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Reporting year 2025

Children's social work workforce

Annual statistics on child and family social workers, including agency social workers, employed in local authorities in England.

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Official statistics 

Produced by

Department for Education

Published

19 March 2026

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Background information

Two local authorities, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster, were unable to provide data following a cyberattack in November 2025, which had a significant impact on their information management systems. See 'About this release' for more detail.

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Summary

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Social workers in post (FTE)

36,200

up 5.4% or 1,900 workers from 2024 and the series peak

► Social workers in post (FTE)



Agency social workers in post (FTE)

5,400

down 16.9% or 1,100 workers from 2024

► Agency social workers in post (FTE)



Vacancies (FTE)

6,000

down 17.0% or 1,200 vacancies from 2024

► Vacancies (FTE)



Turnover rate (FTE)

11.8%

down from 13.9% in 2024 and the lowest rate in the series

► Turnover rate (FTE)



Average caseload (per FTE)

15.2

down from 15.4 in 2024 and the lowest in the series

► Average caseload (per FTE)



Sickness absence rate (FTE)

3.5%

up slightly from 3.4% in 2024 and the joint highest in the series

► Sickness absence rate (FTE)



In 2025 (compared with a year earlier):

- the number of child and family social workers in post at 30 September increased to the series peak (started in 2017) and also had the largest annual rise in the series.
- the number of agency workers, vacancies and the turnover rate all had their largest annual falls in the series (the turnover rate also fell to the lowest point in the series). As covered in more detail in the section below on Agency child and family social workers in post, new statutory guidance and consultation with local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers is likely to have contributed to the fall in their use.
- average caseload fell to the lowest in the series (although these figures don't account for the complexity of the cases held) whilst the sickness absence rate increased slightly to the joint highest in the series.

Official statistics in development show that in 2025:

- the number of child and family social workers leaving the workforce to agency child and family social work (300 workers) or leaving the workforce entirely (2,700 workers) fell for the third consecutive year (down 53% or 300 workers and down 5.4% or 200 workers respectively from a year earlier); this suggests that social worker retention has continued to improve.
- the median base salary of full-time child and family social workers in post was £47,200.

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About this release

This annual release contains statistics on child and family social workers, including agency social workers, employed in local authorities in England. Each reporting year covers the period 1 October to 30 September.

Child and family social workers are social workers registered with [Social Work England \(SWE\) \(opens in new tab\)](#) 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 primarily on children and families work.

Figures are shown on both a full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount basis. The timeseries in this release feature data from 2017 onwards, which is when information on individual social workers was first collected by the Department for Education (DfE). Comparisons with earlier years should be made with a degree of caution as any changes, at least in part, may be attributable to improvements in data quality. Refer to the 'Background and coverage' section of the [methodology page](#) for more information.

For the first time, these statistics include figures on full-time social worker base salary and eligibility for allowances and additional payments as official statistics in development (see 'Base salary, allowances and additional payments' section for further information).

151 out of the 153 local authorities in England provided a return for the 2025 [children's social work workforce census \(opens in new tab\)](#). Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster were unable to provide data following a cyberattack in November 2025, which had a significant impact on their information management systems. Therefore, in data sets 1 to 4, figures for these local authorities are not available (indicated by 'x'), and for data at national and regional level, figures from the previous year were used as best estimates for these local authorities to calculate totals for England, London, and Inner London. Figures for Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster have been omitted from data sets 5 and 6 (relating to attrition and base salary) and are stated as 'Not known' in data set 7 (relating to allowances and additional payments).

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Child and family social workers in post

Number of child and family social workers

Full-time Equivalent (FTE) figures are calculated by aggregating the total number of hours that child and family social workers are contracted to work and dividing by the standard hours for their grade. As a result, part-time workers are converted into an equivalent number of full-time workers to enable more meaningful comparisons.

FTE figures exclude social workers for whom FTE information was missing or not known, equating to 0.6% of social workers in post at 30 September 2025, the same percentage as 2024 but down from 1.0% in 2017. This should be considered when interpreting these figures.

Headcount is a count of all individual child and family social workers, regardless of their working pattern. Where a social worker holds more than one post within a local authority, only one post is counted (the more senior role where applicable).

In this section, both the FTE and headcount figures of social workers in post exclude agency social workers in post.

There were 36,200 full-time equivalent (FTE) social workers in post at 30 September 2025, up 5.4% or 1,900 workers from a year earlier and up 27% or 7,700 workers from 2017, when the series started. The corresponding headcount figure was 38,300, up 5.2% or 1,900 workers from a year earlier and up 25% or 7,600 workers since 2017.

In 2025, both the FTE and headcount measures represented the series peaks and had the largest annual rises in the series (both in numeric and percentage terms). Except for falls in 2022 (possibly linked to greater labour market churn following recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic), FTE and headcount have increased each year in the series.

Age of social workers (FTE)

In 2025, social workers aged 30 to 39 continued to be the largest age group, accounting for 3 in 10 workers (30%). The number of social workers rose for all age groups since

2024 and 2017. The 40 to 49 age group had the largest numeric and percentage rise since 2024 (up 900 workers or 9.8%) and the largest numeric rise since 2017 (up 3,000 workers). The 60 and over age group had the largest percentage rise since 2017 (up 79%).

Sex of social workers (FTE)

In 2025, nearly 9 in 10, or 88%, of social workers were female. This is higher than the 74% seen in the teaching profession and the 46% seen in professional occupations. The proportion of social workers who were female has increased each year in the series.

The figure on sex:

- In the teaching profession is based on FTE teachers in state-funded schools and is from the 2024 Department for Education Statistics release [School Workforce in England](#).
- In professional occupations includes managers, directors and senior officials and is based on headcount figures from the [2021 Census \(opens in new tab\)](#), as defined under the [2020 Standard Occupational Classification \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Ethnicity of social workers (FTE)

Ethnicity was known for 82% of social workers in 2025. Of those, over 1 in 4 (28%) were from ethnic minority backgrounds (excluding white minorities) and this has increased each year from around 1 in 5 (21%) in 2017, mainly due to workers from Black ethnic groups.

The proportion of social workers from ethnic minority backgrounds is greater than the 12% seen in the teaching profession and the 18% seen in professional occupations. However, it is lower than the 33% seen in the children in need population.

The figure on ethnicity:

- In the teaching profession is based on FTE teachers in state-funded schools and is from the 2024 Department for Education Statistics release [School Workforce in England](#).

- In professional occupations includes managers, directors and senior officials and is based on headcount figures from the [2021 Census \(opens in new tab\)](#), as defined under the [2020 Standard Occupational Classification \(opens in new tab\)](#).
- In the children in need population is from the 2025 Department for Education Statistics release [Children in Need](#). Children in need are those assessed as needing help and protection from children's social care services as a result of risks to their development or health.

Time in service at local authority (FTE)

Time in service is a measure of the total time in years that a social worker has been employed continuously in any child and family social worker role at their current local authority, rather than only the time spent in their current child and family social worker role.

Across all years in the series, social workers with less than 2 years' service accounted for the most workers, equivalent to around 1 in every 3 workers.

The rise in 2025 in social workers with between 2 and 5 years service (up 1,100 social workers or 13%) was the largest annual rise in the series for this grouping (both in numeric and percentage terms). This may be partly explained by the [agency rule on post-qualifying experience \(opens in new tab\)](#) which was introduced in October 2024. This sets out that child and family social workers should have at least three years of post-qualifying experience in direct employment of an English local authority before they are eligible for an agency role. Although this experience can be gained across one or more local authorities, the effect of the rule is likely reflected in these data, which capture time spent within a social worker's current authority.

Social worker role (FTE)

Feedback from local authorities suggests that there is an overlap in the responsibilities of the six role types that local authorities report on. There is also more variation between roles than is accounted for in the six role types. As a result, there can be differences in the recording practices between local

authorities and/or reporting years therefore this data should be treated with a degree of caution.

A case holder role is a social worker that manages cases, but is not in a senior manager, middle manager, first line manager or senior practitioner role. However, cases can be held by those not in case holder roles.

Across all years in the series, the case holder role accounted for the most workers; most recently, 4 in 10 workers (40%) in 2025.

In 2025, the number of social workers rose across all roles since 2024 and 2017. Those qualified without cases had the largest rise (both in numeric and percentage terms), up 11% or 700 workers since 2024 and up 65% or 2,800 workers since 2017.

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Agency child and family social workers in post

Agency workers, as at 30 September, are the number of child and family social workers not directly paid by the local authority. These may be social workers who are paid by an agency rather than the local authority or who are self-employed. FTE figures are presented in this section.

The **agency worker rate**, as at 30 September, is calculated as the number of FTE agency (child and family) social workers divided by the sum of FTE agency social workers and FTE social workers.

The **agency workers covering vacancies rate**, as at 30 September, is calculated as the number of FTE agency workers covering vacancies divided by FTE agency workers.

There were 5,400 agency social workers in post at 30 September 2025, falling for the second consecutive year from the series peak of 7,200 in 2023 (prior to this, there were rises each year). The latest figure is down 17% or 1,100 workers from 2024; this is the largest annual fall in the series (both in numeric and percentage terms).

[Statutory guidance \(opens in new tab\)](#) for local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers came into effect on 31 October 2024 with a transition period which ended on 1 October 2025. The guidance includes rules designed to improve social worker stability and reduce costs and over reliance on agency workers. Whilst the transition period ended and regional agency price caps came fully into effect one day after the 2025 data reference period, some local authorities achieved full implementation of the guidance early. These factors, alongside DfE's engagement with local authorities prior to the guidance being introduced in 2024, are likely to have contributed to the annual fall in agency workers in 2025.

The decrease in agency workers contributed to the agency worker rate reaching its lowest point in the series at 13%, falling for the second consecutive year from the series peak of 18% in 2023.

Around 4 in every 5 or 81.1% of agency workers covered vacancies in 2025, a similar proportion to 2024 (81.3%).

In situations where agency workers are not covering vacancies, they may be used to manage a local authority's seasonal peaks, or deal with acute backlogs, as an alternative to employing social workers on a permanent basis.

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Caseload

A **case** is defined as any person allocated to a named social worker, where the work involves child and family social work. Cases may be held by social workers regardless of their role in the organisation and not by just those specifically in a 'case holder' role.

Average caseload at 30 September is calculated as the total number of cases held by FTE child and family social workers, including agency workers, in post divided by the number of FTE child and family social workers, including agency workers, in post that held one or more cases.

The number of cases held doesn't account for the complexity of the cases held and this should be considered when interpreting the caseload figures.

There were 321,700 cases held by 21,100 social workers and agency workers at 30 September 2025, equivalent to an average caseload of 15.2.

Average caseload has mostly been falling each year since the series peak of 17.7 in 2017; the latest average is the lowest in the series and is down from 15.4 in 2024.

In 2025, whilst the number of cases rose since 2024 (up 0.4%), the number of workers holding cases rose by a greater percentage (up 1.5%) and this resulted in average caseload falling. Similarly, since 2017, although the number of cases held increased (up 1.6%) average caseload decreased due to a greater percentage increase in workers holding cases (up 18%).

Following the launch of the [Families First Partnership programme \(opens in new tab\)](#) in March 2025, as reported by some local authorities during data collection, some alternatively qualified Family Help Lead Practitioners took on some cases related to child and family social work previously allocated to qualified social workers. This limited the rise in cases held for child and family social workers in 2025.

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Vacancies

Vacancies are defined as any FTE (child and family social worker) vacancy as at 30 September within a local authority's organisational structure, including vacancies that are not being actively recruited for, and those covered by agency

workers.

The **vacancy rate**, as at 30 September, is calculated as FTE vacancies divided by the sum of FTE vacancies and FTE social workers.

The **vacancy agency cover rate**, as at 30 September, is calculated as FTE agency workers in post covering vacancies, divided by FTE vacancies.

There were 6,000 social worker vacancies at 30 September 2025, falling for the third consecutive year from the series peak of 7,900 vacancies in 2022. The latest figure is down 17% or 1,200 vacancies from a year earlier; this equates to the largest annual fall in the series (both in numeric and percentage terms).

The corresponding vacancy rate also decreased for the third consecutive year from the series peak of 20% in 2022 to 14% in 2025 and is now the lowest rate in the series.

Around 3 in every 4 or 74% of vacancies were covered by agency workers in 2025, down from the series peak of 76% in the previous year.

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Sickness absence

The **sickness absence rate** is calculated as the number of days child and family social workers missed due to sickness absence during the year to 30 September (of those in post at 30 September), divided by the number of FTE child and family social workers in post at 30 September multiplied by 253 days (the number of working days in a non-leap year, taking account of bank holidays). The rate for a leap year is based on 254 working days. Agency social workers are not included in the calculation of the sickness absence rate.

The sickness absence rate for social workers in post at 30 September 2025 was 3.5%, up

slightly from 3.4% in 2024; the latest figure matches the series peak from 2022.

The rate in 2025 is higher than the latest 2024 (calendar year) figure of 2.0% for England seen in the ONS statistical release [Sickness absence in the UK labour market \(opens in new tab\)](#) (specifically, Table 9 of the [2024 dataset \(opens in new tab\)](#)). The sickness absence rate in the ONS statistics is based on the Labour Force Survey and is calculated as the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness absence for all people in employment aged 16 and over.

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Starters, leavers and attrition

Starters at the local authority (FTE)

Starters are social workers who joined a vacant child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September.

The social worker starters figures include those joining from:

- the same local authority, but from a non-child and family social work position.
- a child and family social work position in another local authority in England.
- an agency child and family social work position.

The social worker starters figures exclude those:

- moving or being promoted from one child and family social work position to another within the same local authority.
- returning from maternity or sick leave.
- starting and leaving in the same reporting year.

There were 5,800 social worker starters in the year ending 30 September 2025, up 4.0%

or 200 starters from 2024.

There were more social worker starters than leavers in 2025, the same trend seen in previous years except for 2022. The net difference in 2025 was 1,600 more starters than leavers, the highest since 2017.

[Step-Up to Social Work \(opens in new tab\)](#) is a graduate training programme delivering a new cohort of qualified social workers in alternate years, and this will likely have contributed to the annual rises in 2019, 2021, 2023 and 2025 but also the falls in the intervening years.

Achievements in [social worker apprenticeships](#) have increased annually since the 2019/20 academic year and this is likely to have resulted in additional starters each year since 2020.

Leavers and turnover at the local authority (FTE)

Leavers are social workers who left a child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September.

The social worker leavers figures include those:

- staying at the same local authority but moving to a non-child and family social work position, for example moving to adult social care.
- moving to a child and family social work position in a different local authority in England.
- moving to an agency child and family social work position.
- beginning a career break.
- being seconded out of an organisation.
- leaving the profession altogether.

The social worker leavers figures exclude those:

- moving or being promoted from one child and family social work position to another within the same local authority.
- starting maternity or sick leave.
- starting and leaving in the same reporting year.

There were 4,300 social worker leavers in 2025, falling for the third consecutive year from the series peak of 5,400 in 2022, and representing the lowest number since 2017. The latest figure is a decrease of 10% or 500 workers from a year earlier.

Social worker leavers fell across all age groups between 2024 and 2025, except for those aged 60 and over (up 60 leavers).

The **turnover rate** is calculated as (the number of) FTE child and family social worker leavers in the year to 30 September divided by FTE child and family social workers in post at 30 September. The turnover rate is a measure of churn in the workforce (although it doesn't capture the movement of social workers to different child and family social work positions within the same local authority).

The associated turnover rate was 12% in 2025, falling for the third consecutive year from the series peak of 17% in 2022 and representing the lowest rate in the series.

Attrition

Statistics in development

Official statistics in development are official statistics that are undergoing development (previously called experimental statistics). Data on attrition, at national level only and with no further breakdowns, is contained in this statistics release for the third time.

Figures on attrition can be accessed in data set 5 of the [table tool](#). Further information can be found on the [methodology page](#).

We welcome user feedback on these figures (see 'Contact Us' section below). The continued inclusion and format of these figures will be reviewed prior to the 2026 statistics release.

Attrition and movers definitions

Child and family social worker leavers can be classed as belonging to one of three groups based on their status at 30 September. Specifically, those:

1. moving to a child and family social work position in a different local authority in England;
2. leaving the workforce to agency child and family social work (either at the same or a different local authority in England);
3. leaving the workforce entirely (i.e. are no longer a child and family social worker or agency child and family social worker within any local authority in England).

The term '**attrition**' applies to both the second and third groups. The second group is referred to as '**agency attrition**', and the third group is referred to as '**full attrition**'.

As the leavers figures within this release include the first group, the purpose of the attrition figures is to specifically identify those leaving the local authority employed child and family social work workforce.

The **attrition rate** (either agency or full) is calculated as the number of FTE child and family social workers leaving due to attrition during the year ending 30 September divided by the number of FTE child and family social workers in post at 30 September.

The **movers rate** is calculated as the number of FTE child and family social workers moving to a child and family social work position in a different local authority divided by the number of FTE child and family social workers in post at 30 September.

Unlike the leavers and turnover figures in the preceding sub-section which include estimates for Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster (see introduction for further information), estimates for these local authorities are not included in the attrition analysis.

4,200 child and family social worker leavers were included in the attrition analysis in the year to 30 September 2025. These leavers had an associated turnover rate of 12% (the same turnover rate as cited in the preceding sub-section). Of these:

- 2,700 leavers (64% of leavers) were due to full attrition from the workforce, equivalent to a full attrition rate of 7.6%.
- 300 leavers (6.6% of leavers) were due to agency attrition, equivalent to an agency attrition rate of 0.8%.
- 1,200 leavers (29% of leavers) were child and family social workers moving positions

between local authorities, equivalent to a movers rate of 3.4%.

Similar to the total number of leavers mentioned in the previous sub-section, in 2025, all the attrition measures fell for the third consecutive year from the series peaks in 2022 (series started in 2017); this suggests that social worker retention has continued to improve in 2025.

The total attrition rate, the agency attrition number and rate, and the movers rate all represented the lowest figures in the series.

As covered in more detail in the section on agency child and family social workers in post, new statutory guidance for local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers and the Department's engagement with local authorities on this guidance is likely to have contributed to the annual fall in 2025 for the agency attrition number and rate.

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Base salary, allowances and additional payments

Statistics in development

[Official statistics in development \(opens in new tab\)](#) are official statistics that are undergoing development (previously called experimental statistics). The following statistics should be treated with caution as they were collected and included in this 2025 release for the first time:

- Base salary information, where recorded, for full-time child and family social workers in post at 30 September 2025 (excluding agency workers), at national and regional level. This includes breakdowns by role, sex, ethnicity, age and time in service. The Department for Education assessed data quality to be insufficient to publish statistics on an FTE basis and for part-time workers; it will continue to work with local authorities to improve recording practices, with a

view to potentially publishing this information in future years.

- Information on the eligibility of child and family social workers in post (excluding agency workers) for eight types of local authority allowances and additional payments as at 30 September 2025, at national and regional level.

Figures on base salary can be accessed in data set 6 and figures on local authority allowances and additional payments can be found in data set 7 of the [table tool](#). Further information can be found on the [methodology page](#).

We welcome user feedback on these figures (see 'Contact Us' section below). The continued inclusion and format of these figures will be reviewed prior to the 2026 statistics release.

Based on information from 150 local authorities (98%) and 32,300 full-time social workers with recorded base salary information (99.9% of all full-time social workers), the median base salary of full-time child and family social workers in post at 30 September 2025 was £47,200. Male social workers had higher base salaries than female social workers for all roles; overall, there was a pay differential of £2,000.

As to be expected, median base salary rises with increasing seniority of social worker roles, ranging from £41,800 for case holders to £84,400 for senior managers.

149 local authority returns, covering 151 local authorities, submitted eligibility information on local authority allowances and additional payments; two pairs of local authorities submit joint returns and are included as one local authority each in this section. The cost of Disclosure and Barring Service checks was the most common allowance/payment for social workers in post, with 125 local authorities (84%) indicating that at least some social workers were eligible for this payment. Conversely, performance rewards and regional weighting were the least common allowances/payments, with 12 local authorities (8%) indicating that at least some social workers were eligible; however, the latter may be explained by regional weighting already being accounted for within base salary in some instances e.g. in London.

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Contact us

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