



Department
for Education



Statistical First Release

Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements in England: Year Ending 31 March 2014

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Internet	Private Fostering Arrangements

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- 1,610** Children reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England at 31 March 2014. This is an increase of 7% compared with the previous year. The numbers have fluctuated between 1,250 and 1,650 over the past 8 years but overall are generally quite stable.

 - 2,880** New arrangements reported to have started during the 2014 financial year, an increase of 15% on the previous year. Overall this has been steadily increasing over the past 8 years from 1,420 in 2007 to 2,880 in 2014.

 - 2,750** Arrangements were reported to have ended, an increase of 6% compared with the previous year. This has been steadily increasing over the past 8 years from 1,040 in 2007 to 2,750 in 2014.

 - 80%** Of cases where action was taken following a notification of a private fostering arrangement, had action taken within 7 working days, compared with 72% the previous year. This is the highest proportion in the last 8 years.

 - 38%** Of children reported to be in private fostering arrangements were born in the UK. This proportion has been declining since 2008 and in 2013 for the first time the majority of children in new arrangements were born overseas, this has continued in 2014.
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A National Statistics publication

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

1. Background and context

This publication

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides figures on notifications received by local authorities (LAs) of children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England.

Definition of a private fostering arrangement

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a close relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but if a child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.

Legal duty to notify

Parents and carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority when entering into a private fostering arrangement; local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment, and to monitor the arrangement. Some notifications are received from parties involved in private fostering arrangements, often private foster carers or young people. These notifications tend to occur once the arrangement is well underway, and often come about as a result of a private foster carer approaching the authority for general support or advice. On occasion authorities are notified of private fostering when the arrangement is in crisis and in danger of breaking down. Reasons for such crises could be because of a breakdown in financial arrangements between the private foster carer(s) and the birth parent(s), or conflict between the privately fostered child and their carer. Note that not all notifications go on to be classified as private fostering arrangements; if they do not meet the requirements of the definition of a private fostering arrangement as detailed above they would be counted as a notification but not an arrangement.

Figures are an undercount...

The figures reported in the SFR are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. This is because there is doubt over whether all parents, carers and other relevant third parties currently report the existence of these arrangements to their LA. We are not clear whether the changes in the number of arrangements seen is due to changes in activity in private fostering or a change in the reporting of such arrangements.

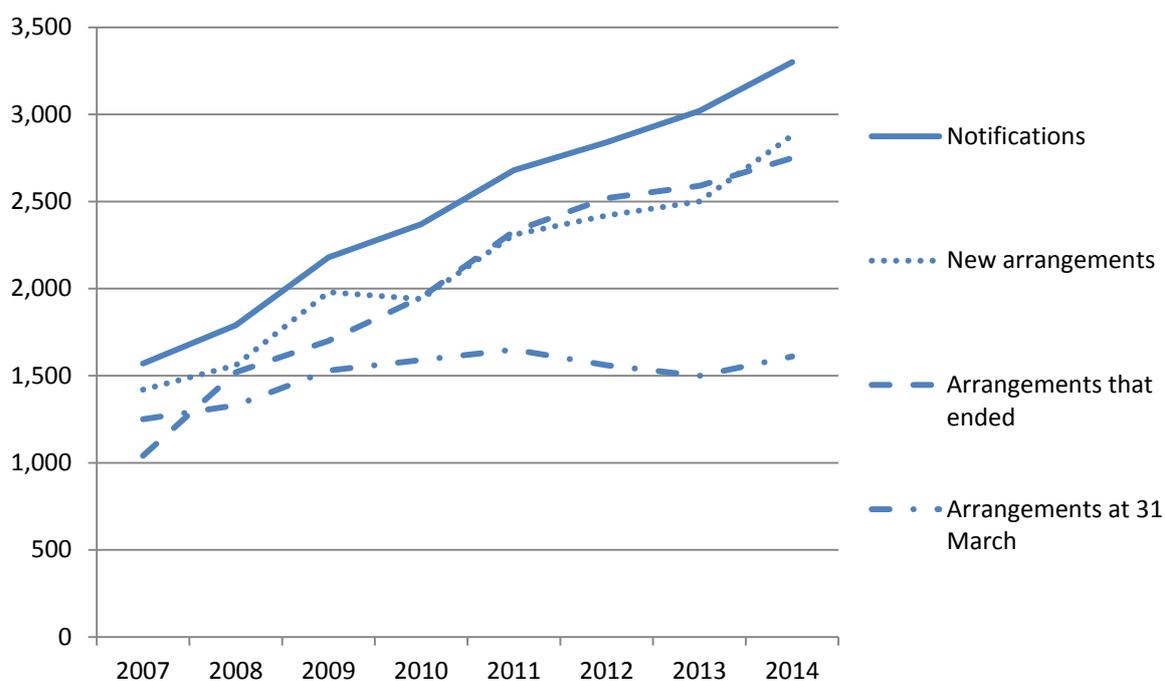
Readers are cautioned against using the figures in this SFR as an estimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. Further information on the issue of under-reporting can be found in the Quality and Uses document, which accompanies this SFR and can be found on the publication webpage.

...But are still important

The figures in this SFR are still important as they allow the Department to monitor LA performance against the requirements for carrying out visits under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. LAs are required to visit the child and the foster carer to satisfy themselves about the child's welfare. Further details of these visits can be found in the Technical Notes.

2. Notifications and arrangements (Table 1)

Chart A: Notifications, new arrangements, arrangements that ended and arrangements at 31 March all increasing



Notifications are increasing

3,300 notifications were received by local authorities in the year ending 31 March 2014, the highest over the past 8 years.

...so are new arrangements

Overall the number of new arrangements has been steadily increasing over the past 8 years from 1,420 in 2007 to 2,880 in 2014.

Arrangements at 31 March have fluctuated in the past 5 years

The number of arrangements at 31 March 2014 has increased 7% from 1,500 in the previous year to 1,610. The numbers have fluctuated over the past 8 years but are generally quite stable. Note that not all notifications go on to be classified as a private fostering arrangement.

...and varies at regional level

Compared with the previous year, 3 regions saw a fall in the number of reported arrangements and 6 regions saw an increase. West Midlands had the greatest increase of 40% and the North East had the greatest decrease at 16%. Please note that numbers are small so percentages are volatile.

Related data trends...

Information on children who are looked after in England by their Local Authority in a foster placement is included in the [“Children Looked After in England” Statistical First Release](#). National figures show a steady increase over the past five years in the overall number of children looked after as well as the number of children looked after in a foster placement. The number of children adopted has fluctuated but also shows an increasing trend.

3. Action taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits (Table 2)

Action taken in accordance with requirements

Within seven working days of receipt of notification of a private fostering arrangement, local authorities are required to take action which involves carrying out visits. Action will not be taken if the notification does not meet the requirements of a private fostering arrangement. Further information on the Regulations is in the Technical Notes.

Table A: Cases where action was taken within 7 working days is up

	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits	Number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days	Percentage of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days
2007	1,410	970	69
2008	1,600	1,240	78
2009	1,880	1,440	77
2010	2,040	1,520	75
2011	2,420	1,860	77
2012	2,420	1,870	77
2013	2,820	2,020	72
2014	3,060	2,440	80

Highest proportion of cases where action was taken within 7 working days since 2007

80% of cases where action was taken were taken within 7 working days, compared with 72% the previous year. This is the highest proportion in the last 8 years.

4. Characteristics (Table 3a and 3b)

Chart B: Age breakdown of children reported to have started a new private fostering arrangement during the year

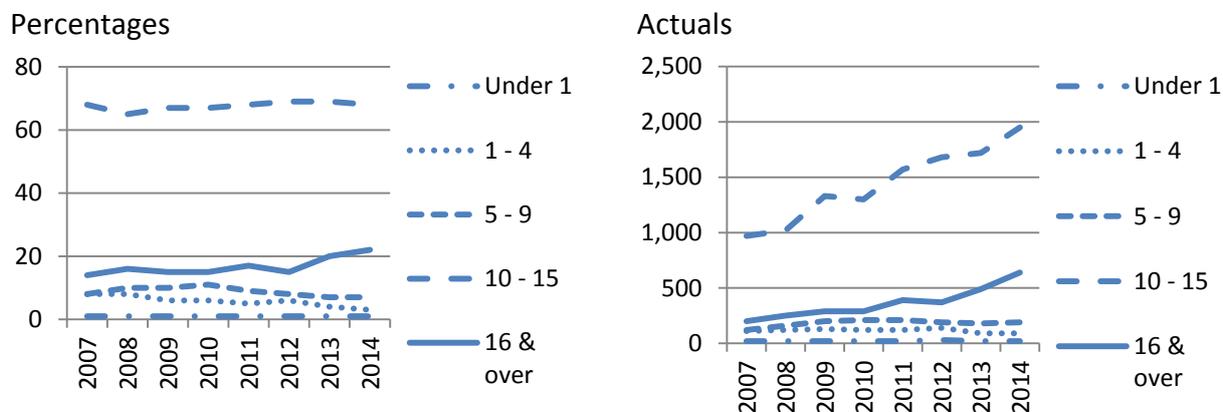
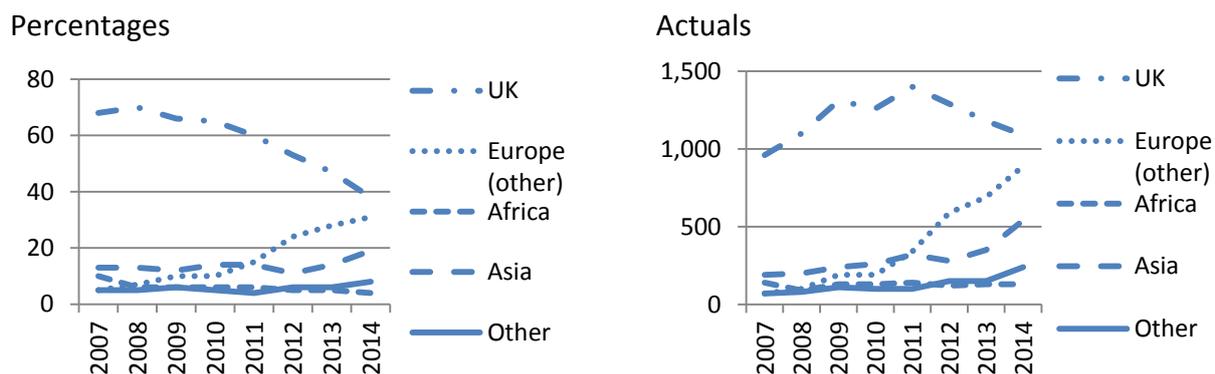


Chart C: Breakdown of place of birth for children reported to start private fostering arrangements



Most are aged 10 to 15

The majority (68%) of children in new private fostering arrangements are aged 10 to 15. This proportion is quite stable over time; it has varied between a minimum of 65% and a maximum of 69% over the last 8 years.

Increase in those aged 16+

22% of children in new private fostering arrangements are aged 16 and over. This has increased from 20% in 2013 and 14% in 2007.

38% born in the UK

38% of children reported to be in private fostering arrangements were born in the UK. This proportion has been declining since 2008.

The numbers from overseas continues to increase

2013 was the first year where the majority of children reported to be in new private fostering arrangements were born overseas. This trend continues in 2014.

Large increase in children born in Asia

The proportion of children reported to be in private fostering arrangements that were born in Asia has increased by 5 percentage points from 14% in 2013 to 19% in 2014

5. Visits within timescale (Table 4)

Regulations for visits

Within the first year of a private fostering arrangement, local authorities are required to make follow-up visits at intervals of not more than 6 weeks. For the second and any subsequent years, visits should be made at intervals of not more than 12 weeks. Further information on the Regulations is in the Technical Notes.

67% visited within 6 weeks

2,880 arrangements were reported to have begun on or after 1 April 2013 and, of these, 67% were visited within the required timescale of 6 weeks. This has decreased from 69% in the previous year but is fairly stable over the past 5 years, ranging between 64% and 69% since 2010.

Performance varies across the regions

East of England achieved the highest percentage of visits within 6 weeks, at 91%, and the South West achieved the lowest, at 55%

68% visited within 12 weeks

1,400 arrangements were reported to be ongoing at 1 April 2013 and, of these, 68% were visited within 12 weeks. In the previous year it was 67%. This has been fairly stable over the past 5 years, ranging between 62% and 68%.

Performance varies across the regions

East of England achieved the highest percentage of visits within 12 weeks, at 79% and the North West achieved the lowest, at 52%. Please note that numbers are small so percentages are volatile.

6. List of tables

The following tables are available in excel format on the [Department's statistics website](#).

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

Table 4a Number and percentage of reported new arrangements where scheduled visits were completed within 6 weeks, years ending 2010 to 2014

Table 4b Number and percentage of reported ongoing arrangements where scheduled visits were completed in 12 weeks, years ending 2010 to 2014

When reviewing the tables, please note the following:

We preserve confidentiality The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires we take reasonable steps to ensure that our published or disseminated statistics protect confidentiality.

We round numbers We round numbers to the nearest 10. Because of this rounding, totals in text and in tables may not always equal the sum of their component parts. This suppression is consistent with the [Departmental statistical policy](#).

And publish underlying data As part of a Government drive for data transparency in official publications and to make data more accessible, supporting underlying data at local authority level is published alongside this SFR. Further detail on the underlying data can be found in the Quality and Uses Document on the publication webpage.

Technical notes

7. Methodology

Details of the methodology used in this SFR are published in a separate document which can be found on the publication webpage.

8. Legislation

The legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989, as amended by section 44 of the Children Act 2004 which came into effect on 1 July 2005, and regulations made under Part 9 of 1989 Children Act ([the Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#)), which also came into effect on 1 July 2005. Local authorities are required to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within their area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

The requirements of Regulation 4(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority has received notification under regulation 3 it must, for the purposes of discharging their duty under section 67(1) of the Act (welfare of privately fostered children), arrange for an officer of the authority within 7 working days to:

- (a) visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated;
- (b) visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of his household;
- (c) visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate;
- (d) speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and
- (e) establish such matters listed in Schedule 2 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

The requirements of Regulation 7(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that where a local authority have received a notification under regulation 5 or 6 they must for the purposes of discharging their functions under section 67(1) of the Act, arrange for an officer of the authority within 7 working days to:

- (a) visit the premises where the child is being cared for and accommodated;
- (b) visit and speak to the private foster carer and to all members of his household;
- (c) visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate;
- (d) speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and
- (e) establish such matters listed in Schedule 3 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

The requirements of Regulation 8(1) of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 state that each local authority must arrange for an officer of the authority to visit every child who is being fostered privately in their area at intervals of not more than 6 weeks in the first year of the private fostering arrangement; and intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any second or subsequent year.

9. Data quality and uses of the data

A separate document has been published which details issues relating to the quality of the data from the PF1 return along with details of users and the known uses made of the data. This can be found on the publication webpage.

10. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

11. Research on Under Reporting

Under-reporting of arrangements

There have been long-running concerns about the under-reporting of private fostering arrangements as evidenced in a [leaflet for professionals](#) produced by the Department of Health (2001). This suggested there were around 10,000 children under private fostering arrangements at any given time. However, this figure is 13 years out of date and there are also concerns around the accuracy of this figure. These concerns were reiterated in a [research document](#) funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)¹ (Research into Private Fostering) which was published in March 2010.

Sources of notifications

The DCSF-funded research explored the sources of private fostering notifications. Overall, most local authorities' notifications were received from statutory agencies, particularly from other social workers and education. Analysis revealed that the groups most likely to notify local authorities of private fostering arrangements are (in order): (i) Social workers (this group was a long way ahead in terms of making 'frequent' or 'occasional' notifications), (ii) Teachers in state schools, (iii) 'others' (including agencies outside of the Children's Trust/children's workforce) and (iv) Health workers

Type of arrangements

The same research identified some common circumstances where private fostering arrangements occurred through surveys and case studies. African and Caribbean children with parents and family abroad, children attending language schools, children sent to the UK for educational purposes, local children living apart from their families due to parental problems and "sofa-surfers" (teenagers making their own arrangements to stay with friends' families or adults)

Why arrangements aren't reported

The research also cited the following as some reasons why private fostering arrangements are failed to be reported: (i) lack of awareness or confusion as to what constitutes a private fostering arrangement, (ii) concerns about confidentiality, (iii) agencies not aware of their responsibility to notify and (iv) insufficient awareness among parties involved in private fostering arrangements.

¹ Now the Department for Education.

12. Related publications

Wales	Information on private fostering arrangements in Wales can be found in Social services statistics Wales, 2012-13
Scotland	The Scottish Government do not centrally collect information on Private Fostering arrangements in Scotland.
Northern Ireland	The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety does not produce statistics relating to Private Fostering Arrangements in Northern Ireland.
Children looked after	Information on children who are looked after in England by their Local Authority in a foster placement is included in the "Children Looked After in England" Statistical First Release .

13. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

Users are encouraged to provide feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet user needs. Comments on any issues relating to this SFR are welcomed and encouraged. Any enquiries should be addressed to the following:

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