



Department  
for Education

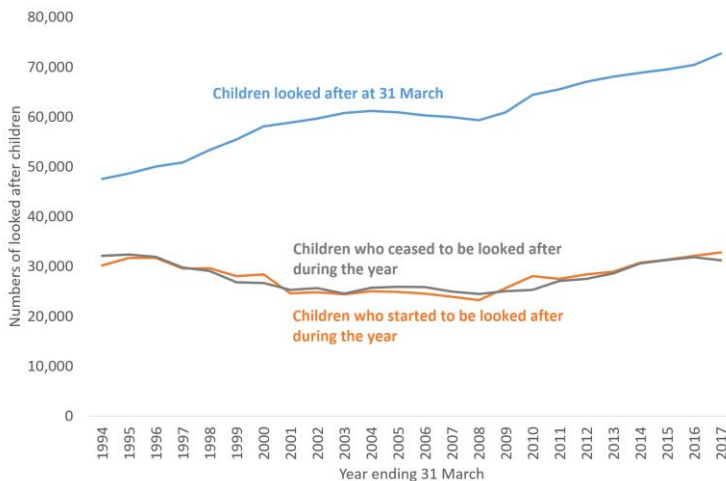
# Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017



SFR 50/2017, 28 September 2017

## The number of looked after children continues to increase

### Number of children looked after at 31 March and starting and ceasing to be looked after during the year, 1994 to 2017



The number of looked after children continues to increase; it has increased steadily over the last nine years. At 31 March 2017 there were 72,670 looked after children, an increase of 3% on 2016.

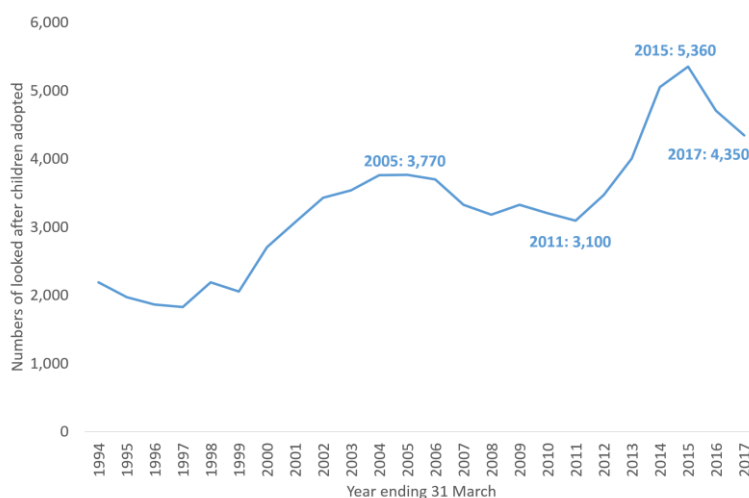
The number of children starting to be looked after in 2016-17 has also risen in recent years and has increased by 2% compared with the previous year.

The number of children ceasing to be looked after in 2016-17 has fallen by 2% compared with the previous year.

Source: SSDA 903

## Adoptions have fallen for a second year, down from a peak in 2015

### Number of children looked after who were adopted, 1994 to 2017



The number of looked after children ceasing to be looked after due to adoption increased between 2011 and 2015 from 3,100 to a peak of 5,360. Last year the number of adoptions fell for the first time since 2011, by 12% and in 2017 the number of looked after children adopted have fallen again, by 8% to 4,350.

Source: SSDA 903

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## About this release

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides information about looked after children in England for the year ending 31 March 2017, including their placement type, their legal status, the numbers starting and ceasing to be looked after, and the numbers who go missing or are away from their placement without authorisation. Data is reported on care leavers aged 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 years, and numbers include looked after children who were placed for adoption, the number who were adopted and the average time between different stages of the adoption process.

## In this publication

The following tables are included in the SFR:

- Children looked after national tables (SFR50\_2017\_National\_tables.xls)
- Children looked after local authority tables (SFR50\_2017\_LA\_tables.xls)

The accompanying quality and methodology document provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality, and explains the methodology used in producing the data. Additional tables to support this release will be published in December 2017 and underlying data will be published alongside these additional tables.

## Feedback

We are changing how our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document.

In particular we are reviewing the information we publish in looked after children additional tables release with a view to reducing the number of formal tables published but providing the information instead through the underlying data. We welcome any feedback on this proposal to: [cla.stats@education.gov.uk](mailto:cla.stats@education.gov.uk).

# 1. Numbers and characteristics of children looked after at 31 March

(Table A1, A2 & A3)

Under the Children Act 1989, a **child is looked after** by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:

- is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours,

[Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21]

- is subject to a care order

[Children Act 1989, Part IV]

- is subject to a placement order.

A **voluntary agreement** under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 enables a local authority to provide accommodation for any child in need if they consider that to do so would safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Such an arrangement requires the consent of those with parental responsibility where a child is under 16 or the child themselves where the child is over 16. A local authority is required to provide accommodation for a child within their area under section 20 as a result of:

(a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;

(b) his being lost or having been abandoned; or

(c) the person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

Under the Children Act 1989, a **care order** is defined as an order made by the court on the application of any local authority or authorised person to:

(a) place a child with respect to whom the application is made in the care of a designated local authority; or

(b) put him under the supervision of a designated local authority.

A **placement order** is a court order which gives a local authority the legal authority to place a child for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the authority. Only local authorities may apply for placement orders. The order continues in force until it is revoked, an adoption order is made in respect of the child, the child marries, forms a civil partnership or the child reaches 18.

In 2017 the numbers of looked after children in England continue to increase. After small rises of 1% each year between 2014 and 2016, the rise this year has been greater at 3%. At 31 March 2017 there were 72,670 looked after children in England, an increase of 2,220 on 2016, and an increase of 4,600 on 2013. At 31 March 2017, 62 children per 10,000 of the population were looked after, up from 60 children per 10,000 in the previous four years.

**Table 1: Number of children looked after at 31 March 2013 to 2017**

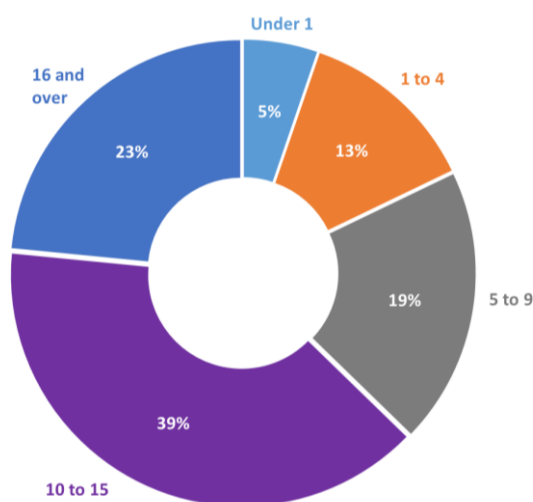
| Year ending 31 March | Number of looked after children | Year on year change | Rate per 10,000 children under 18 years |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 2013                 | 68,070                          | .                   | 60                                      |
| 2014                 | 68,820                          | +1%                 | 60                                      |
| 2015                 | 69,500                          | +1%                 | 60                                      |
| 2016                 | 70,450                          | +1%                 | 60                                      |
| 2017                 | 72,670                          | +3%                 | 62                                      |

Source: SSDA 903

The increase in looked after children reflects that more children started to be looked after in 2017 than ceased. For the last two years, the changes seen in the characteristics of looked after children, those who become looked after and care leavers are influenced by the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children cohort who tend to be non-white British, older children, with a main category of need of absent parenting.

There are slightly more males than females looked after – at 31 March 2017 56% of looked after children were male and 44% were female. These proportions have been quite stable in recent years. The numbers of both males and females have increased in 2017, both increasing by around 3% compared to 2016. Over the last five years there have been greater increases in the number of looked after children who were male – there was an increase of 9% between 2013 and 2017, compared to an increase of 4% for females. This difference has largely been driven by the increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children over this period, the majority of whom are male (see section on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children below).

**Chart 1: Proportions of children looked after at 31 March by age group (in years)**  
England, 2017



Source: SSDA 903

The age profile of looked after children is very similar to last year, with little change in the proportion of children in each age group. Over recent years the numbers of looked after children aged under 1 year have been decreasing; at 31 March 2017 they are down 11% on five years ago, however we did see a slight increase this year of 280 children (8%) between 2016 and 2017. There has been very little change in the number of 1-4 year olds and 5-9 year olds this year; after decreasing slightly in recent years the 1-4 year old group has stabilised around 9,200 children in 2017 and the 5-9 year old group, after increasing in recent years, has stabilised around 14,100.

### Ethnicity of looked after children

Looked after children are predominantly white. 75% of looked after children at 31 March 2017 were white, 9% were of mixed ethnicity, 7% were black or black british, 5% were asian or asian british and 3% were other ethnic groups. Non-white children appear to be slightly over-represented in the looked after children population, in particular children of mixed and black ethnicity. Children of asian ethnicity are slightly under represented<sup>1</sup>. Over the last five years there have been small increases in the proportions of looked after children of non-white ethnicity which is likely to reflect the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

<sup>1</sup> Population figures for children aged under 18 years are taken from [Nomis - Official Labour Market Statistics](#).

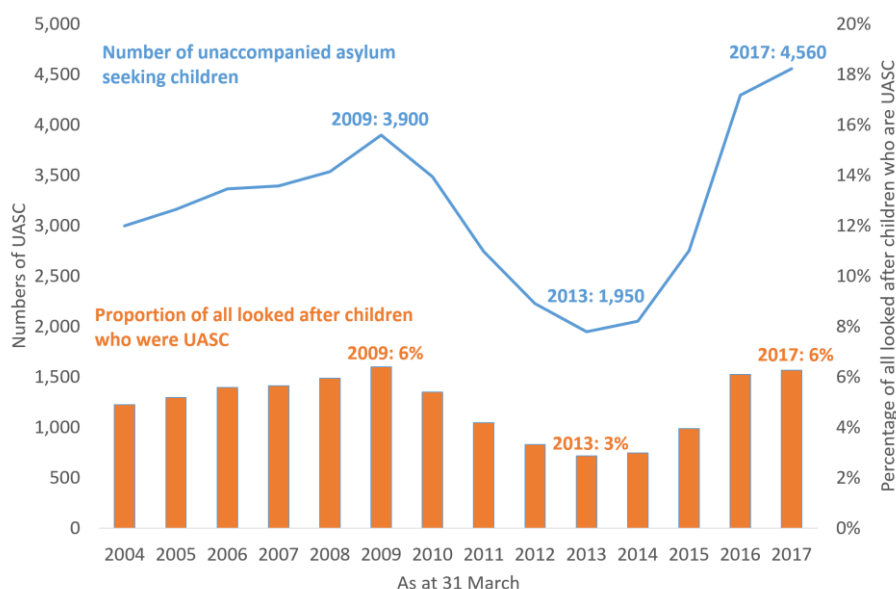
## Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

An **unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC)** is an individual, who is under 18, who has applied for asylum in his/her own right, is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so.

After a large rise in numbers last year, the number of looked after children who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children continues to increase in 2017. The number of looked after children at 31 March 2017 who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children increased by 6% compared to last year, up to 4,560 from 4,300 in 2016, and up 134% from 1,950 in 2013. Up to 2009 the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children was steadily rising to a peak of 3,900 which was 6% of the looked after children population. Between 2009 and 2013 the numbers fell to a low of 1,950 (3% of the looked after children population) before increasing again in 2017 to the levels seen in 2009 where unaccompanied asylum-seeking children represent 6% of the looked after children population.

Whilst we do not collect information on the nationality of looked after children, statistics on asylum *applications* from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by nationality are published by the Home Office<sup>2</sup>.

**Chart 2: Numbers and proportions of looked after children who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**  
England, 2004 to 2017



Source: SSDA 903

Last year we saw that the number of looked after children, excluding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children fell slightly by 1%. However this year we see that the number of non-unaccompanied asylum-seeking looked after children have increased slightly (by 3%).

<sup>2</sup> Home Office National Statistics asylum data tables at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2017-data-tables>.

In recent years we have seen the increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being largely driven by more males, however this year there is a greater increase in females – male unaccompanied asylum-seeking children rose by 5% whereas female unaccompanied asylum-seeking children rose by 19% between 2016 and 2017. However, females still only account for 390 (8%) of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children looked after at 31 March 2017.

There has been an increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 years and over, up 9% to 3,540, whereas the number aged under 16 years has decreased slightly by 3% to 1,020. This means 78% of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at 31 March 2017 were aged 16 years of age and over, and 22% were aged under 16 years. This compares to 76% and 24% in 2016 and 74% and 26% in 2013.

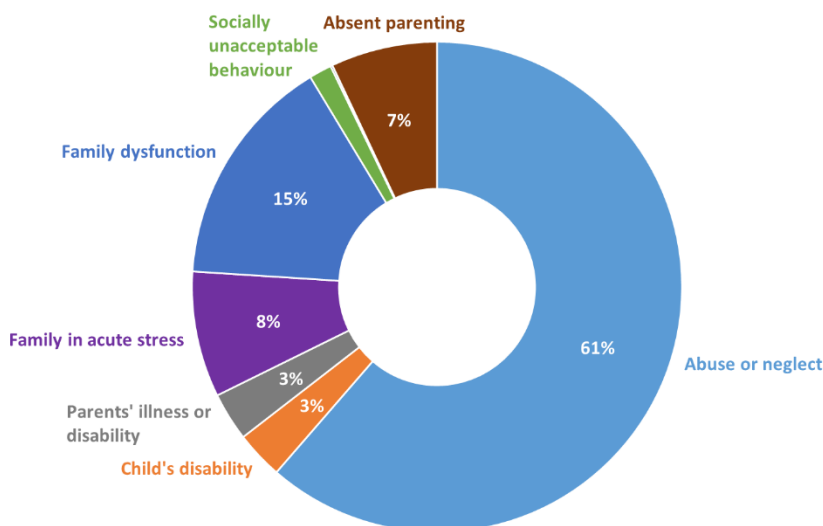
89% of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were assessed as having a primary need<sup>3</sup> of absent parenting. 5% had a primary need of abuse or neglect, 3% family in acute stress and 2% family dysfunction. This pattern is similar to figures seen over the last 5 years.

There is significant variation in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across the country – many are concentrated in areas where they first make entry into the country (for example Kent, Croydon, Hillingdon). At 31 March 2017 the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in these local authorities have reduced compared to 2016. We understand this is a result of the implementation of a National Transfer Scheme<sup>4</sup> from 1 July 2016 resulting in some of these children being distributed across other local authorities within the country.

### Reason for being looked after

When a child is assessed by children's social care their primary need is recorded. For children who are looked after at 31 March 2017, the proportions of children with each recorded category of need is very similar to last year. 61% (44,600 children) were looked after due to an initial need of abuse or neglect, 15% (11,150) family dysfunction, 8% (6,030) family in acute stress and 7% (5,100) absent parenting.

**Chart 3: Proportions of looked after children at 31 March by category of need**  
England, 2017



Source: SSDA 903

<sup>3</sup> Further information on primary need can be found in the [collection guide](#).

<sup>4</sup> Further details on the National Transfer Scheme can be found [online](#).



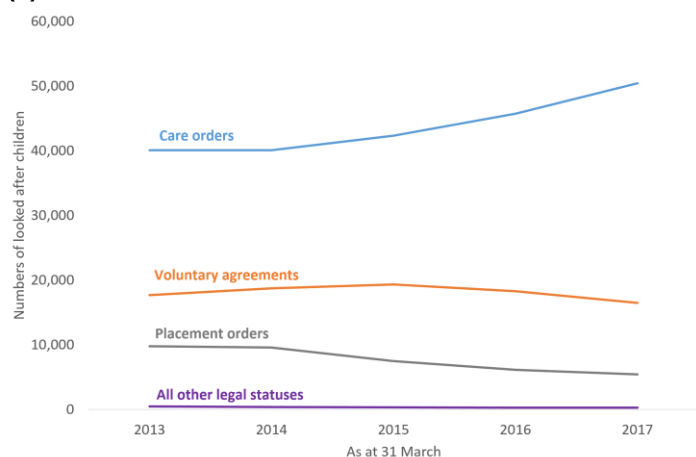
## Legal status of looked after children

Most children are looked after under a care order; the numbers of children looked after under a care order continue to increase and the number who are looked after through a voluntary arrangement continue to decrease.

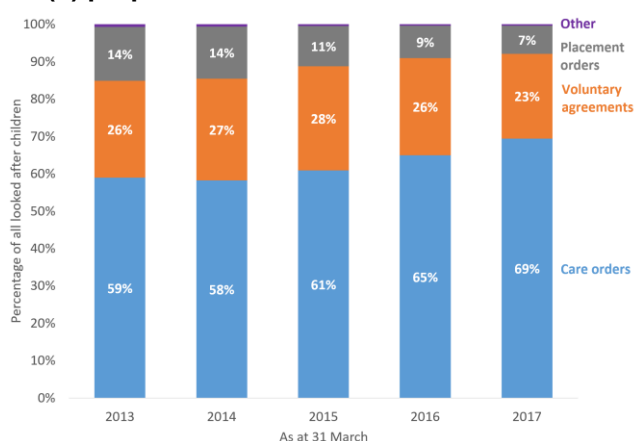
50,470 children were looked after at 31 March 2017 under a care order, up 10% on 45,750 in 2016 and up from a low of 40,070 in 2014, which represents an increase in numbers over the last three years of 26%. The numbers of looked after children looked after under a voluntary agreement under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 was highest in 2015 at 19,350 but has since fallen to 16,470 in 2017.

**Chart 4: Numbers and proportions of looked after children at 31 March, by legal status**  
England, 2013 to 2017

### (a) numbers



### (b) proportions



Source: SSDA903

Over the past four years the numbers of placement orders has fallen. At 31 March 2013, the numbers of children looked after under a placement order peaked at 9,800 and have fallen steadily since to 5,440 at 31 March 2017. In 2013, placement orders represented 14% of looked after children at 31 March whereas in 2017 only 7% of looked after children are on placement orders.

This is in line with quarterly adoptions data collected by the Adoption Leadership Board, which has indicated that numbers of Adoption Decision Maker decisions for adoption and numbers of adoption placement orders granted have decreased. On the 27 March 2016, the Department for Education published a new adoption strategy "Adoption – a vision for change" which addresses the decline in Adoption Decision Maker decisions and adoption placement orders further.

## Placement of children looked after (Table A2)

A **Fostering for Adoption (FfA)** placement relates to when a looked after child is placed in a foster placement with carers who are foster carers who are also approved prospective adopters and adoption is likely to be the outcome. The local authority are considering adoption for the child or are satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption but do not have a placement order or parental consent to place the child for adoption, but are seeking to obtain the order or consent.

**Concurrent planning** is where the local authority is trying to rehabilitate the child with the birth parents, but at the same time, the local authority is planning for adoption, in the event that rehabilitation fails.

Most looked after children are accommodated in foster placements. 74% of children looked after at 31 March 2017 were in foster placements, a similar proportion as in previous years. There has continued to be a fall in children placed with prospective adopters.

At 31 March 2017, there were 53,420 children in foster placements, up from 50,560 in 2013. 62% of children fostered were placed within the council boundary and 17% were fostered by a relative or friend. 380 children (1%) were placed with a carer who is also an approved adopter (fostering for adoption), or where they were subject to concurrent planning.



**Table 2: Number of children looked after at 31 March placed in foster placements**  
England, 2017

| Placement type                 | Number        | Percentage  |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>Total foster placements</b> | <b>53,420</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| Inside the council boundary    | 33,270        | 62%         |
| Outside the council boundary   | 20,160        | 38%         |
| With a relative or friend      | 8,830         | 17%         |
| With other foster carer        | 44,600        | 83%         |

Source: SSDA903

The number of children placed with parents has continued to increase this year, up 13% from 3,890 in 2016 to 4,370 in 2017. 6% of looked after children were placed with parents in 2017, the same as in 2016. 7,890 children were placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living arrangements, an increase in numbers of 2% on 2016. The proportion of children placed in these settings is the same as last year but it is difficult to comment in the longer term due to changes in the collection introduced in 2016, which resulted in improvements in collecting and validating data on placements.<sup>5</sup>

There were 2,520 looked after children who were placed for adoption in the year ending 31 March 2017, representing 3% of all looked after children. The numbers of looked after children placed for adoption rose to a peak of 3,940 (6%) in 2014, but have since been falling. The numbers dropped by 12% last year and have fallen a further 20% this year.

### Number of placements during the year

68% of looked after children at 31 March 2017 had only had one placement during the year, 21% had 2 placements and 10% had 3 or more placements. These are similar to the figures reported last year and we cannot compare directly to earlier years as the methodology changed in 2016<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See section 5.1 of the methodology and quality document for more information

<sup>6</sup> New data collected from 2016 allows us to identify if the change of placement involved a change of carer. If a child does not change carer in a new placement then this is not counted as an additional placement.

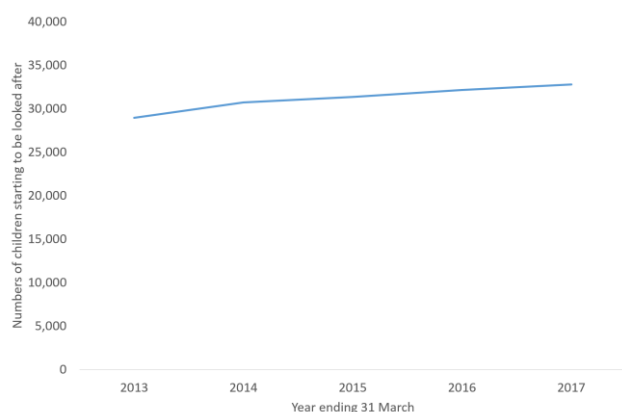
## 2. Children who started to be looked after (Table C1)

The number of children starting to be looked after continued to rise in 2017, up 2% on 2016 and up 13% on 2013.

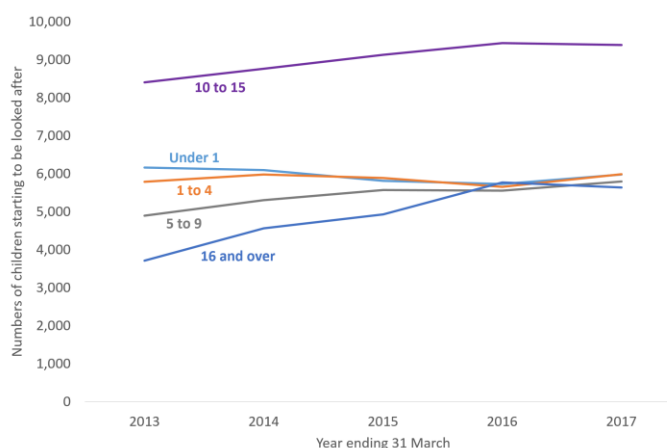
Most of the increase in numbers is due to the more females starting to be looked after – there were 14,420 females starting to be looked after in 2017 up 4% on 2016. However there are still more males starting to be looked after than females – 56% of children starting to be looked after were male compared to 44% who were female.

**Chart 5: Number of children starting to be looked after**  
England, 2013 to 2017

**(a) total numbers**



**(b) by age**



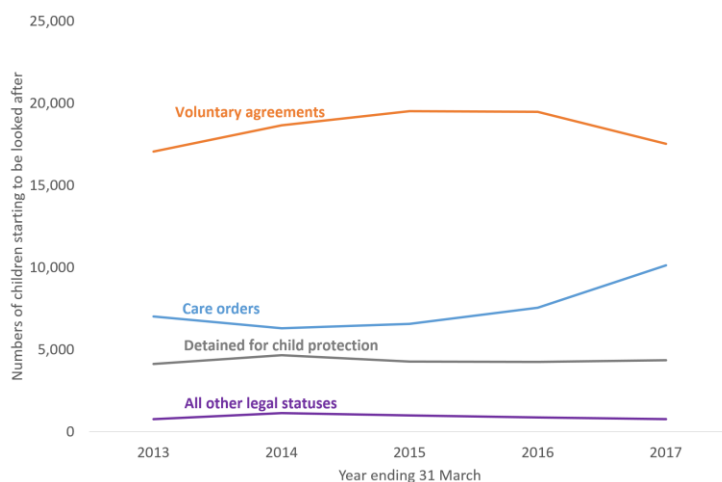
Source: SSDA903

By age group, both the numbers and proportion of children starting to be looked after are similar to last year. Over the last five years, we have seen a slight fall in the proportions aged under 5 years and an increase in the proportions aged 16 years and over which is likely to reflect the increase in the number of asylum-seeking children.

Of the children starting to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2017, 17,540 (53%) started to be looked after under a voluntary agreement under section 20 of the Children Act 1989<sup>7</sup>. This has fluctuated over recent years at around 60% of all children starting to be looked after, but has fallen this year to 53% from 61% in 2016. The number of children looked after under a care order has increased by a third, from 7,550 children in 2016 to 10,130 in 2017. 31% of all children starting to be looked after were looked after under a care order in 2017, up from 23% in 2016. 13% of children starting to be looked after are detained for child protection and 2% start to be looked after under youth justice statuses.

<sup>7</sup> For definitions of legal statuses see page 4.

**Chart 6: Number of children starting to be looked after by legal status**  
England, 2013 to 2017



Source: SSDA903

Information on whether children starting to be looked after had previously left care under a permanence arrangement (that is adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangements order) was collected for the first time in 2014. In the year ending 31 March 2017, of the 32,810 children starting to be looked after, 86% had had no previous permanence arrangement and 620 (2%) were known to have had a previous permanence arrangement; 240 had had a special guardianship order, 200 had been adopted and 180 had a residence order or child arrangements order. It is difficult to read too much into these numbers given they are small, and that in many cases (12% of children starting to be looked after in 2017) the information is not known.

### 3. Children who ceased to be looked after (Table D1)

The number of children looked after who ceased to be looked after fell for the first time in 2017 after rising steadily since 2008. There were 31,250 children who ceased to be looked after in 2017, a decrease of 2% on 2016.

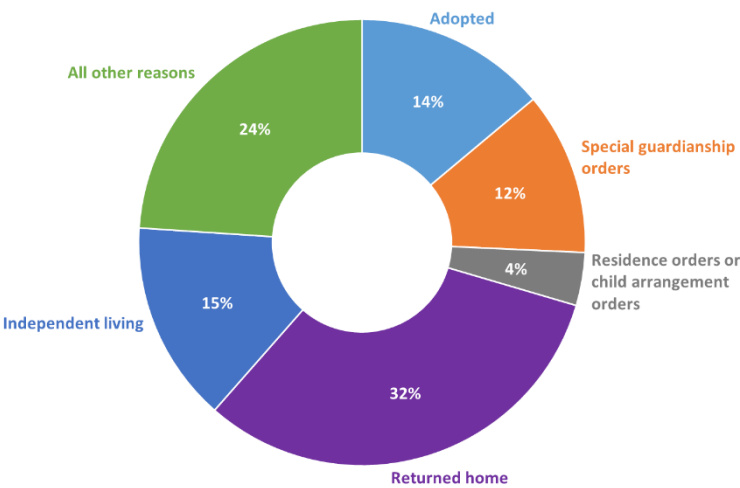
8,700 children ceased to be looked after on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is 28% of all children ceasing to be looked after. This has increased from 6,830 (22% of children ceasing) in 2014 and is likely to reflect the increased number of looked after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children over this time. The next largest group is children aged 1 to 4 years – 7,160 children ceased to be looked after which is 23% of all children ceasing to be looked after. The number and proportion of children ceasing to be looked after in the 1 to 4 years age group have fallen from 28% since 2014 – this is likely a reflection on the fall in the number of children who have been adopted.

#### Reasons for ceasing to be looked after

In 2017, of the 31,250 children who ceased to be looked after, 9,970 (32%) returned home to live with their parents or relatives. This is down slightly from 34% of all children ceasing to be looked after in 2016 and 34% of all children ceasing to be looked after in 2015. We cannot compare to earlier years due to changes in recording categories.

4,350 children ceased to be looked after due to being adopted (14%). Whilst this is higher than in 2013, it is 19% lower than the peak of 5,360 (17%) in 2015. 3,690 (12%) ceased to be looked after due to a special guardianship order up 33% from 2,770 in 2013 but down slightly since 2016. 15% ceased move to to independent living, similar to the 14% in 2013, however more are living independently with supportive accommodation, up from 10% in 2013, to 12% in 2017.

**Chart 7: Proportions of children who ceased to be looked after by reason, England, 2017**



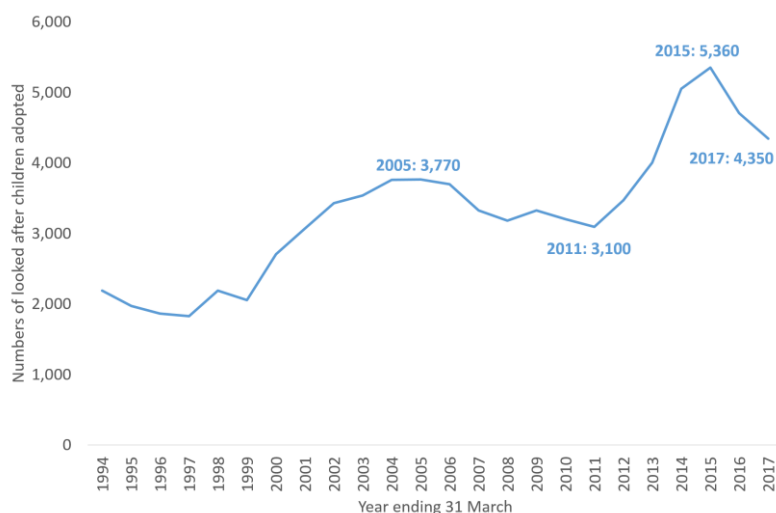
Source: SSDA903

## 4. Children looked after who were adopted (Tables E1 & E2)

The number of looked after children who were adopted in 2017 decreased, continuing a decline we saw last year from a peak 5,360 in 2015. This fall was expected as since 2015 the number of looked after children with a placement order has decreased, as has the number of looked after children who were placed for adoption.

4,350 looked after children were adopted in 2017, down 8% on 2016 and down 19% of the peak of 5,360 in 2015. This fall follows a period of increasing numbers of looked after children being adopted since 2011.

**Chart 8: Children looked after who were adopted**  
England, 1994 to 2017



Source: SSDA903

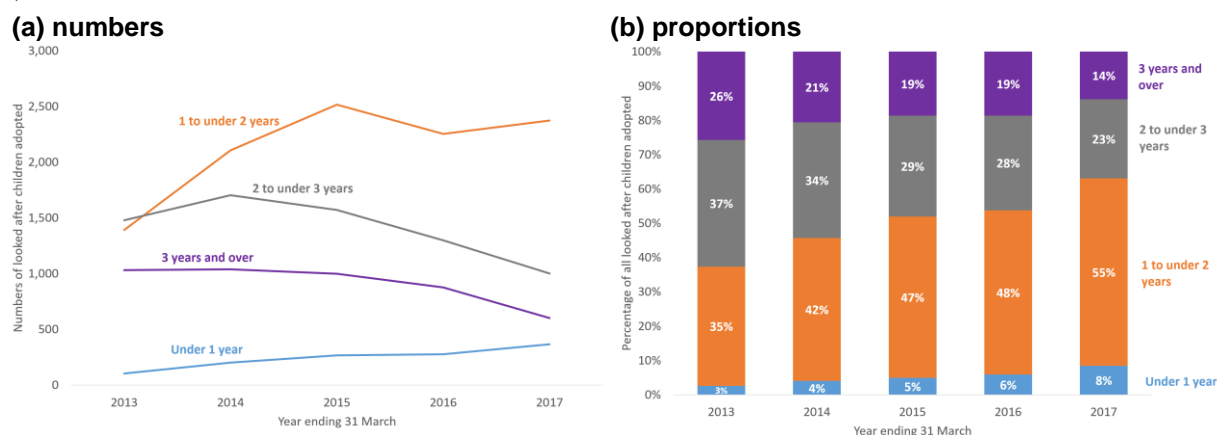
Slightly more male looked after children were adopted than females; 2,240 (51%) were male in 2017 and 2,110 (49%) were female which is very similar to the adoption gender split we have seen in recent years. Similarly the ethnic origin of looked after children who were adopted has not changed, with 84% of white origin, 11% mixed, 2% black or black british and 1% each of asian or asian british, other ethnic groups and other.

Most looked after children who were adopted were aged between 1 and 4 years at adoption, 3,070 of the 4,350 looked after children adopted in 2017; representing 71% of all looked after children who were adopted. 5 to 9 year olds represented 21% of looked after children who were adopted, 7% were aged under 1 year and the remaining 1% were aged 10 years and over.

In the year ending 31 March 2017, the average age at adoption was 3 years and 4 months, similar to 2015 and 2016, but slightly lower than the average age of 3 years and 8 months in 2013. This corresponds to changes seen in the duration of the child's final period of care (explained below).

Just over half of looked after children who were adopted had a final period of care lasting 1 to under 2 years. In the year ending 31 March 2017, this was 2,380 children, or 55% of all looked after children adopted. The duration of the final period of care for looked after children who are adopted is decreasing. Over the last 5 years, the proportion of children adopted who had a final period of care between 1 and 2 years has risen, from 35% in 2013 up to 55% in 2017. Over the same period the numbers and proportion of adopted children with a final period of care under 1 year has also increased, from 110 in 2013 (3%) to 370 in 2017 (8%). At the same time we have seen both the number and proportion of children with a final period of care lasting over 2 years fall – from 2,510 in 2013 (63%) to 1,600 in 2017 (37%)

**Chart 9: Numbers and proportions of all looked after children adopted, by duration of final period of care.**  
England, 2013 to 2017



Source: SSDA903

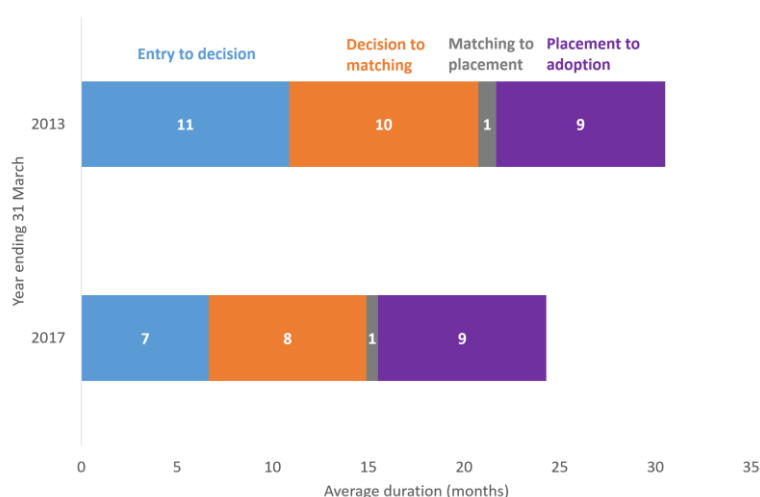
## Duration of the stages of the adoption process

### Stages of an adoption

Before a looked after child can be adopted, the local authority must first make the decision that adoption is in the child's best interest. Suitable prospective adopters are then found before the child is placed for adoption for at least 10 weeks before the adoption order is granted and the child ceases to be looked after.

The average duration between entry into care and being adopted has continued to fall. It has decreased by six months between 2013 and 2017, from a total duration of 2 years and 6 months in 2013 to 2 years and 3 months in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, it has decreased further to 2 years. Once a child has been matched with adopters, the time to adoption has remained stable. The improvements have been seen in the earlier stages of the process. The average time between entry to care and the decision the child should be adopted has decreased from 11 months in 2013 to 7 months 2017 and the average time between the decision the child should be placed for adoption and the child being matched to adopters has fallen from 10 months in 2013 to 8 months in 2017.

**Chart 10: Children looked after who were adopted, duration of stages of adoption (in months)**  
England, 2013 and 2017



Source: SSDA903

## 5. Former care leavers (Tables F1 to F4)

### Data collected on care leavers

Local authorities provide the department with information about the cohort of children who have turned 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21 in the year who were previously looked after. The cohort covers children looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, including some time after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Information for children age 17 and 18 was collected for the first time in 2016. Due to concerns over the completeness of the data, it has been published as **experimental statistics** and therefore should be treated with caution.

Further information can be found in the quality and methodology document.

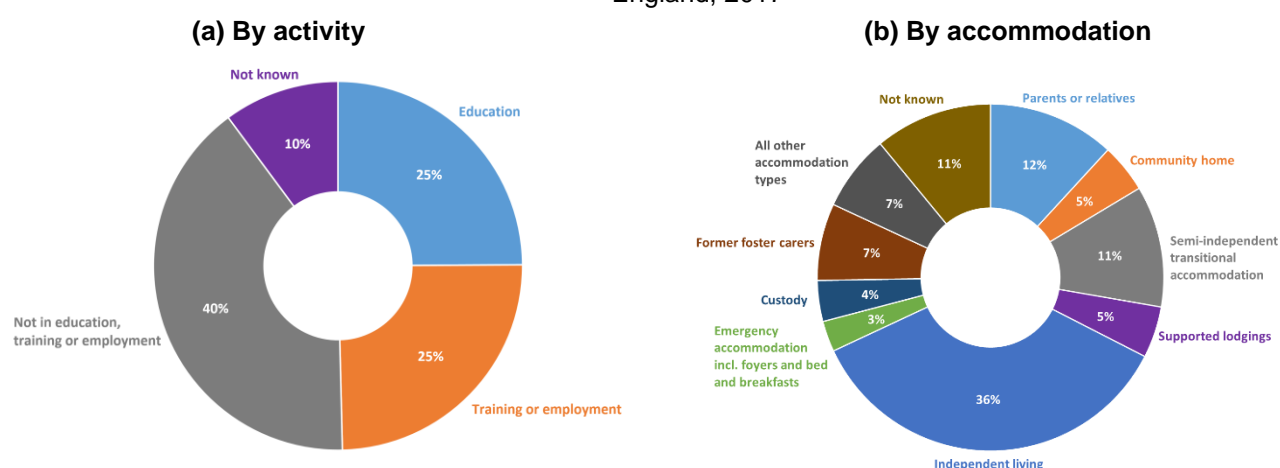
The term “**Staying Put**” is used to define arrangements where:

1. A young person who was looked after immediately prior to their eighteenth birthday (as an eligible child) continues to reside with their former foster carer/s;
2. A young person is deemed an eligible child, within the meaning of paragraph 19B(2) of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989;
3. The “Staying Put” arrangement is set out in the child/young person’s Pathway Plan;
4. The “Staying Put” arrangement extends until:
  - the young person first leaves the “Staying Put” arrangement; or
  - the young person reaches their twenty-first birthday; or
  - completes the agreed programme of education or training being undertaken on their twenty-first birthday.

Local authorities continue to be in touch with more care leavers. For 19-21 year olds, 23,780 (88%) were in touch in 2017, up from 87% in 2016 and 86 % in 2015 however the rate does vary with age. In 2017, 92% of 19 year olds were in touch, 88% of 20 year olds and 84% of 21 year olds.

For care leavers aged 19 to 21 years, in 2017 we have information on their activity for more young people - activity was known for 90% in 2017, up from 89% in 2016 and up from 87% in 2015. 10,870 19-21 year old care leavers (40%) were not in education, training or employment in 2017, compared to 13% of all 19 to 21 year olds. This proportion is the same as in 2016 and up slightly from 39% in 2015. 6,670 (25%) were in training or employment, and 25% were in education. However, we do need to be cautious interpreting year on year changes in proportions as they can easily be affected up or down by knowing the activity of more children.

**Chart 11: Care leavers now aged 19 to 21 years old, England, 2017**



Source: SSDA903

22,180 (84%) of 19 to 21 year olds were in suitable accommodation, compared to 83% in 2016 and 81% in 2015, however over this time the proportion of care leavers whose accommodation was known rose from 88% in 2015 to 89% in 2016 and 90% in 2017. 560 (7%) were in unsuitable accommodation and the



accommodation was not known for 2,590 care leavers (10%). The most common accommodation was to live independently, 9,600 (36%) in 2017. 12% were living with parents or relatives, 11% were in semi-independent living arrangements, and 7% were with former foster carers.

For 17 and 18 year olds, experimental statistics for 2017 show local authorities were in touch with 79% of 17 year old care leavers and 93% of 18 year old care leavers.

33% of 17 year old care leavers were in education, 16% were in training or employment and 31% of were not in education, training or employment, however information was not known for 19%. For 18 year old care leavers, 46% were in education, 16% were in training or employment, 31% were not in education, training or employment, and information was not known for 7%.

89% of 18 year olds were in suitable accommodation in 2017, although accommodation was not known for 6%. 5% were in unsuitable accommodation. For 17 year olds accommodation was not known for 18% which helps to explain why the proportion in suitable accommodation is so low at 72%. 10% were considered to be in unsuitable accommodation.

### ‘Staying Put’

In 2017, the number and proportion of 19 and 20 year olds who ceased to be looked after on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and who were still living with their former foster carers (‘Staying Put’) continued to increase, from 23% in 2016 to 25% in 2017. Individual data on children who were aged 18 and still living with former foster carers up to 3 months after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday was collected for the first time in 2016 and published as experimental statistics. In 2017, of the 3,170 children, 1,630 (51%) remained with their foster carers 3 months after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is down from 54% last year; however, we need to be cautious reading too much into this change as these are experimental statistics.

**Table 3: Number and percentage of care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20 years who remained living with their former foster carers:**

England, 2015 to 2017

| Age at 31 March 2017       | Number living with former foster carers |       |       | Total number who ceased care who had been in a foster placement at age 18 |       |       | Percentage of young people remaining with former foster carers |      |      |
|----------------------------|---|-------|-------|---|-------|-------|--|------|------|
|                            | 2015                                    | 2016  | 2017  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2015   | 2016 | 2017 |
| Aged 18 years <sup>8</sup> | 1,580                                   | 1,440 | 1,630 | 3,230   | 2,660 | 3,170 | 49%  | 54%  | 51%  |
| Aged 19 years              | 560                                     | 820   | 940   | 2,560   | 2,740 | 3,170 | 22%  | 30%  | 30%  |
| Aged 20 years              | 330                                     | 410   | 550   | 2,500   | 2,560 | 2,740 | 13%  | 16%  | 20%  |

Source: SSDA903

<sup>8</sup> Information was collected in 2015 on the number and percentage of care leavers staying put aged 18 in the year; however this was undertaken through an aggregate level data collection, and may not be directly comparable with other data. Data for 2016 was collected at child level for the first time, due to improvements in reporting in 2017 the numbers and percentages for 2017 may not be directly comparable to those in 2016. Therefore these figures should be treated with caution.

## 6. Looked after children who were missing or away from placement without authorisation (Table G1)

### Missing from care

A looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (for example school) and their whereabouts is not known.

### Away from placement without authorisation

A looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

### Experimental statistics and comparability between years

Detailed information on all children looked after who were missing or away from placement without authorisation was collected and published for the first time in 2015. Local authorities reported data improvements in 2016 so we published the figures as experimental statistics as data between the two years was not comparable. This year local authorities have told us of further improvements in the collection and reporting of these figures, however some local authorities have informed us that they no longer report and collect information on children who were away from placement without authorisation but instead record all incidents as missing incidents. We believe this could mean the figures for missing are over reported by around 3%. These statistics retain their experimental nature in 2017 and 2017 data is not comparable to earlier years. We will continue to assess the data quality in 2018.

In the year ending 31 March 2017 there were 10,700 children looked after who had a missing incident<sup>9</sup>, which equates to 10% of the 102,590 children looked after during the year. There were 60,720 missing incidents, which is an average of 5.7 missing incidents per child who went missing. 6,660 children went missing more than once and 330 were missing at the 31 March 2017.

Most missing incidents were short. 54,230 missing incidents (89%) lasted 2 days or less and 490 lasted more than 30 days. However we need to be cautious interpreting these figures as the duration of missing incidents is collected in days so a child who went missing for a short period late one evening, but was found early the next morning would be counted as being missing for 1 day even if they were only missing for a few hours.

50% of missing incidents were by children placed in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation, 33% were by children in foster placements and 14% were by children living independently.

4,860 looked after children were away from their placement without authorisation during the year. There were 20,330 incidents, an average of 4.2 per child.

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<sup>9</sup> The number of children missing is collected separately from police forces, however this information is not directly comparable due to the different data collection practices and definitions.

## 7. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available on the [department's statistics website](#). Additional tables to this release will be published in December 2017 and are detailed on the publication schedule alongside this release.

### National tables

|    |   |
|----|---|
| A1 | All children looked after at 31 March by gender, age at 31 March, category of need, ethnic origin, legal status and motherhood status, 2013 to 2017   |
| A2 | Children looked after at 31 March by placement, 2013 to 2017  |
| A3 | Looked after children at 31 March, who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) during the year, by gender, age, category of need and ethnic origin, 2013 to 2017  |
| B1 | Children looked after at any time during the year ending 31 March and those looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March by gender, age, placement and ethnic origin, 2013 to 2017  |
| C1 | Children who started to be looked after during the years ending 31 March by gender, age on starting, category of need, ethnic origin, legal status and previous permanence arrangement, 2013 to 2017  |
| D1 | Children who ceased to be looked after during the years ending 31 March by gender, age on ceasing, reason episode ceased, legal status, category of need and ethnic origin, 2013 to 2017  |
| E1 | Looked after children who were adopted during the year ending 31 March by gender, age at adoption, ethnic origin, category of need, final legal status, duration of final period of care and age on starting final period of care, 2013 to 2017 |
| E2 | Children looked after who were adopted during the year ending 31 March by average time between the different stages of the adoption process and age at start of period of care, 2013 to 2017  |
| F1 | Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21 years old by gender, contact with the local authority and activity, 2015 to 2017  |
| F2 | Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21 years old by accommodation, 2015 to 2017  |
| F3 | Care leavers aged 17 and 18 years old by gender, contact with the local authority and activity, 2016 and 2017 – Experimental Statistics   |
| F4 | Care leavers aged 17 and 18 years old by accommodation, 2016 and 2017 – Experimental Statistics   |
| G1 | Children looked after who were missing or away from placement without authorisation, 2015 to 2017 – Experimental Statistics   |

### Local authority and regional tables

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| LAA1  | Children looked after at 31 March, 2013 to 2017  |
| LAA4  | Looked after children at 31 March, who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) during the year, 2013 to 2017                                     |
| LAB1  | Children looked after at any time during the year ending 31 March and those looked after exclusively under a series of short-term placements, 2013 to 2017 |
| LAC1  | Children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31 March, 2013 to 2017  |
| LAD1  | Children who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March, 2013 to 2017   |
| LAE1  | Children who ceased to be looked after and the number and percentage adopted during the year ending 31 March, 2013 to 2017                                 |
| LAF2a | Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21 by activity, 2017  |
| LAF2b | Care leavers aged 17 and 18 by activity, 2017 – Experimental Statistics  |
| LAF4a | Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21 by suitability of accommodation, 2017  |
| LAF4b | Care leavers aged 17 and 18 by suitability of accommodation, 2017 – Experimental Statistics  |
| LAG1  | Children looked after who were missing or away from placement without authorisation, 2017 – Experimental Statistics  |

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Rounding Conventions                                   | <p>The National Statistics Code of Practice requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the DfE protect confidentiality. National figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 and local authority figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. For confidentiality purposes, numbers from one to five inclusive have been replaced in the published tables by a cross (x). To ensure the suppressed number cannot be identified by simple arithmetic secondary suppression may be required. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero (0). The following convention has been used:</p> <p>“.” means not applicable</p> <p>“..” means not available</p> <p>“-” means negligible – used to represent a percentage below 0.5%</p> |
| UK Comparability of Looked-After Children’s Statistics | <p>Data is collected and published independently by each of the 4 countries in the UK. Although there are similarities between the data collected by the 4 nations, there are also differences which may be down to different policies and legislation, and differing historical data collections.</p>   |
| Population Estimates                                   | <p>Population estimates are used to calculate rates per 10,000 children under the age of 18 published in Table A1 and LAA1. These are calculated using the appropriate mid-year population estimates supplied by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).</p>   |

## 8. Further information is available

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Outcomes for looked after children in England                | <p>Information on <a href="#">outcomes for looked after children</a> is available for children looked after at 31 March 2016. Outcomes include educational attainment, special educational needs (SEN), absence and exclusions from school.</p>                         |
| Children in need and child protection statistics for England | <p>Information on <a href="#">referrals, assessments and children who were the subject of a child protection plan</a> (taken from the Children in Need census) is available for 2016. Statistics for 2017 will be published in October/November 2017.</p>               |
| Information on care proceedings in England                   | <p>The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) publish information on <a href="#">care proceedings applications</a> made by local authorities where CAFCASS has been appointed by the court to represent the interests of children.</p>        |
| Local authority expenditure                                  | <p>Information on local authority <a href="#">planned expenditure</a> on schools, education, children and young people’s services is available for the financial year 2015-16. This data is returned to DfE by local authorities via the Section 251 Budget Return.</p> |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Ofsted statistics | <a href="#">Ofsted</a> publish inspection outcomes for local authority children's services and children's social care providers in England as well as data on the placements of children looked after and fostering in England. |
| Scotland          | Statistics on children's social work in Scotland are available for 2015-16 on the Scottish Government <a href="#">website</a> .   |
| Wales             | Statistics on children looked after in Wales are available for the period up to 31 March 2016 on the Welsh Government <a href="#">website</a> .   |
| Northern Ireland  | Statistics on children looked after in Northern Ireland are available for 2015-16 and are published on the Department of Health <a href="#">website</a> .   |

## 9. 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.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## 10. Technical information

A methodology and quality document accompanies this SFR. This provides further information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data, including how it is validated and processed.

## 11. Get in touch

### Media enquiries

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

Tel: 020 7783 8300

### Other enquiries/feedback

Alison Butler, Department for Education, Bishopsgate House, Darlington, DL1 5QT.

Tel: 01325 340465 Email: [cla.stats@education.gov.uk](mailto:cla.stats@education.gov.uk)



Department  
for Education



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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 Alison Butler, Department for Education, Bishopsgate House, Darlington, DL1 5QT.

Tel: 01325 640365 Email: [cla.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cla.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk)

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