and limitations of the data.

For more information on experimental statistics please visit the ONS website [here](#).

The SFR contains information on the following data variables, which were collected on a statutory basis:

- Number of children’s social workers (not including agency workers)
- Number of children’s social workers by age
- Number of children’s social workers by time in service at LA

- Number of vacancies (including those covered by agency workers)
- Vacancy rate

- Total number of starters (not including agency workers)
- Total number of leavers (not including agency workers)
- Turnover rate

- Number of days of work missed due to sickness absence by children’s social workers (not including agency workers) in previous 12 months
- Absence rate
- Total number of agency workers
- Number of agency workers covering vacancies
- Agency worker rate

The data on: the breakdowns of the numbers of children’s social workers by age and time in service; and, the number of agency workers covering vacancies; were collected on a statutory basis for the first time in 2015.

The SFR also contains information on the following data variables, which were collected on a voluntary basis:

- Number of children's social workers by role
- Number of cases held, and
- Number of cases held by front-line children's social workers
- Number of front-line children's social workers holding these cases, and
- Number of agency front-line social workers holding these cases
- Number of starters by origin
- Number of starters by age
- Number of leavers by time in service at LA
- Number of leavers by destination
- Number of leavers by age

The data on the number of: children's social workers by role; starters by age; and, leavers by age; were collected for the first time in 2015. The data on cases held by children's social workers were also collected for the first time in 2015.

This document provides information on the methodology used in the processing of these data from collection through to publication, and information relating to the quality and uses of the statistics derived from the data.

Background

The data are mainly counts of children's social workers employed by the local authority (or through an agency). Children's social workers are social workers registered with the Health and Care Professionals 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, working exclusively on children and families.

Data collection and processing

Data Collection

Local authorities are required to collect and report to the Department for Education: aggregate data on numbers of children's social workers at 30 September; and, for starters and leavers, aggregate data on numbers of (these) children's social workers during the year ending 30 September, as follows:

- Number of children's social workers (not including agency workers)
 - Number of children's social workers by age
 - Number of children's social workers by time in service at LA
- Number of vacancies (including those covered by agency workers)
- Vacancy rate
- Total number of starters (not including agency workers)
- Total number of leavers (not including agency workers)
- Turnover rate
- Number of days of work missed due to sickness absence by children's social workers (not including agency workers) in previous 12 months
- Absence rate
- Total number of agency workers
- Number of agency workers covering vacancies
- Agency worker rate

Further information on the data variables including data variables collected on a voluntary basis can be found [here](#).

Data cleaning

Local authorities submit their data to the Department for Education. Their data is collected using a standard data collection form and stored securely on the Department's servers and access to the data is restricted to a small number of officials prior to publication.

The Department for Education carries out consistency checks including the ones that are built into the data collection form. The Department for Education also carries out additional credibility checks that make comparisons between the data collected and the data for the previous year. The consistency checks built into the data collection form enable local authorities to identify possible errors and clean the data before they submit their data to the Department. The checks can identify errors (where the data are

incorrect) or queries (where the data are questionable but could be correct in certain circumstances).

Local authorities are encouraged to check and correct as necessary data where there are queries. Notes can be added to the data collection form to explain any apparent discrepancies including unusual data.

Coverage

The data collection covers all local authorities in England and all children's social workers employed by the local authorities.

Interpretation of tables

The data on the statutory data variables are more reliable than the data on the voluntary data variables because with few exceptions all local authorities returned data for all statutory data variables. Relatively few local authorities returned data for the voluntary data variables.

Data on counts were collected on both a headcount and full-time equivalent basis except for the number of vacancies and the number of absences, which were collected on a full-time equivalent basis only. Apart from these exceptions, counts are generally reported in terms of headcounts and rates were based on full-time equivalent numbers.

Definitions

Children's social workers	This SFR includes social workers who have registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC), and who either work in a local authority in a children's services department or (if working in an authority where the services are joined up) work exclusively on children and families work. This includes social workers regardless of managerial responsibilities or caseloads.
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Full-time equivalent (FTE)	FTE numbers 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, the number of part-time staff is converted into an equivalent number of 'full-time' staff.
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CiN per children's social worker	The ratio of the number of children in need (CiN) to the number of children's social workers is calculated using the number of children in need at 31 March 2015, from the Department for Education's Children in Need Census. Note that the number of children's social workers is as at 30 September 2015. These estimates are provided for comparative purposes only and are not a robust estimation of caseload.
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Vacancy rate	The vacancy rate is calculated using the formula: $\frac{\text{(Number of vacancies)}}{\text{(Number of children's social workers + Number of vacancies)}}$
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and relates to a snapshot as at 30 September.

Turnover rate The turnover rate is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{(Number of leavers during the year)}}{\text{(Number of children's social workers as at 30 September)}}$$

Agency worker rate The agency worker rate is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of agency workers}}{\text{(Number of children's social workers + Number of agency workers)}}$$

and relates to a snapshot as at 30 September.

Absence rate The absence rate is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{(Number of days missed due to sickness absence during the year)}}{\text{(Number of children's social workers as at 30 September} \times 253)}$$

where 253 is the number of working days in a year, taking account of bank holidays.

Note: This includes all absences including long term sickness.

Rounding and Suppression

The National Statistics Code of Practice requires we take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality. Rounding and suppression were applied to the data. The following rounding conventions have been used:

In the main text and accompanying spreadsheets The counts given in the main text have been rounded to the nearest 10. Rates and percentages have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.

In the supplementary tables and National and regional figures for both headcounts and FTEs have been rounded to the nearest 10. Local authority figures for headcounts have not been rounded; local authority figures for

underlying data	FTEs have been rounded to one decimal place. Rates and percentages have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.
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The following suppression conventions have been used:

x	We have suppressed all counts of 2 or fewer and replaced them by a cross (x). Percentages and rates where the numerator or denominator is based on a value of 2 or fewer have also been replaced by a cross.
0	Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.
.	Not applicable
..	Not available
-	Negligible (used to represent a percentage below 0.5% when percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage point, or a number below five when numbers are rounded to the nearest ten)

These conventions are consistent with the Department’s Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality found [here](#).

Revisions

There are no revisions planned for this release. However, where we find that a substantial error has occurred as a result of the compilation or dissemination process the statistical release and accompanying tables will be updated with a correction notice as soon as this is practical.

The Department’s Statistical Policy Statement on Revisions can be found [here](#).

Data Quality and Uses

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 this reason we strongly encourage all users to comment on the statistics.

Data quality

The quality of the data has improved as we have expanded the coverage of the data variables and improved our guidance and data validation and amendment processes.

Quality assurance checks have been carried out at each stage of the data collection and production of the SFR. Anomalous data were highlighted and verified by contacting the local authority and late returns pursued to ensure overall response was as complete and accurate as possible.

In the majority of cases local authorities will derive the data they send from their management information systems and will require managerial sign off before sending the data. However, information on the specific data checks carried out by local authorities was not collected.

Some known data quality issues are listed below:

Increase in the number of children’s social workers	The number of children’s social workers reported by local authorities increased from 26,810 in 2014 to 28,570 in 2015. The main reason for this is the improvement in data quality, rather than a genuine increase in the number of children’s social workers. There were improvements in the data collection form and guidance with the inclusion of the roles of children’s social workers (albeit collected on a voluntary basis) leading to increased numbers of children’s social workers in managerial and other roles being reported.
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New statutory data variables	Where data were collected on a statutory basis for the first time: the breakdowns of the numbers of children’s social workers by age and time in service; and, the number of agency workers covering vacancies; there was an expectation that the quality would improve as almost all local authorities provided data for almost all of the statutory data variables. There were some
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apparent inconsistencies though including where the FTE number of agency workers covering vacancies appears to exceed the FTE number of vacancies, for Sunderland, Nottingham, Waltham Forest, and Brighton and Hove.

Statutory and voluntary data variables

The data on the statutory data variables are more reliable than the data on the voluntary data variables because with few exceptions all local authorities returned data for all statutory data variables. The data for the statutory data variables are shown in the accompanying tables; where data are not available for any local authority, we have inserted a symbol (double dot) to indicate that the relevant data are not available. Relatively few local authorities returned data for the voluntary data variables. See below.

The following data variables were collected on a voluntary basis:

- Number of children's social workers by role
- Number of cases held, and
- Number of cases held by front-line children's social workers
- Number of front-line children's social workers holding these cases, and
- Number of agency front-line social workers holding these cases
- Number of starters by origin
- Number of starters by age
- Number of leavers by time in service at LA
- Number of leavers by destination
- Number of leavers by age

The data on the number of: children's social workers by role; starters by age; and, leavers by age; were collected for the first time in 2015. The data on cases held by children's social workers were also collected for the first time in 2015.

Response rates

The findings for the voluntary data variables are reported in the text of the statistical release. The findings should be considered in conjunction with the relevant response rates. Particular care should be taken when looking at the voluntary data variables which had very low response rates. The response rates are shown alongside the findings and summarised here:

Children's social workers:	Local authorities (%)	Headcount of social workers (%)
Roles	32	33
Cases held	20	20

Starters:	Local authorities (%)	Headcount of Starters
Origin	19	21
Age	44	45

Leavers:	Local authorities (%)	Headcount of leavers
Time in service at local authority	40	41
Destination	23	19
Age	40	41

Time Series Compatibility

This is the third year that local authorities have been under a statutory obligation to return data on children's social workers. The statistics are not comparable over time because of changes in coverage as the Department for Education improves the data collection guidance and local authorities get used to the data requirements and develop their systems to produce the required data.

Data Source

The figures in the SFR were derived from the Children's Social Work Workforce for 2014-15 data collection. The Department first collected these data on a statutory basis for 2012-13. Voluntary data variables were included in the 2013-14 collection. Some of these voluntary data variables were collected on a statutory basis in the 2014-15 data collection and some additional voluntary data variables were collected too. The table local authorities were asked to populate and its guidance can be found [here](#).

Further data

The SFR on characteristics of children in need: 2014 to 2015 is [here](#).

The underlying data for children's social workers are available in CSV format on the same page as the SFR, [here](#).

Uses of the data

The main users of these statistics are officials in the Department for Education and the statistics are used to provide advice to Ministers for policy monitoring and setting future policies.

The main external users of these statistics are local authorities who use the information to compare the statistics for their local authorities with national and regional statistics and to benchmark their statistics against those for other local authorities.

Feedback and user engagement

Feedback on methodology and presentation is welcomed and encouraged.

If you have any comments on the information collected, the timing or format of our outputs or whether these statistics are meeting your requirements, please email:

ProgrammeOffice.CSAR@education.gsi.gov.uk



Department
for Education

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