



Department  
for Education

# **Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2019**

**Technical document**

**February 2020**

# Contents

Summary	3
Background	3
Data collection and processing	4
Data collection	4
Data cleaning	4
Coverage	4
Methodology	5
Headcount and Full-time Equivalent (FTE) measures	5
Number of social workers in post at 30 September	5
Number of social worker starters during year ending 30 September	5
Number of social worker leavers during year ending 30 September	6
Number of agency workers in post at 30 September	6
Number of agency workers covering vacancies (FTE and headcount)	6
Vacancies	7
Age and gender	7
Time in service at local authority	7
Caseload measure	7
Interpretation of the data	8
Definitions	8
Rounding and Suppression	10
Revisions	11
Data Quality and Uses	12
Official Statistics	12
Data quality	12
Time series compatibility	14
Data source	15
Underlying data	15
Uses of the data	15
Data items not included in the statistical publication	15
Regional adoption agencies	18
Feedback and user engagement	21

## Summary

### Official statistics

The accompanying statistical publication provides national and local level information on the children and family social work workforce in English local authorities. This is the seventh year that statistics have been published based on data collected from local authorities in the children and family social work workforce census.

This year the statistics were published as official statistics, whereas in previous years they have been classified as experimental statistics. More information on [official statistics](#) is available from the UK Statistics Authority.

Users should read all footnotes and caveats included in this publication to understand the practical applications and limitations of the data. In particular, any comparisons with statistics in previous publications should be done with caution. This is because any changes from year to year may not reflect actual changes in figures, but may simply indicate improvements in data quality. Refer to the Data Quality and Uses section for more information on data quality issues.

This document provides information on the methods used to process children and family social work workforce data, from collection through to publication. It also includes information relating to the quality of the statistics derived from the data.

## Background

The information in this statistical release is based on data collected in the annual statutory census collection on the children's social work workforce. The census collects information from local authorities in England on the social workers and agency workers they employ within their children's services department. Children and family social workers are social workers registered with the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) working in a local authority children's services department, or, if working in an authority where the services are joined up, working exclusively with children and families.

This is the seventh children's social work workforce census, collecting data over each full year ending 30 September. The latest collection covers the year from 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 and is the third year in which data has been collected on an individual social worker level basis. Data for earlier years was collected at an aggregate (local authority) level.

# Data collection and processing

## Data collection

Local authorities are required by the Department for Education (the department) to collect and return individual level data on children and family social workers in post at 30 September and starters and leavers during the year ending 30 September.

The latest census collected for all local authority and agency social workers in post at the 30 September 2019.

Some data items are not included in the statistical release, because of concerns over data quality. More information is provided below in the section 'Data items not included in the statistical publication'.

Further information on the data variables and data collection, including those collected on a voluntary basis can be found in the [census guide](#).

## Data cleaning

Local authorities submit their data to the department through the secure COLLECT (collections online for learning, education, children and teachers) data collection system. This data is stored securely by the department and access to it is restricted to a small number of officials prior to publication.

The department carries out consistency checks, including those that are built into the data collection system, and additional credibility checks that make comparisons between the data collected for the current year and the previous year. The consistency checks built into the data collection system enable local authorities to identify errors and discrepancies, and clean their data before it is submitted to the department.

Throughout the data collection local authorities were encouraged to check and, where necessary, correct errors and discrepancies within their data. All local authorities were asked to provide comments against any validation queries in their data and to confirm that the data submitted was accurate.

## Coverage

The Children's social work workforce census covers all local authorities in England and all children and family social workers employed by those local authorities. This year all local authorities provided an individual level data return.

Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames submitted a joint return through Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services.

## Methodology

### Headcount and Full-time Equivalent (FTE) measures

Headcount is a count of all distinct social workers that fit the relevant criteria (starters, leavers and those in post at 30 September). In instances where a social worker holds more than one post, only one record is counted to avoid duplication.

For headcount at 30 September of the reporting year, duplicates are removed based on local authority, HCPC number, date of birth, gender and ethnicity. This provides a count of the number of individual social workers regardless of their working pattern.

Duplicates are removed from headcount figures for starters on the variables listed above, and in addition Role Start Date; leavers are de-duplicated on the variables listed above, and in addition Role End Date.

Duplicate records for agency workers are not removed and each record is assumed to refer to a separate individual.

Duplicates are not removed from full-time equivalent (FTE) figures. FTEs 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, part-time staff are converted into an equivalent number of 'full-time' staff. This allows for meaningful comparisons of measures such as caseload across local authorities.

### Number of social workers in post at 30 September

A count of the number of social workers in post at 30 September of the reporting year by headcount and FTE. This measure includes all social workers with a valid role start date before 30 September and either no end date or an end date after 30 September. It does not include agency workers, who are covered separately within the publication.

If a social worker left their post on the 30 September they are counted as both in post and as a leaver during the reporting year.

### Number of social worker starters during year ending 30 September

The number of social workers with a start date during the year ending 30 September, by headcount and FTE.

The calculation for FTE starter figures is based on FTE at 30 September.

Starters are child and family social workers who joined a vacant child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who have previously worked in the same local authority, but in a non-child and family social worker role.

A move or promotion from one child and family social work position to another child and family social work position within the same local authority is not counted as a starter. Similarly child and family social workers returning from maternity or sick leave are not counted as starters. Refer to the data quality section for details of data quality concerns regarding this measure.

## **Number of social worker leavers during year ending 30 September**

A count of the number of social workers with a leaving date during the year ending 30 September 2019 by headcount and FTE.

The calculation for FTE leaver figures is based on FTE at 30 September of the previous reporting year. For leavers during the 2018-19 reporting year, this is their FTE at 30 September 2018.

Leavers are child and family social workers who left a child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who are staying at a local authority, but moving to a non-child and family role, for example moving to adult social care.

Leavers also include child and family social workers who have begun a career break, those seconded out of an organisation or those leaving the profession altogether. They do not include social workers who have started maternity or sick leave.

## **Number of agency workers in post at 30 September**

A count of the number of agency workers at 30 September of the reporting year. Data was only collected on agency workers in post at the 30 September and does not include those who left during the year.

## **Number of agency workers covering vacancies (FTE and headcount)**

This is an aggregate (local authority-level) number collected by the local authority, at both FTE and headcount level.

## Vacancies

The number of FTE vacancies within the local authority at 30 September. This is an aggregate (local authority-level) number collected by the local authority.

## Age and gender

Age and gender breakdowns are available at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September
- Starters
- Leavers

Age is derived from the date of birth provided and is age at 30 September of the reporting year.

Gender is taken from the data item collected.

## Time in service at local authority

Time in service breakdowns are available at both FTE and headcount for:

- Social workers in post at 30 September
- Leavers

This measure is derived from the 'Role Start Date' which is collected and calculated as either the role start date in the year to 30 September (for those still in post) or role start date to the leaving date for those that left a social work post within the year.

## Caseload measure

This is the third year the department has collected the number of cases held by each social worker at an individual level. This allows us to calculate a more accurate caseload measure than in previous publications, and means comparisons with earlier years should not be made due to these methodology differences.

In previous years, some local authorities have raised issues around reporting the 'number of cases held at 30 September' data item and linking cases to social workers at an individual level.

The caseload is derived as the total number of cases held divided by the number of social workers that hold one or more cases at 30 September.

## Interpretation of the data

Data was collected at an individual social worker level and figures are shown on both a headcount and full-time equivalent basis. The only exception to this is the number of vacancies (FTE) and the number of agency workers covering vacancies (both headcount and FTE) which were collected at an aggregate level.

## Definitions

---

Children and family social workers	Children and family social workers are social workers who have registered with the Health and Care Professional 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 statistical release includes data on social workers regardless of their managerial responsibilities or caseloads.
------------------------------------	--

---

Full-time equivalent (FTE)	FTE estimates 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.
----------------------------	---

This data item is collected for each individual record and the value is summed to produce figures at an FTE level.

---

Starters	Starters are child and family social workers who joined a vacant child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who have previously worked in the same local authority, but in a non-child and family social worker role.
----------	---

A move or promotion from one child and family social work position to another child and family social work position within the same local authority is not counted as a starter. Similarly, child and family social workers returning from maternity or sick leave are not counted as starters. Refer to the data quality section for details of data quality concerns regarding this measure.

---

**Leavers** Leavers are child and family social workers who left a child and family social worker post at a local authority in the year ending 30 September. This includes social workers who are staying at a local authority, but moving to a non-child and family role, for example moving to adult social care.

Leavers also include child and family social workers who have begun a career break, those seconded out of an organisation or those leaving the profession altogether. They do not include social workers who have started maternity or sick leave.

---

**Vacancy rate** The vacancy rate is calculated using the formula:

(FTE)

$$\frac{\text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}}{\left( \frac{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September}}{\text{Number of vacancies at 30 September}} \right)}$$

---

**Turnover rate** The turnover rate is calculated using the formula:

(FTE and headcount)

$$\frac{\text{Number of social workers leaving in the year}}{\text{Number of social workers at 30 September}}$$

---

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

(FTE and headcount)

$$\frac{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September}}{\left( \frac{\text{Number of agency workers at 30 September}}{\text{Number of non – agency social workers at 30 September}} \right)}$$

---

**Absence rate** The absence rate is calculated using the formula:

(FTE)

$$\frac{\text{Number of days missed due to sickness absence during year for social workers in post at 30 September}}{\left( \frac{\text{Number of children and family social workers at 30 September}}{253} \right)}$$

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

Note: Includes all absences including long-term sickness.

---

Cases (FTE)	A case is defined as any person allocated to a named social worker, where the work involves child and family social work.
----------------	---

This may include:

- an individual child allocated to a social worker (for example a family of three siblings would be three individual cases) including those on a child protection plan, children in need, fostering and adoption cases and care leavers
- a carer or carers allocated to a social worker for the purposes of fostering or adoption.

---

Average caseload (FTE)	The average caseload per children and family social worker is calculated by taking the total number of cases held by each individual, divided by the number of individuals who have a number of cases greater than zero. Caseload data from 2016-17 onwards is not directly comparable with that for earlier years, due to methodology differences.
---------------------------	---

---

## Rounding and Suppression

The National Statistics Code of Practice requires we take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality. Suppression of small numbers has therefore been applied to the data, where it is applicable to do so.

The following rounding conventions have been used:

---

In the main text	Figures for FTEs and headcounts have been rounded to the nearest 100 or 10. Rates and percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer or to one decimal place.
------------------	---

---

In the underlying data	Figures for FTEs, rates and percentages have been rounded to one decimal place. Headcounts are provided to the nearest integer.
------------------------	---

---

The following suppression conventions have been used:

c	Where necessary we have replaced figures with a 'c' to preserve confidentiality. Secondary suppression may also be applied to preserve confidentiality.
0	Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.
.	Not applicable
..	Not available

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 because of the compilation or dissemination process the statistical release and accompanying data 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

## Official Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority defines official statistics as statistics produced by an organisation named by the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#) and described by that organisation as an official statistic or part of a set of official statistics. More information on types of statistics is available from the [UK Statistics Authority](#).

## Data quality

The quality of the data has improved, as a result of improved guidance, data validation and amendment processes and the hard work of local authorities to provide accurate data.

Quality assurance checks have been carried out at each stage of the data collection and production of the statistical publication. 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.

The data collection included validation checks, as covered earlier in the data cleaning section. All local authorities were asked to provide comments on the return relating to any validation queries and, where applicable, asked to confirm that the year on year changes were valid.

The majority of local authorities derive their children and family social work workforce data from their management information systems. This data requires checking and managerial sign off before it is submitted. However, the department does not collect information on the specific data checks carried out by local authorities.

Some known data quality issues are listed below:

---

Comparisons  
between years

We are publishing the 2019 children and family social work workforce data for the first time as official statistics. In 2017 and 2018 they were published as “experimental” statistics as the individual-level census was a new data collection. Local authorities are, however, becoming more familiar with the return and their data collection systems are now better placed to provide the data. We are also working continuously with local authorities to improve the data collection process, by clarifying guidance and inviting their feedback through focus groups.

There are still discrepancies between the years that are a result of data quality improvements and changes in data collection. For

---

---

example, we would expect that the headcount of staff at 30 September 2018 plus the starters for this year minus the leavers would give the headcount at 30 September 2019. However, this is not the case for a number of local authorities and may be due to how they have interpreted the department's guidance.

For the reasons outlined above, any comparisons between years should be treated with caution.

---

Starters

The number of starters during the year is derived from the individual start date.

Some local authorities have reported that they have recorded start dates when an employee has moved children and family social worker posts. However, a start date should only be recorded where the person is a new children and family social worker: this includes child and family social workers who joined a vacant child and family social worker post at a local authority and social workers who have previously worked in the same local authority, but in a non-child and family social worker role. It should not include a move or promotion from one child and family social work position to another child and family social work position within the same local authority.

As a result the number of starters reported may be inflated, as we cannot distinguish between new starters and individuals who changed roles based on the data available.

---

Duplicate records

Duplicates have been removed at a headcount level to account for cases where individuals have split roles; this avoids double counting. At FTE level duplicates have not been removed so that the FTE for each role is captured.

There are some occasions where the sum of the FTE in these cases is greater than 1. Consequently, there may be cases in the data where the FTE is greater than the headcount figure.

---

FTE

There are some records returned within the data collection where the FTE is recorded as zero. These cases are included in the tables at a headcount level, but at an FTE level will be counted as zero. In some instances, local authorities have reported that these individuals are working on a zero hour contract or casual basis and therefore do not have an FTE.

---

FTE for leavers	Within the data collection there are social workers who leave their post during the year and have a valid leaving date recorded. However, in some cases they do not have an FTE recorded for 30 September of the previous reporting year, which is required to calculate the FTE value for leavers. These social workers are included in the headcount of leavers, but are counted as 0 (zero) at an FTE level. The missing information also affects the turnover measure at an FTE level, as these individuals will not be included in the calculation.
-----------------	--

---

Gaps and inconsistencies	Some local authorities did not provide a complete and consistent set of data for the statutory data variables. The gaps and inconsistencies are outlined in the footnotes which accompany this publication.
--------------------------	---

---

Returns were received from all 151 local authorities. The majority of local authorities returned data for the statutory data variables, although concerns were raised about the data quality in some instances and some local authorities reported that certain data items were not available within their IT systems. Where applicable, these issues are explained in the footnotes of the relevant tables.

Kingston upon Thames and Richmond upon Thames submitted a joint return through Achieving for Children, a social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services. This means their data cannot be broken down to an individual local authority level and is instead reported together against Kingston upon Thames. This arrangement has no impact on the regional and national totals included in this publication.

### **Time series compatibility**

This is the seventh year that local authorities have been under a statutory obligation to return data on children and family social workers and the third year data has been collected at an individual level for all local authorities. The statistics are not comparable over time because of inconsistencies with reporting over the years. This means year on year changes may not reflect true changes in the number of children and family social workers, but may instead be a result of better reporting. The number of inconsistencies is decreasing over time however, as the department improves its guidance, and local authorities become more familiar with the census and develop their information management systems for the data collection.

## Data source

The figures in the statistical publication were derived from the Children and family social work workforce census for the year ending 30 September. The department first collected this data on a statutory basis in 2013, as an aggregate (local authority-level) return. The data was collected on an individual children and family social worker basis for the first time in 2017. The latest collection covers the year ending 30 September 2019.

Prior to 2013, the primary source for information on the children and family social work workforce was the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC). This was a voluntary return. The last report on this data published by the department covered the workforce at December 2012 and used data returned by 68 out of the 152 local authorities. There has been a 100% response rate for each of the statutory collections since 2013.

## Underlying data

The underlying data for this release is available in .CSV format, as part of this statistical publication.

Previous children's social work workforce statistical publications are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). These publications are not available in the new explore education statistics platform.

## Uses of the data

The main internal users of these statistics are officials within the department, to provide advice to ministers on current and future policies.

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

## Data items not included in the statistical publication

Some data items collected in the children's social work workforce census are not included in this statistical release because of low response rates or concerns regarding the quality of the data. These are all data items that are relatively new to the data collection or collected on a voluntary basis. We will work to improve the quality of this data, including making voluntary items mandatory, with a view to publishing information in future releases.

## **Mandatory data items:**

### **Qualification level**

This item collects data on highest qualification level information and was known for over 99% of children and family social workers in post on 30 September 2019. Of those, 46% were recorded as having an undergraduate degree which qualified them to work as a social worker, 30% a postgraduate degree and 24% other. However, some local authorities have reported difficulty in providing this data item, with nearly 20 recording all social workers against one category. This data item is therefore not included in the statistical release.

### **Origin when started**

This item collects data on the child and family social worker's situation prior to commencing employment in a social worker post at a local authority. Information was reported for all starters, however for 69% of starters it was recorded as 'not known' or 'not yet collected'.

### **Destination of leaver**

Information on destination was recorded as 'not known' or 'not yet collected' for 79% of leavers.

### **Reason for leaving**

Reason for leaving was populated for all leavers, but for 10% was recorded as 'Not known' or 'Not yet collected'.

### **Length of current post/assignment (agency workers only)**

Information on the length of current post or assignment was known for only 52% of FTE agency workers.

## **Voluntary data items:**

### **Qualifying institution**

This item collects data on the institution where the children and family social worker obtained their qualification and was known for less than half (44%) of children and family social workers.

### **Reason for absence**

Reason for absence was not known for 89% of FTE children and family social workers, who had a period of absence.

**Absent on 30 September**

Information was not known for 33% of FTE children and family social workers who were absent on 30 September 2019.

**Knowledge and skills statement**

Knowledge and skills statement information was not known for 82% of FTE children and family social workers.

## Regional adoption agencies

A regional adoption agency (RAA) is a shared adoption service for several local authorities, working with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and other partners to deliver a system wide approach. RAAs were introduced as a 2015 manifesto commitment with the aim that a larger service would be more efficient and effective than a fragmented system of smaller services in each local authority.

At the time of the 2018-19 children's social work workforce census, 20 RAAs covering nearly 100 local authorities had gone live. Where the RAA is hosted by a local authority (LA) and staff have been transferred, the social workers working within the RAA are recorded against the host local authority in the children's social work workforce data census.

### Live RAAs at time of the 2018-19 children's social work workforce census:

RAA Name	Go Live Date	LAs within the RAA	Host LA
One Adoption West Yorkshire	April 2017	Bradford Calderdale Kirklees Leeds Wakefield	Leeds
Adoption Counts	July 2017	Cheshire East Manchester Salford Stockport Trafford	Stockport
Aspire	July 2017	Bournemouth/ Christchurch/Poole Dorset	Bournemouth
Together for Adoption	September 2017	Cheshire West & Chester Halton St Helens Warrington Wigan	Wigan
Adoption NoW	November 2017	Bolton Blackburn with Darwen Bury Oldham Rochdale Tameside	Bolton
Adoption Thames Valley	December 2017	Bracknell Forest Oxfordshire Reading Swindon West Berkshire Windsor and Maidenhead Wokingham	Oxfordshire

RAA Name	Go Live Date	LAs within the RAA	Host LA
Adopt Central England	February 2017	Coventry Herefordshire Solihull Worcestershire Warwickshire	Warwickshire
One Adoption North Yorkshire and Humber	March 2018	City of York East Riding Kingston-upon-Hull North East Lincs North Yorkshire	York
AIM	April 2018	Knowsley Liverpool Sefton Wirral	Knowsley
Adopt Tees Valley	May 2018	Darlington Hartlepool Middlesbrough Redcar & Cleveland Stockton-on-Tees	Stockton
Adopt South West	October 2018	Devon Somerset Plymouth Torbay	Devon
Adopt North East	December 2018	Gateshead Newcastle North Tyneside South Tyneside Northumberland	South Tyneside
Adoption West	March 2019	Bath & North East Somerset Bristol Gloucestershire North Somerset South Gloucestershire Wiltshire	Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) led
Adopt South	April 2019	Hampshire Isle of Wight Portsmouth Southampton	Hampshire
Adoption Connects	April 2019	Central Bedfordshire Milton Keynes	Central Bedfordshire
Adoption @ Heart	April 2019	Dudley Wolverhampton Sandwell Walsall	Wolverhampton
Adoption East Midlands D2N2	March 2019	Derby Derbyshire Nottingham Nottinghamshire	Nottinghamshire
Ambitious for Adoption	May (phase 1) and July (phase 2) 2019	City of London Harrow Redbridge Bromley Hillingdon Waltham Forest	VAA led

RAA Name	Go Live Date	LAs within the RAA	Host LA
Adopt London South	September 2019	Croydon Kingston Upon Thames Lambeth Lewisham Merton Richmond Upon Thames Southwark Sutton Wandsworth	Southwark
Adopt London West	September 2019	Brent Ealing Hammersmith & Fulham Hounslow	Ealing

## 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:

[CSWW.Stats@education.gov.uk](mailto:CSWW.Stats@education.gov.uk)



Department  
for Education

© Crown copyright 2020

This publication (not including logos) is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

To view this licence:

visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

About this publication:

enquiries [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

download [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Reference: Children and family social work workforce in England technical document



Follow us on Twitter:  
[@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)



Like us on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/educationgovuk](https://facebook.com/educationgovuk)