



**BRIEFING PAPER**

Number 04470, 5 October 2015

# Children in Care in England: Statistics

By Yago Zayed and  
Rachael Harker

**Inside:**

- 1 Numbers and characteristics of children in care.....3
- 2 Entering the care system.....4
- 3 Care placements.....4
- 4 Costs of service provision.....5
- 5 Outcomes for children.....6



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
1. Numbers and characteristics of children in care	4
2. Entering the care system	4
3. Care placements	5
4. Cost of service provision	5
5. Outcomes for children in care	5
6. Sources and further information	6
7. Reference tables	7

## Summary

The term “children in care” includes all children being looked after by a local authority, including those subject to care orders under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and those looked after on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents.

This note presents headline statistics on the number of children in care in England, reasons for entering the care system, types of care placement and number of care placements experienced. Estimated costs of service provision are also given as well as outcome indicators relating to educational attendance and attainment and offending behaviour.

## 1. Numbers and characteristics of children in care

In the year ending 31 March 2015, a total of 69,540 children were looked after by local authorities in England, a rate of 60 per 10,000 children under 18 years. The absolute number of children looked after has increased by 6% since 2011 (65,510). Indeed, the number of looked after children has increased steadily over the past seven years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985.

Children aged between 10 and 15 years represent the majority of the looked after population (38%), while children under one year old are in a minority (5% of the looked after population). The looked after population includes more boys than girls (55% compared with 45%). These age- and gender-related distributions have remained relatively constant over the past 5 years.

The majority of the looked after population is *White* (77%), with *Mixed* groups and *Black* or *Black British* making up approximately 9% and 7% of the looked after population respectively. These minority ethnic groups appear to be overrepresented in the looked after population (around 5 per cent of the child population of Great Britain is from *Black* or *Black British* and *Mixed* groups).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 provides further details on the number of children looked after by gender, age and ethnic origin.

## 2. Entering the care system

The reasons why children are looked after range from abuse and neglect through to a need to offer parents or children a short break because of severe disability. Table 1 shows the “category of need” (the reason social services became involved with a child) associated with children being looked after. In 2015, the main reason why social services first engaged with looked after children was because of abuse or neglect (61%), with family-related issues making up the majority of the rest of cases. While the reasons why children start to be looked after have remained relatively stable since 2011, the percentage starting to be looked after due to family dysfunction has increased slightly (16% of children in 2015 compared with 14% in 2011)

In legal terms, children can become looked after through three main routes:

- Care orders made by the courts under section 31 of the *Children Act 1989*
- Voluntary accommodation arrangements under section 20 of the *Children Act 1989*
- Police protection or involvement with the youth justice system

Where children are subject to a care order, parental responsibilities are vested in the local authority through its social services department. If a child is accommodated under a voluntary arrangement, the local authority does not acquire parental responsibility although they undertake day-to-day parental responsibilities for the child on behalf of the child's parents and any other adult who has parental responsibility for the child.

---

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census data

In 2015, a total of 42,030 looked after children were subject to care orders, which represents 60% of all legal statuses. Twenty nine per cent (19,850 children) were being looked after on a voluntary basis, 13% on some other basis (placement orders, freed for adoption) while a small number of children were looked after under police protection or involvement with the Youth Justice System.

Following three consecutive annual increases in the number of placement orders, the number of children with placement orders fell by 24% between 2014 and 2015 (from 9,580 to 7,320). The national Adoption Leadership Board, Family Justice Board, and the Department for Education have heard regularly that these changes are a response to a number of high profile court judgments on care and adoption order cases, notably *Re B* and *Re B-S1*. The National Adoption Leadership Board has published [guidance](#) on this issue

Table 2 shows the numbers and percentages of children looked after by legal status.

### 3. Care placements

The majority of looked after children (75%) are in foster care placements. The number of children looked after in foster placements has increased by 9% since 2010 (from 46,890 to 51,340). Over the same period there has been a 12% decrease in the number of looked after children placed with parents (3,990 in 2011 compared with 3,510 in 2015). While the number of children placed for adoption increased by 22% between 2011 and 2015 - from 2,720 to 3,320 - this masks a fall of 15% since 2014 (3,910 adoption placements).

Table 3 provides detailed information on placement type.

### 4. Cost of service provision

In the 2013/14 financial year an estimated £2.5 billion (gross expenditure) was spent on the main looked after children's services in England. The majority of expenditure (55%) was on foster care services (around £1.4 billion, 55%) and children's homes (around £0.9 billion, 36%). Table 4 shows the gross expenditure on the main looked after children's services since 2000/01. Both the total expenditure and the cost per looked after child increased year-on-year until 2011/12. The changes in 2012/13 and 2013/14 should not be deemed conclusive since these figures are still provisional estimates.

### 5. Outcomes for children in care

The Department for Education publish information on a range of outcomes for children who have been continuously looked after by a Local Authority for at least 12 months.<sup>2</sup>

Information is available on the educational attainment, special educational needs, absence and exclusions of this cohort of children, taken from the matched administrative data taken from the Children Looked After database and the National Pupil Database (CLA-NPD).

---

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education. [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

Some details are also available on cautions and convictions, substance misuse, healthcare and activity at age 16 based on child level data from the Children Looked After database.

## 5.1 Educational performance

Table 5 compares the educational performance of looked after children in England with all children. Attainment for the looked after population is lower than national levels at all ages of assessment. For example, among Year 11 students in 2014, 31% of looked after children obtained five GCSEs at grade A\* to C, compared with a national figure of 75%. Only 14% of looked after children achieved five GCSEs A\* to C including Mathematics and English, compared with 55% nationally.

## 5.2 Offending behaviour

Table 6 provides basic information on offending behaviour for looked after children aged 10-17 compared with national offending rates for children aged 10-17. Around 6% of looked after children had received a conviction or a final warning or reprimand during the year ending 31 March 2013. This compared with 1% of all children aged 10-17 in 2013. In the year ending March 2014, there was a slight fall in the proportion of looked after children receiving a conviction or a final warning or reprimand; down to 5.6%. Comparable figures for all children are not yet available for 2014.

## 6. Sources and further information

Detailed statistics on [looked after children](#) and [outcomes for children looked after by local authorities](#) can be found on the Department for Education website.

Statistics on looked after children in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also available from the internet:

Scotland

<http://scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/TrendLookedAfter>

Wales

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/data-collection/social/child/lookedafter/episodefile/?lang=en>

Northern Ireland

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/looked-after-children>

## 7. Reference tables

**Table 1 Children looked after at 31 March by gender, age, category of need, and ethnic origin, England 2011-2015<sup>1,2</sup>**

	Numbers					Percentages				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>All children looked after at 31 March</b>	<b>65,510</b>	<b>67,070</b>	<b>68,060</b>	<b>68,800</b>	<b>69,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Rates per 10,000 children under 18 years<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>58</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>					
<b>Gender</b>										
Male	36,440	37,020	37,490	38,020	38,530	56	55	55	55	55
Female	29,070	30,060	30,570	30,780	31,010	44	45	45	45	45
<b>Age at 31 March (years)</b>										
Under 1	3,680	4,200	4,310	3,880	3,710	6	6	6	6	5
1 to 4	11,970	12,400	12,330	11,410	10,120	18	18	18	17	15
5 to 9	11,830	12,700	13,250	13,920	14,310	18	19	19	20	21
10 to 15	24,200	24,230	24,460	25,150	26,140	37	36	36	37	38
16 and over	13,830	13,540	13,710	14,450	15,270	21	20	20	21	22
<b>Category of need<sup>4</sup></b>										
Abuse or neglect	40,410	41,790	42,440	42,390	42,710	62	62	62	62	61
Child's disability	2,190	2,310	2,280	2,330	2,250	3	3	3	3	3
Parents illness or disability	2,720	2,690	2,500	2,460	2,380	4	4	4	4	3
Family in acute stress	5,840	5,990	6,190	6,240	6,310	9	9	9	9	9
Family dysfunction	8,930	9,550	10,160	10,910	11,000	14	14	15	16	16
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1,210	1,160	1,230	1,220	1,130	2	2	2	2	2
Low income	150	120	110	140	140	-	-	-	-	-
Absent parenting	4,050	3,490	3,150	3,110	3,630	6	5	5	5	5
<b>Ethnic origin</b>										
<b>White</b>	<b>50,390</b>	<b>52,140</b>	<b>53,020</b>	<b>53,470</b>	<b>53,600</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>
White British	48,510	50,020	50,630	50,660	50,450	74	75	74	74	73
White Irish	360	320	300	300	270	1	-	-	-	-
Traveller of Irish Heritage	50	50	70	70	90	-	-	-	-	-
Gypsy/Roma	90	120	200	220	250	-	-	-	-	-
Any other White background	1,370	1,620	1,820	2,210	2,550	2	2	3	3	4
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>5,840</b>	<b>6,160</b>	<b>6,290</b>	<b>6,270</b>	<b>6,170</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
White and Black Caribbean	2,320	2,370	2,380	2,320	2,270	4	4	4	3	3
White and Black African	640	670	710	670	670	1	1	1	1	1
White and Asian	1,020	1,150	1,210	1,180	1,140	2	2	2	2	2
Any other mixed background	1,860	1,960	2,000	2,100	2,080	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	<b>3,130</b>	<b>2,830</b>	<b>2,620</b>	<b>2,550</b>	<b>2,660</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
Indian	300	280	310	300	290	-	-	-	-	-
Pakistani	770	760	770	810	880	1	1	1	1	1
Bangladeshi	420	440	460	470	450	1	1	1	1	1
Any other Asian background	1,640	1,350	1,090	980	1,040	3	2	2	1	1
<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>4,520</b>	<b>4,480</b>	<b>4,460</b>	<b>4,620</b>	<b>4,920</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
Caribbean	1,620	1,540	1,520	1,550	1,530	2	2	2	2	2
African	2,070	2,110	2,090	2,200	2,490	3	3	3	3	4
Any other Black background	840	830	840	870	900	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Other ethnic groups</b>	<b>1,460</b>	<b>1,280</b>	<b>1,370</b>	<b>1,490</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Chinese	100	80	70	70	70	-	-	-	-	-
Any other ethnic group	1,360	1,210	1,300	1,420	1,640	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Other</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Refused	20	20	30	40	40	-	-	-	-	-
Information not yet available	140	170	280	370	450	-	-	-	1	1

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2. Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

3. The rates per 10,000 children under 18 years have been derived using the mid-year population estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics.

4. The most applicable category of the eight "Need Codes" at the time a child started to be looked after rather than necessarily the entire reason they are looked after.

- Negligible. Percentage below 0.5%

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption 2014/2015

**Table 2 Children looked after at 31 March by legal status, England 2011-2015<sup>1,2</sup>**

	Numbers					Percentages				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>All children looked after at 31 March</b>	<b>65,510</b>	<b>67,070</b>	<b>68,060</b>	<b>68,800</b>	<b>69,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Care Orders</b>	38,970	39,760	40,060	39,980	42,030	59	59	59	58	60
<b>Freed for adoption<sup>3</sup></b>	250	200	140	60	20	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Placement Order granted<sup>4</sup></b>	6,440	8,040	9,800	9,580	7,320	10	12	14	14	11
<b>Voluntary agreements under S20 CA 1989 (single placements)</b>	19,670	18,890	17,730	18,840	19,850	30	28	26	27	29
<b>Detained for child protection</b>	30	40	20	40	40	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Youth Justice legal statuses</b>	150	150	300	300	290	-	-	-	-	-

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

See Technical Notes for more information on rounding.

2. Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

3. No new applications for freeing orders may be made on or after 30 December 2005.

4. Placement orders came into force on 30 December 2005.

- Negligible. Percentage below 0.5%

[Source: DFE Children looked after in England including adoption 2014/2015](#)



**Table 3 Children looked after at 31 March by placement, England 2011-2015<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

	numbers					percentages				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>All children looked after at 31 March</b>	<b>65,510</b>	<b>67,070</b>	<b>68,060</b>	<b>68,800</b>	<b>69,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Foster placements</b>	<b>48,150</b>	<b>50,020</b>	<b>50,570</b>	<b>50,910</b>	<b>52,050</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>75</b>
Foster placement inside Council boundary										
With relative or friend	5,360	5,290	5,130	5,190	5,610	8	8	8	8	8
With other foster carer	25,390	26,640	26,720	26,790	27,160	39	40	39	39	39
Foster placement outside Council boundary										
With relative or friend	2,110	2,140	2,110	2,130	2,300	3	3	3	3	3
With other foster carer	15,280	15,960	16,610	16,760	16,980	23	24	24	24	24
<b>Placed for adoption</b>	<b>2,720</b>	<b>2,900</b>	<b>3,610</b>	<b>3,910</b>	<b>3,320</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
Placed for adoption with consent with current foster carer	70	80	80	70	60	-	-	-	-	-
Placed for adoption with placement order with current foster carer	190	270	360	430	290	-	-	1	1	-
Placed for adoption with consent not with current foster carer	240	270	270	290	320	-	-	-	-	-
Placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer	2,220	2,280	2,900	3,120	2,650	3	3	4	5	4
<b>Placement with parents</b>	<b>3,990</b>	<b>3,600</b>	<b>3,310</b>	<b>3,260</b>	<b>3,510</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Other placement in the community</b>	<b>2,560</b>	<b>2,380</b>	<b>2,270</b>	<b>2,240</b>	<b>2,280</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Living independently	2,560	2,380	2,270	2,230	2,280	4	4	3	3	3
Residential employment	x	0	x	x	x	x	0	x	x	x
<b>Secure units, children's homes and hostels</b>	<b>6,090</b>	<b>6,120</b>	<b>6,270</b>	<b>6,660</b>	<b>6,570</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
Secure unit inside Council boundary	20	10	30	20	10	-	-	-	-	-
Secure unit outside Council boundary <sup>3</sup>	140	170	180	190	170	-	-	-	-	-
Homes and hostels subject to Children's Homes regulations										
inside Council boundary	2,630	2,650	2,610	2,540	2,450	4	4	4	4	4
outside Council boundary	2,380	2,430	2,600	2,850	2,840	4	4	4	4	4
Homes and hostels not subject to Children's Homes regulations	920	850	860	1,070	1,100	1	1	1	2	2
<b>Other residential settings</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>1,080</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Residential care homes	530	560	510	500	510	1	1	1	1	1
NHS Trust providing medical/nursing care	100	110	130	100	130	-	-	-	-	-
Family centre or mother and baby unit	160	140	150	120	170	-	-	-	-	-
Young offenders institution or prison	140	130	260	270	260	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Residential schools</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other placement<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>170</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Number of placements during the year</b>	<b>65,500</b>	<b>67,070</b>	<b>68,060</b>	<b>68,800</b>	<b>69,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
1	43,100	44,300	44,590	45,530	46,690	66	66	66	66	67
2	15,190	15,190	15,790	15,610	15,820	23	23	23	23	23
3 or more	7,220	7,580	7,680	7,660	7,040	11	11	11	11	10

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. See Technical Notes for more information on rounding.

2. Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

3. There are currently only 16 secure units operating in England therefore most placements will inevitably be outside the council boundary.

4. Includes children missing from their placement for more than 24 hours for 2011 to 2014. The way data on children missing from their placements is collected changed in 2015 and is now reported separately in Table G1.

x Figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality.

- Negligible. Percentage below 0.5%

.. Not applicable.

Source: DFE Children looked after in England including adoption 2014/2015

**Table 4 Gross expenditure on children looked after, England 2000/01 to 2013/14**

	Children's homes (£millions)	Fostering services (£millions)	Other children looked after services (£millions)	Total looked after children (£millions)	Cost per looked after child
2000/01	694.7	550.6	70.7	1,316.0	£22,343
2001/02	716.7	621.1	89.5	1,427.3	£23,908
2002/03	788.5	696.3	82.8	1,567.6	£25,783
2003/04	855.7	801.5	108.1	1,765.3	£28,844
2004/05	923.8	881.2	127.7	1,932.7	£31,684
2005/06	943.1	963.4	148.3	2,054.8	£34,077
2006/07	930.6	1,049.6	145.7	2,125.9	£35,432
2007/08	906.2	1,111.1	170.4	2,187.8	£36,769
2008/09	935.0	1,130.5	197.2	2,262.7	£37,154
2009/10	969.4	1,253.1	203.4	2,425.9	£37,640
2010/11	1,029.0	1,293.7	175.3	2,425.0	£37,023
2011/12	1,051.0	1,376.9	197.1	2,625.0	£39,132
2012/13 estimate	924.3	1,339.1	186.4	2,449.8	£35,968
2013/14 estimate	905.0	1,377.3	205.4	2,487.7	£36,524

Sources: 2000/00 to 2007/08: *Personal Social Services Expenditure and Unit Costs* NHS Information Centre. 2008/09 to 2011/12: *Children's Services Actuals England*, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting. 2012/13 and 2013/14 *Children's Services Estimates England*, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting

**Table 5: Eligibility and educational performance of looked after children in Key Stages 1,2 and 4, compared with all children, 2010 to 2014, England**

	Looked After children					Non-Looked After children				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Year 2</b>										
Number eligible to sit Key Stage 1 tasks and tests	1,330	1,510	1,680	1,740	1,750	552,160	569,020	581,290	593,820	615,090
Percentage achieving level 2 or above in:										
Reading	64	64	67	69	71	85	85	87	89	90
Writing	56	56	57	61	61	81	81	83	85	86
Mathematics	68	68	71	71	72	89	90	91	91	92
<b>Year 6</b>										
Number eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tests	1,730	2,110	2,310	2,300	2,450	422,090	552,370	541,760	537,840	558,230
Percentage achieving expected level of progress:										
Mathematics	47	52	56	59	61	80	81	84	85	86
Reading	54	58	64	63	68	83	84	87	86	89
Writing (taught assessed)	.	.	51	55	59	.	.	81	83	85
<b>Year 11</b>										
Number eligible to sit GCSEs	4,960	5,020	4,870	4,870	4,800	645,100	631,940	626,400	637,930	625,070
Percentage who attained at least:										
A* - C in English & Mathematics	13.0	14.2	15.4	16.2	15.7	53.5	59.1	59.3	59.4	56.6
5+ A* - C GCSEs or equivalent inc. English and Mathematics	12.4	13.6	14.9	15.5	14.4	52.9	58.5	58.8	58.6	55.4
5+ A* - C or equivalent	28.8	33.5	37.2	37.2	31.1	74.7	78.8	81.0	80.9	74.5

Source: Department for Education, Outcomes looked after by Local Authorities in England, April 2014

**Table 6 Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for at least twelve months by gender, England 31 March 2013 and 2014**

	2013			2014		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of children aged 10-17 years at 31 March	16,800	13,040	29,840	17,160	13,510	30,660
Number convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	1,300	530	1,830	1,260	450	1,710
Percentage convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	7.8	4.0	6.1	7.4	3.3	5.6
Percentage of all children aged 10 to 17 convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	1.9	0.4	1.2	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Department for Education. Outcomes for Children looked After by Local Authorities in England, April 2014

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email [hcinfo@parliament.uk](mailto:hcinfo@parliament.uk).

Disclaimer - This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).