

SFR 18/2008

31 July 2008

Coverage: England

**Theme: Education and
Training**

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PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLAND: YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2008

INTRODUCTION

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides figures on children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (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.

This release contains summary information that has been derived from statistical data supplied by the 150 Local Authorities in England.

These figures are important because they monitor the impact of the legislative changes in 2005 under which Local Authorities have a duty to promote and encourage notification of private fostering arrangements. However, these figures 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 Local Authority. Readers are cautioned against using the figures in this SFR as an estimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements.

Comparison to the earlier years can be sourced from SFR37/2007 which can be found at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000758/index.shtml>.

KEY POINTS

- At 31 March 2008, 1,330 children were reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements in England. This compares with 1,250 children reported at 31 March 2007 and 980 at 31 March 2006.
- 1,560 new private fostering arrangements began during the year to 31 March 2008, and 1,170 private fostering arrangements ended during the year.
- Of the number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits, 78% were subject to action within 7 working days; in 2007 this figure was 69%.

Characteristics of privately fostered children who have new arrangements which started during the year ending 31 March 2008

- 65% of privately fostered children were aged from 10 to 15; in 2007 there were 68%. Those aged 5-9 and 16 and over both increased by two percentage points over the same period from 8% to 10% and from 14% to 16% respectively.
- 70% of privately fostered children were born in the United Kingdom; in 2007 this figure was 68%. 7% of privately fostered children were born in Europe; in 2007 this figure was 5%. The corresponding decrease was in privately fostered children born in Africa; this figure was 6% in 2008 compared to 10% in 2007.

BACKGROUND

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (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. However, a person who is a 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. 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.

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.

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.

TABLES

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|----------------|---|
| Table 1 | Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements during year ending 31 March 2008. |
| 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 days during year ending 31 March 2008. |
| Table 3 | Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2008 and place of birth. |
| Table 4 | Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements during years ending 31 March 2005 to 2008. |

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. In 1991 the Department of Health ceased collecting statistics on private fostering, at which time there were around 2,000 private fostering arrangements known to Local Authorities. The collection was ceased because of concerns about the level of notification of arrangements to those authorities. However, in 2004/05 a new collection (the PF1 return) was put in place. The figures in this release are taken from the PF1 statistical return for 2007/08, plus historical figures taken from the collections for 2004/05 to 2006/07. The PF1 return provides the DCSF with aggregate data on the number of children cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements at 31 March, and the number of new arrangements and the number of arrangements which ceased during the year to 31 March.
2. Two new questions were introduced in the 2006/07 survey about the percentage of foster placements where visits were made to new arrangements at intervals of not more than 6 weeks, and to existing arrangements of not more than 12 weeks. Doubts over the quality of the data submitted in response to these questions have resulted in figures not being reported in this SFR.
3. Provisions on private fostering in the Children Act 2004 and the new Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into effect on 1st July 2005 and therefore affect arrangements starting from that date. These measures are designed to strengthen the existing notification scheme for private fostering arrangements. For further details, please refer to the Private Fostering Guidance at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/datastats1/guidelines/children/returns.shtml#pfr>.
4. The figures provided are based on data provided by all 150 Local Authorities. Four of these Local Authorities reported that they had had no private fostering arrangements during the year, the same number as in 2006/07.
5. A research document funded by DCSF (An Exploratory Study of Private Fostering) was published in June 2007 and can be found at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectId=15240&keyword=private&keywordlist1=0&keywordlist2=0&keywordlist3=0&andor=or&type=0&resultspage=1> .
6. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Numbers from 1 to 5 inclusive have been suppressed, being replaced in the published tables by a cross (x). Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero.

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.

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Table 1: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements^{1,2,3}
Year ending 31 March 2008
Coverage: England

	numbers				
	Number of children under private fostering arrangements at 31 March	Number of new notifications during the year	Number of new arrangements that began during the year ⁴	Notifications of arrangements coming to an end during the year	Number of arrangements that ended during the year
England	1,330	1,790	1,560	1,170	1,520
Region					
North East	60	80	80	70	70
North West	90	110	90	80	100
Yorkshire and Humberside	90	120	110	90	100
East Midlands	110	160	120	70	120
West Midlands	120	170	160	130	150
East of England	140	180	160	100	150
London	370	470	330	250	310
South East	230	260	290	200	280
South West	120	240	220	200	240

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.
2. Notifications received during the year include private fostering arrangements which may have started before 1st April 2007 or were due to start after 31 March 2008. The same applies to notifications of private fostering arrangements coming to an end.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
4. Figures for England are shown by age and place of birth in Table 3

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 days¹
Year ending 31 March 2008
Coverage: England

	numbers and percentages		
	Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements for carrying out visits	Number of cases where this action was taken in accordance with requirements within 7 working days	Percentage of cases where action was taken within 7 working days
England	1,600	1,240	78
Region			
North East	80	70	91
North West	100	90	90
Yorkshire and Humberside	120	80	68
East Midlands	140	100	71
West Midlands	120	90	73
East of England	180	160	90
London	420	330	78
South East	240	180	76
South West	220	160	71

Source: PF1

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Figures may not add up due to rounding.

Table 3: Number and percentage of new arrangements which started during the year, by age of child as at 31 March 2008 and place of birth¹
Year ending 31 March 2008
Coverage: England

	numbers ²					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other ³
All children	1,560	1,100	100	90	200	80
Under 1	20	20	x	x	0	0
1 - 4	120	80	x	20	x	10
5 - 9	160	110	10	10	10	20
10 - 15	1,020	710	70	40	170	40
16 & over	250	180	20	10	30	10
	percentages ⁴					
	All children	UK	Europe (other)	Africa	Asia	Other ³
All children	100	70	7	6	13	5
Under 1	1	1	x	x	0	0
1 - 4	8	7	x	26	x	11
5 - 9	10	10	11	14	4	21
10 - 15	65	65	65	42	82	53
16 & over	16	16	20	15	12	16
All ages	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
3. Other includes Middle East, Oceania, Canada & USA, Central & South America.
4. Figures are based on unrounded data.

Table 4: Number of children reported to Local Authorities as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements ^{1,2,3,4}

Years ending 31 March 2005 to 2008

Coverage: England

	numbers																			
	Number of children under private fostering arrangements at 31 March				Number of new notifications during the year				Number of new arrangements that began during the year ⁵				Notifications of arrangements coming to an end during the year				Number of arrangements that ended during the year			
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005	2006	2007	2008
England	730	980	1,250	1,330	640	1,100	1,570	1,790	630	1,100	1,420	1,560	300	620	1,010	1,170	330	730	1,040	1,520
Region																				
North East	30	40	50	60	20	60	80	80	20	60	80	80	x	30	40	70	x	30	50	70
North West	70	80	100	90	70	70	90	110	90	80	90	90	40	40	60	80	40	60	70	100
Yorkshire and Humberside	90	60	70	90	80	90	80	120	80	90	80	110	40	80	60	90	40	90	60	100
East Midlands	110	120	110	110	100	120	140	160	90	110	130	120	50	60	100	70	50	90	100	120
West Midlands	50	60	90	120	40	70	120	170	40	70	120	160	20	50	90	130	20	50	90	150
East of England	40	70	120	140	30	90	110	180	30	80	110	160	20	50	40	100	20	60	60	150
London	130	240	360	370	110	240	420	470	90	250	340	330	20	80	190	250	20	100	180	310
South East	130	170	210	230	100	140	260	260	100	140	250	290	50	80	190	200	60	80	200	280
South West	100	140	140	120	100	200	270	240	90	220	230	220	80	160	260	200	80	170	230	240

Source: PF1

1. Where a child has had more than one private fostering arrangement during the year, each arrangement has been counted.
2. Notifications received during the year include private fostering arrangements which may have started before 1st April or were due to start after 31 March. The same applies to notifications of private fostering arrangements coming to an end.
3. The figures across years may not tally because of the continually improving reporting of arrangements and the possible counting of children with more than one arrangement during the year.
4. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Figures may not add up due to rounding.
5. Figures for England are shown by age and place of birth in Table 3