Children's
COMMISSIONER

Stability Index for Children in Care

Phase 1: Technical Information

APRIL 2017

Contents

Background

The Importance of Stability for Children in Care

Between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016, 100,810 children were looked after by their local authority[1]. Most of these children will have experienced neglect, and many will have been the victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Children are taken into care to protect them from such harmful situations. However, children in care require more than just protection – they must be provided with an environment which enables them to thrive.

Stable relationships are the platform on which children in care can build their lives and achieve their potential. Foster families, residential care home workers, social workers, teachers, friends and family all play an important role in the life of children in care. Consistent, high quality relationships are important; they help children develop secure attachments and enhance feelings of security, support their ability to form relationships as they grow into adults, and enable the development of a sense of belonging and identity[2].

Instability in children's experiences of care hinders the opportunity for children to form secure relationships. Moving placements and changing schools may make it harder for children to maintain meaningful relationships with their carers, friends and siblings. Changing professionals such as social workers and independent reviewing officers may mean secure connections are lost and trust must be rebuilt.

In our recent workshops with children in care and care leavers, children and young people recognised that moves and changes in their care can sometimes be a good thing. We share their view that instability does not always lead to a negative outcome, and some disruption may be necessary to achieve permanence for children in care.

However, stability continues to be a key issue raised to us by children and young people with care experience. In our survey of 2,936 children, 4 in 10 children in care told us that they had moved placements one to three times in the last two years, and 1 in 10 told us that they had moved placements four or more times. Children and young people in care also told us that changing foster parents and social workers can make them feel anxious, and the timings of these changes can undermine their performance in school exams[3].

Recent national studies support what children have been telling us. Placement moves have been associated with lower levels of GCSE attainment for children in care[4] and higher levels of psychiatric disorders[5], while stable out-of-home placements have been associated with improvements in children's mental health over 18 months[6]. While we must be cautious about interpreting these associations causally, in a context where children in care and care

---

[1] Department for Education (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016
[2] Boddy, J. (2013) Understanding of Permanence for Looked After Children: A Review of Research for the Care Inquiry
[3] Children's Commissioner for England (2015) State of the Nation Report 1: Children in Care and Care Leavers
[4] Sebba, J. et al. (2015) The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data.
[5] Ford et al. (2007) Psychiatric disorder among British children looked after by local authorities: Comparison with children living in private households. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 190:4:319-325
[6] Conn et al. (2015) Mental health outcomes among child welfare investigated children: In-home versus out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review* 57:106-111

leavers are disadvantaged in their immediate and later-life outcomes[7], achieving stability in their care experience for looked after children is a priority.

<div style="border:1px solid">

What children and young people in care told us about stability

In 2016 and 2017, we ran a total of four workshops with children and young people with care experience. Elements of these workshops involved exploring their views and experiences of stability.

Children and young people told us that stability was important – not just for children in care, but for all children. At the same time, they recognised that change can be a good thing, with opportunities to make new friends and meet new people. Some children shared their experiences of a positive change.

"It matters for all children that they don't move a lot."

"I hated my school. Moving made me happier."

Children and young people talked about the challenges they faced with their experiences of instability across different aspects of their lives. They told us that changing homes, schools and professionals affect their relationships with adults and their peers, making it difficult to trust others and build connections. They also told us that change negatively affects their education and opportunities as it disrupts their life. Many children and young people thought experiencing frequent change was usual for children in care.

"It does affect everyone."

"If [social workers] keep leaving you can't trust them very well."

"Making new friends may be hard for some people."

"It affects your learning when you move school, because of different topics and different subjects."

These changes often led to a sense of anxiety, along with a frustration that children and young people had to keep making new relationships and explain their situation over and over again. They said changes can make them feel unsettled, "on edge," and misplaced. Some children and young people seemed to feel resigned to change, and some children highlighted the loss they feel when change happens.

</div>

---

[7] Department for Education (2013) Statistical First Release: Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2013

> *"[We're] not always sure how to approach new social workers."*
>
> *"I'm not willing to build up relationships again when they are going to leave again in a few months."*
>
> *"If you move places constantly you will never feel safe in a secure home. If you move about a lot, you can lose trust in people."*
>
> *"You get used to your foster carer's kids, and then you miss them."*
>
> Children and young people told us that stability facilitates relationships and helps them feel safe. It reinforces the feeling that someone is there for you, and you know what is going to happen.

What We Know about Stability for Children in Care

While placement stability has gradually improved over the last decade[8], the Department for Education's most recent figures suggest that around 1 in 3 (31%) children in care experienced a placement move in 2015/16[9]. Children in care are also more likely to move schools compared to other children, and more likely to be permanently excluded[10].

Beyond these studies, there is a lack of information and evidence on children's experiences of stability more broadly across England. While the Department for Education has begun to publish aggregate numbers of placements by local authority[11], there are no recurring statistics on measures of stability in other aspects of children's lives. Stability for children in care is a multifaceted experience. As it stands, we are collectively failing to monitor and keep track of children's experiences of care across the country.

The Need for Measures of Stability for Children in Care

Without a good understanding of what children in care are experiencing, those in the position to improve their care will face difficulties in making the right decisions.

In their recent concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about frequent changes of social workers and multiple placements for children in care. They recommended that the UK take all measures necessary to provide stability for our looked after children[12]. In 2016, the Department for Education set a goal that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, should receive the same high quality care and support by 2020[13].

[8] Mc Grath-Lone, L. et al. (2016) Changes in first entry to out-of-home care from 1992 to 2012 among children in England. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 51:163-171
[9] Department for Education (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016
[10] Sebba, J. et al. (2015) The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data
[11] Department for Education (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016: additional tables
[12] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
[13] Department for Education (2016) *Putting children first: delivering out vision for excellent children's social care*

However, good quality, robust evidence to support improvements in stability is lacking. The National Audit Office has highlighted that the process of sharing good practice between local authorities is weak, and notes that benchmarking tools may help them identify and share good practice in children's social care[14].

Stability in children's experiences of care is not easily measured. Nonetheless, we can begin to build a national picture of stability by exploiting information that is already available. Local authorities already collect information on their looked after children, much of which is shared with the Department for Education and Ofsted. Most schools provide termly data on their pupils, including those who are also in care, to the Department for Education.

By using pre-existing information from different sources and joining them together, we can start to build a picture of what children in care are experiencing across the country. With greater understanding of the levels and patterns of stability, we will be in a better position to identify what helps children in care achieve stability in their lives.

---

[14] National Audit Office (2016) *Department for Education. Children in need of help or protection.*

Stability Index Project Overview

Project Aims

The Stability Index is a long-term project with aims to develop a yearly measure of stability for looked after children, covering multiple aspects of their lives. Over time, we will capture national and local trends of stability in children's care experiences.

As a starting point, we focus on developing measures of stability at home, at school and in professional support. Following initial scoping of available data, our first iteration of the Stability Index explores placement moves, school moves and social worker changes.

Methods Summary

Data Sources

Where available, we use pre-existing data to develop measures of stability across different aspects of children's care experience. Initial scoping of administrative datasets highlighted that placement moves and school moves could be identified from information in the annual Children Looked After Census and the termly School Census, both of which are held by the Department for Education[15]. However, our scoping found no national data sources that provide information on social worker changes experienced by looked after children. As a result, after a series of consultations with local authorities, we carried out a pilot data exercise to collect information on social worker changes, as an initial feasibility test of a national data collection.

---

[15] The Looked After Children Census and School Census data are held within the National Pupil Database owned by the Department for Education. Further information can be found in Department for Education (2017) *The National Pupil Database Userguide*.

Summary of Data Sources

Stability Measure	Data Source	Data Source Description
Placement Moves	2015/16 Children Looked After Census	The Children Looked After Census is carried out annually on the 31st March, and includes information on all children looked after by local authorities on the census date. We requested further information on the placements these children in care experienced between the 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016.
School Moves	2015/16 School Censuses	School Censuses are carried out termly, with the Autumn Census carried out on the first Thursday of October, the Spring Census carried out on the 3rd Thursday of January, and the Summer Census carried out on the 3rd Thursday of May.
		The School Censuses hold child-level information on all children and young people enrolled in maintained schools, including primaries, secondaries, academies, free schools, pupil referral units and special schools. It does not include information from independent schools.
Social Worker Changes	Local Authority Pilot Data Collection	We carried out a pilot data collection with 22 local authorities across 9 regions in England. We received information on each child in care on the 31st March 2016, and the total number of social worker changes the child experienced between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016 while they were in care.

Analysis Methods

All of our analyses focus on a sample of children and young people looked after by local authorities on the 31st March 2016, based on the specifications of the 2015/16 Children Looked After Census. We use the most recently available information at the time of analysis, so our measures of stability relate to 2015/16.

For placement moves and school moves – where national data is available – we began by describing stability at national, regional and local authority level using census data. For a more detailed understanding of the factors associated with stability and the differences in stability across areas, we need to take account of any relevant differences in child characteristics. To control for these, we employed multilevel logistic regression models

which cluster children by Local Authorities. Further information on our methods can be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

For social worker changes, we mainly focused on validating the information returned by Local Authorities by linking it to the existing census data. In this report we provide initial findings on the levels of social worker changes for English local authorities.

Consultation with Children and Young People in Care

To help us better understand the experiences of stability in care, we carried out consultations with children and young people with care experience. Our first series of consultations were held at the East of England Children in Care Council meeting in November 2016, involving around 40 children in care and care leavers across three workshops. Their age ranged across primary years, secondary years and school leavers, and our workshop focused on their experiences of stability at school, at home and in terms of professional support. Our second workshop in February 2017 involved around 10 young people in care from 4 Local Authorities across England. This focused on our preliminary findings on placement moves, school moves and social worker changes.

Throughout this report, our findings are supplemented by what children and young people have told us about their views and experiences of stability while in care. It is important to note that these views are for illustrative purposes only, and may not be representative of all children in care. Nonetheless, they provide valuable context for our preliminary findings.

Preliminary Findings

About the Children in this Study

The preliminary findings are based on a core sample of children from the 2015/16 Children Looked After Census, which holds information on all children in care looked after by English Local Authorities on the 31st March 2016. In line with the Department for Education's statistical first release, we exclude children with respite care arrangements and children who left care on the 31st March 2016. Further, we exclude 5 children who had regular movements between placements at set intervals, which resembled respite care arrangements.

Our findings are based on a remaining core sample of 70,438 children in care on the 31st March 2016. In the following sections, we present our initial measures of placement moves, school moves and social worker changes.

Core sample: Key Information

> 70,438 children looked after on the 31st March 2016

> 56% were boys, 44% were girls

> Average age of 10 years
>> 18% were under 5 years old
>> 30% were between 5 and 11 years old
>> 52% were over 12 years old

> The majority (75%) of children were from White ethnic backgrounds

> 31% were in care for under a year, 39% were in care for over 3 years

> Most children (60%) had a primary need status recorded as abuse and neglect

Placement Moves

## Overview of placement moves in England

Using the 2015/16 Children Looked After Census, we explored the numbers of placement moves among the core sample of 70,438 children[16] who were in care on the 31st March 2016. We found that:

- Around **7 out of 10** children (73%) did not experience any placement moves in the 12 months preceding 31st March 2016

- Around **2 out of 10** children (18%) experienced 1 placement move in the 12 months preceding 31st March 2016

- Around **1 in 10** children (10%) had 2 or more placement moves in the 12 months preceding 31st March 2016[17]

How does the proportion of children experiencing placement moves vary by area?

Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of placement moves by region in England. This seems to suggest that placement moves seem to occur more frequently, on average, for children in the South West and South East.

Figure 1: Placement moves between in the 12 months preceding 31 March 2016 at national and regional level.

Distribution of Placement Moves in England and by Region

---
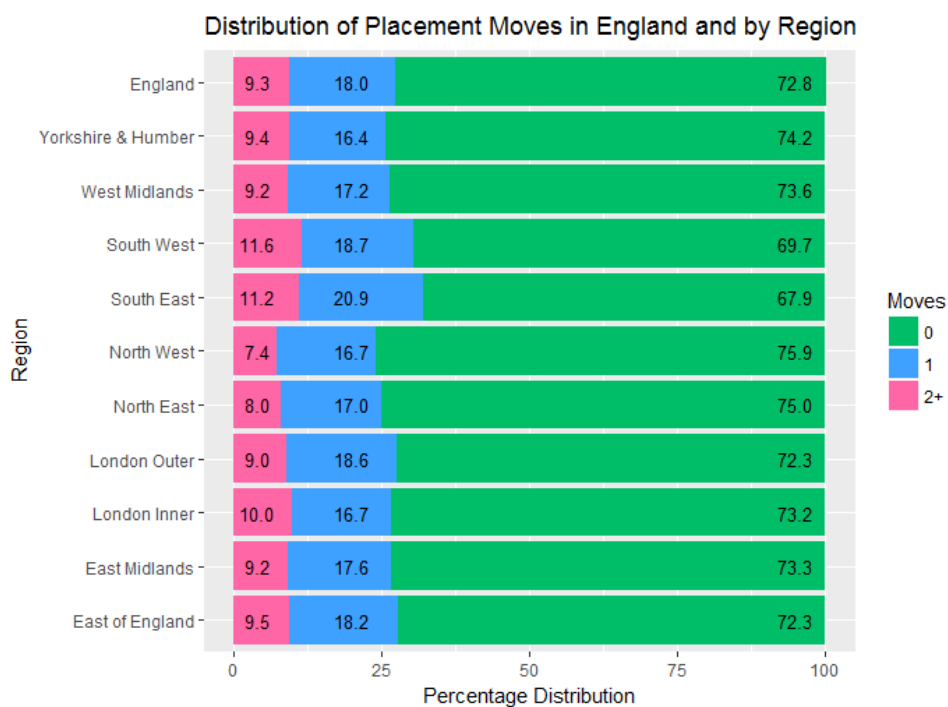
[16] This excludes children with respite care arrangements, and children who left care on the 31st March 2016.
[17] Note that our figures do not include all placement moves for the 1,353 children who left and re-entered care in the 12-month period preceding 31st March, and therefore may slightly underestimate the true number of placement moves.

It is not clear from these basic trends whether the regional differences above reflect genuine and notable differences between areas in the placement stability. We therefore carried out further analyses that control for differences in children's characteristics. Based on available information and further data exploration, we controlled for differences in children's:
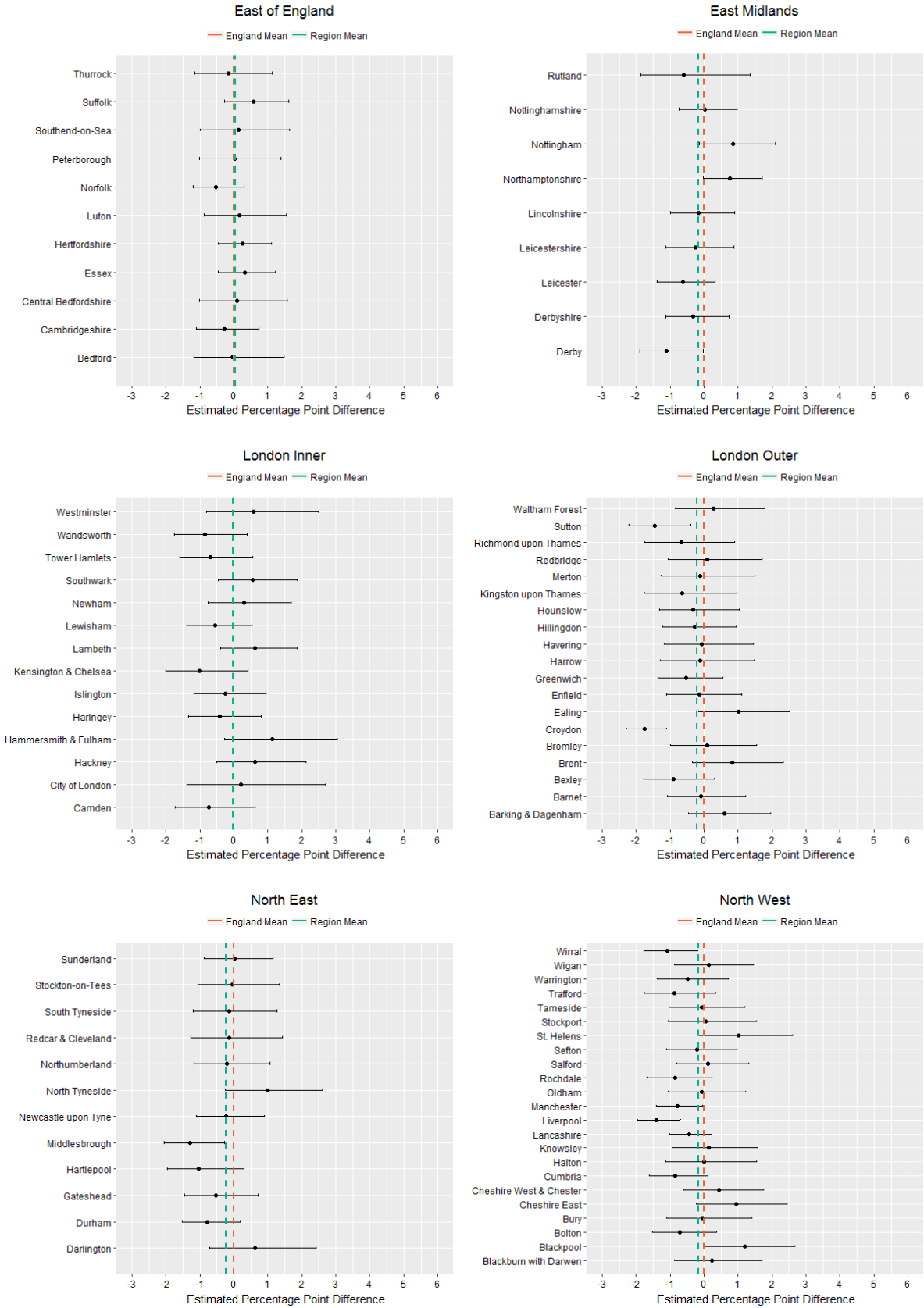
> ethnicity
> age
> duration of care
> primary need status.

In our analyses, we focused on whether children experienced multiple (two or more) placement moves during the year, under our assumption that multiple placements within a short period are more likely to be disruptive and stressful for children in care.

This analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between regions in the percentage of children who experienced multiple placement moves in 2015/16. At local authority level, the majority of authorities were within statistical margins of error to each other, with a small number of exceptions.

Further detail is presented in the figures below. Each black dot shows the difference between a local authority's estimated percentage of children experiencing multiple placements (controlling for the characteristics above) and the national average. Each horizontal black line shows the 95% confidence interval around that difference (that is, the range within which we could be 95% confident that the "true" value of the difference lies). The vertical red dashed line represents the national average (centred at 0), and the blue line represents the region average. If a confidence interval includes the national average or overlaps with another local authority's confidence interval, then the difference compared to the national average or the other local authority is not statistically significant.

Figure 2: Estimated differences in the percentage of children experiencing two or more placement moves by Local Authority, with 95% Confidence Intervals, controlling for children's characteristics. England mean = red line, region mean = blue line.

South East

South West

West Midlands

Yorkshire & Humber
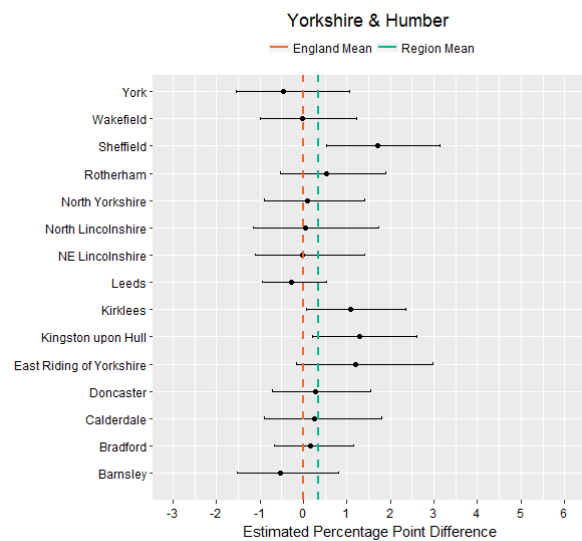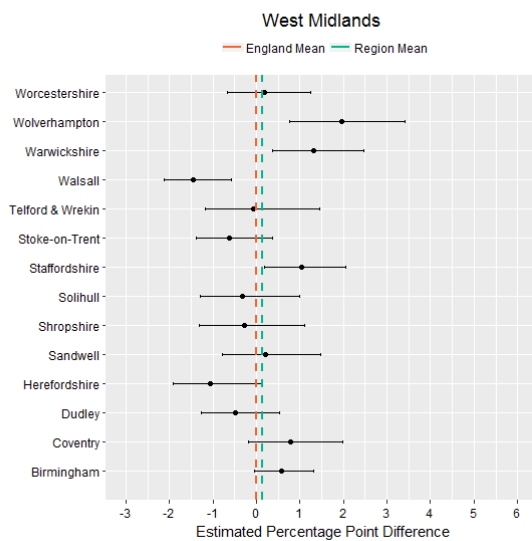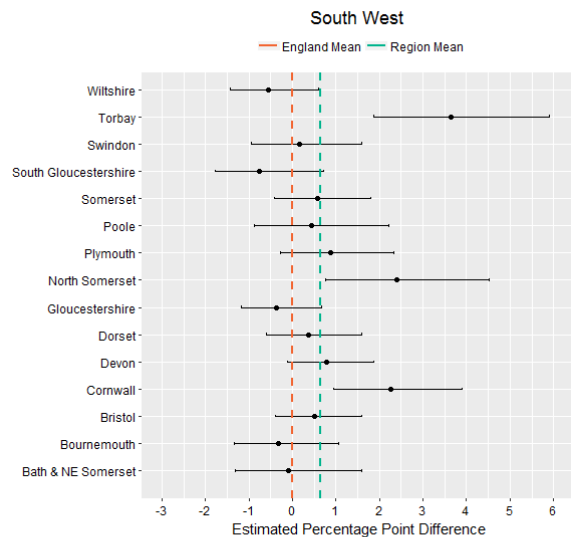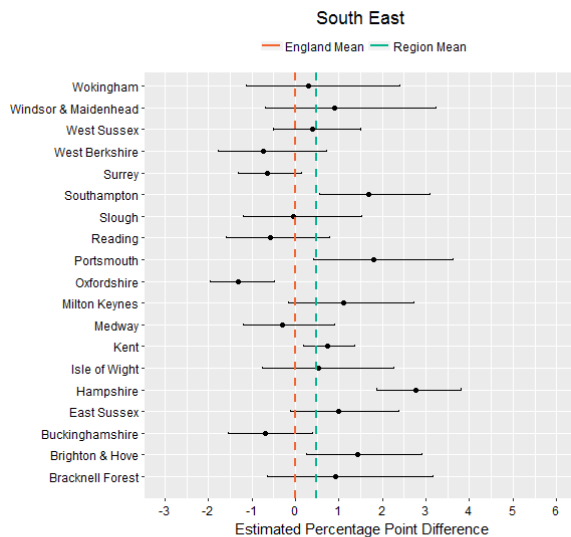
These results do reveal some statistically significant differences between Local Authorities in the percentage of children experiencing multiple placement moves, which cannot be explained by factors such children's age, ethnicities, duration of care and need status. It is beyond the scope of this report to fully explore why such differences exist, and at this preliminary stage we are unable to judge whether such differences are due to variations in practice, data quality, data reporting, other characteristics of the local authority or other child factors that have not been controlled for. Further research is required to understand the drivers of placement moves, and how these might vary across areas. Below we summarise insights into potential causes and consequences of placement moves, that we have learned from our workshops with children in care and care leavers.

Children and young people's views and experiences of placement moves

It is important to remember that children in care experience placement moves cumulatively over their care period. While we found that 73% of children did not experience a placement move in 2015/16, most had experienced placement moves at some point during their time in care - although their experiences varied. Some children and young people had been in a long-term, stable placement after one or two changes, while some were continuing to experience placement moves.

When discussing the causes of placement moves, children and young people told us it might involve issues such as not getting along with their carers, behaviour problems, and drugs and alcohol. Lack of foster carers was raised as a problem in some areas, as a short supply of foster placements made it difficult to match children to the right family. Older children were also described as being harder to place.

Placement moves were often discussed in a negative light, with issues raised around the process of moving and the impact it has on children and young people. Many children and young people shared experiences of sudden changes without being prepared, and in some cases without any warning. Some young people talked about moving to a new placement they had never seen before, without ever having met or spoken to the carers.

"[I was] dropped off by [a] taxi driver."

"I got a text to say I was moving that day. I had to get my boyfriend's mum to pick me up and drop me off at my new placement. It took ages to get all my things back."

Children talked about having to get used to new rules and boundaries, as well as the personalities of their new carers and other children in the house. Finding and building new relationships can often be a challenge. Moving placements sometimes had a profound impact on children.

"My brother was really happy at his placement, and then he had to move. It made his behaviour problems worse, and it's affected his whole life."

When discussing what makes a good placement move, being able to visit their new placement and knowing more about their carers before they move was a strong theme which emerged. A good relationship with carers who are loving, supportive and understanding was raised as being very important for a successful placement.

"It's important to match the foster carers and children properly."

"What makes a good placement: happy, nice people… to be treated like family, not loads of moving, as close to friends as possible… not to go [straight] into your new home."

"It's not about moving, but it matters how many times you've been loved."

School Moves

Overview of school moves in England

We analysed the most recent school moves for the subset of looked after children who also appeared in the 2015/16 Autumn and Summer School Censuses (40,068 children).[18] We found that:

> Overall, around **1 in 4** children (24%) experienced at least one school move in 2015/16 by the end of May 2016.

However, the nature of school moves may differ between those that occur during natural transition periods over the summer holidays, and those that occur during the academic year. Separating these two, we found that:

> Around **1 in 7** children (14%) last moved school at the start of the academic year (i.e., over the summer holidays or beginning of the year, between 1st August 2015 and 17th September 2015).

> Around **1 in 10** children (10%) last moved school in the middle of the academic year (between the end of September 2015 and end of May 2016).
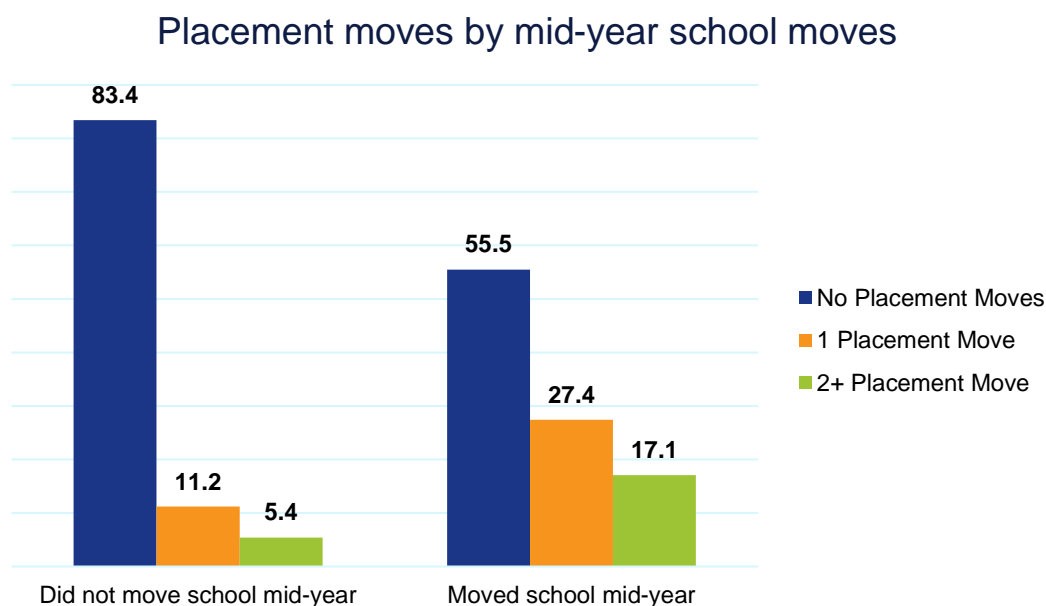
As comparison, nationally, 12% of children moved school at the start of the academic year, and 3% of children moved school in the middle of the year by May 2016. This suggests looked after children are at significantly higher risk of moving school in the middle of the academic year compared to the national average.

These figures are based on the enrolment dates listed in the 2016 Summer School Census, and do not provide the full picture of children's experiences of school moves throughout the year. For example, children who experienced a school move during the academic year may have also experienced a school move at the start of the year, but the latter is not captured in our measure. Some children may have also moved school after the Summer Census date, which is not available in the data. Therefore, the figures above may underestimate the true frequency school moves experienced by children in care in 2015/16.

Looking at school moves and placement moves together, the graph below shows the frequencies of placement moves for children whose recent school move was in the middle of the 2015/16 academic the year. We focus on mid-year school moves as these are more likely to be disruptive and stressful for looked after children.

---

[18] This sample excludes children who joined the eligible school system mid-year, such as unaccompanied asylum seeking children who recently arrived in England. We also excluded children under 5 and children attending nursery.

Placement moves by mid-year school moves

We see that children with recent experience of mid-year school moves are also more likely to experience recent placement moves: 45.5% of them experienced a placement move, compared to 16.6% of children who did not move school mid-year. This suggests that instability in placements may be associated with instability in schools.

However, it is notable that more than half (55.5%) of children who experienced a mid-year school move did not experience a placement move in 2015/16, suggesting that other factors are also likely to influence mid-year school moves for children in care.

To explore this further we conducted additional analysis using multilevel logistic regressions that controlled for other factors (children's age, ethnicity, duration of care, need status, SEN status and region). This indicated that that placement moves were the strongest predictor of mid-year school moves in 2015/16 (see Appendix for full details). Based on that analysis, the graph below shows the how the percentage of children predicted to experience mid-year school varies according to the number of placement moves (after controlling for child characteristics). Children who experience a placement move are nearly three times more likely to experience a mid-year school move, while children who experience multiple placement moves are nearly four times more likely to do so.

Figure 4: Estimated percentage (marginal predicted probabilities) of children experiencing mid-year school moves, controlling for age, ethnicity, duration of care, needs status and SEN status.

Predicted percentage of children experiencing mid-year school moves, by placement moves in 2015/16
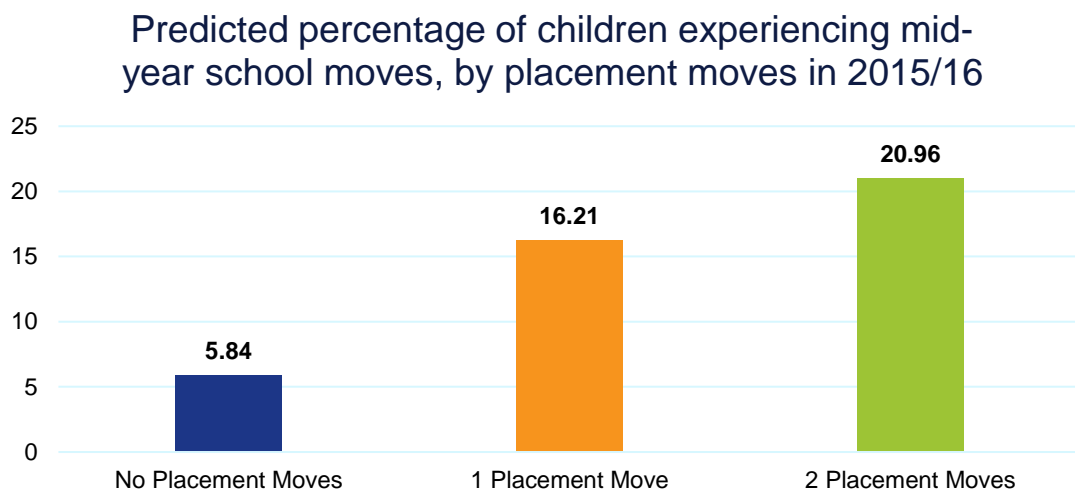
How does the proportion of children experiencing school moves vary by area?

The figure below shows the average percentage of children in care experiencing a school moves for each region in England. Mid-year school moves among children in care appear to be relatively more common in the South West, East of England and Outer London.

Figure 5: School moves for the 2015/16 academic year at national and regional levels, for children in care on 31st March who appeared in the Autumn and Summer School Census.

Distribution of School Moves in England and by Region
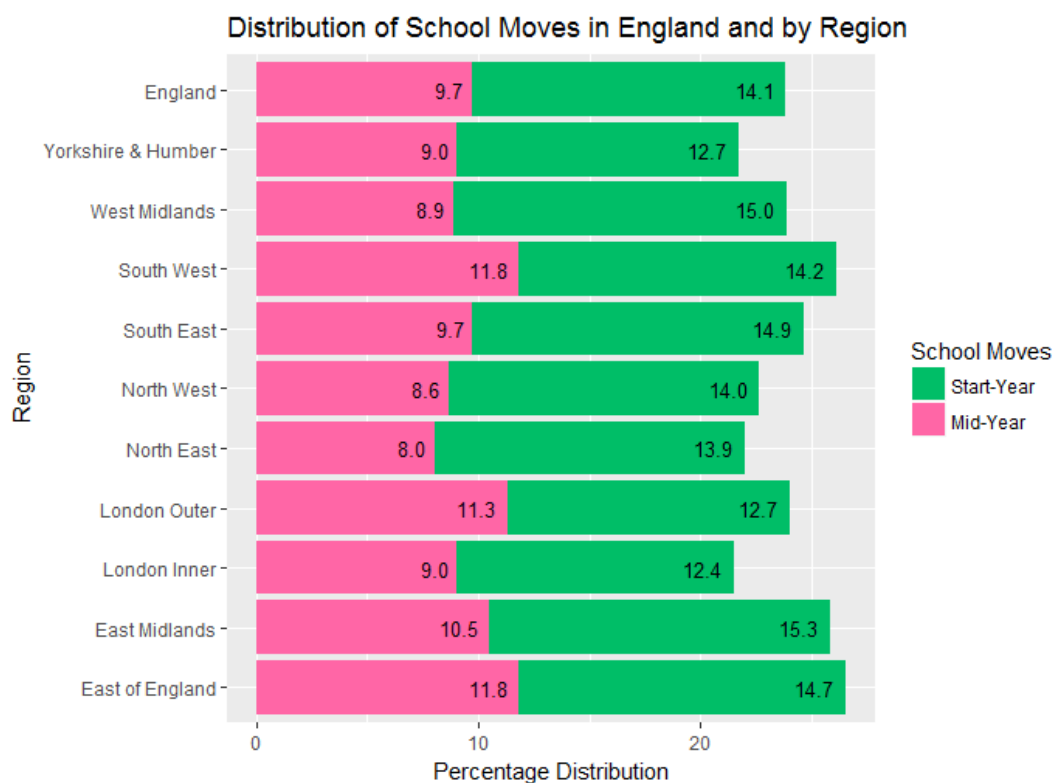
To test whether the regional differences we observe are genuine and notable, we carried out further analyses that controlled for children's characteristics: age, ethnicity, duration of care, need status, SEN status and number of placement moves in 2015/16. We also focused on whether children experienced a mid-year school move, as it is likely to be more disruptive and stressful.

Even after controlling for these characteristics, we found statistically significant differences between areas in the proportion of children experiencing mid-year school moves. Overall, it is highest in East of England and Outer London, and lowest in the North East and North West (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Estimated percentage (marginal predicted probabilities) of mid-year school moves by end of May 2016 by region, controlling for age, ethnicity, duration of care, needs status, SEN status and placement moves.
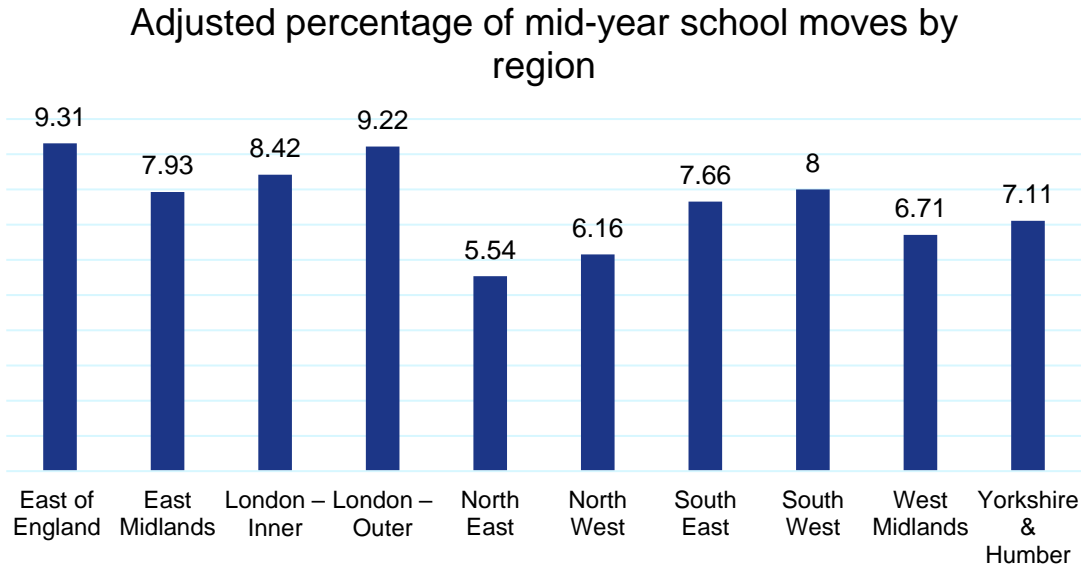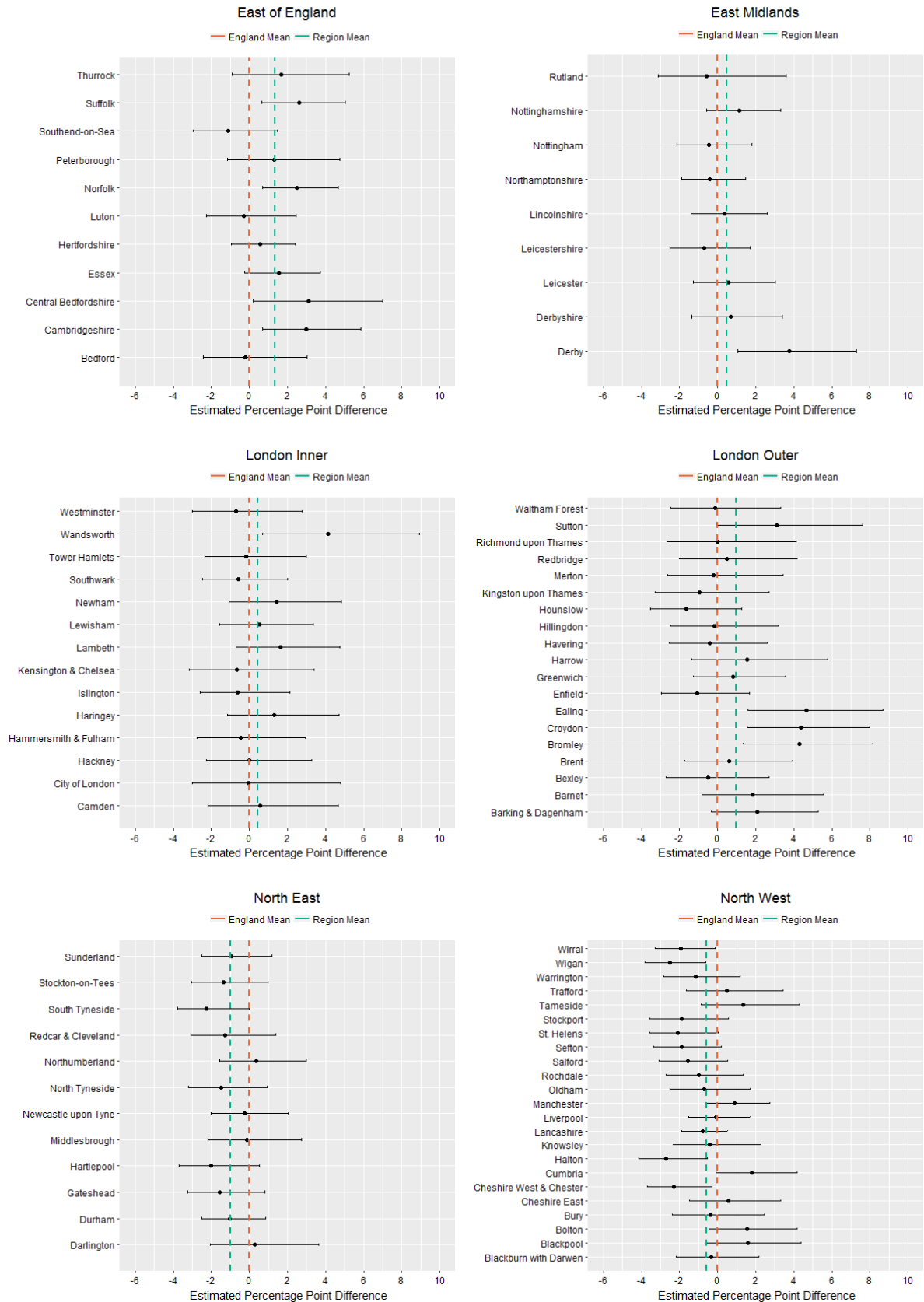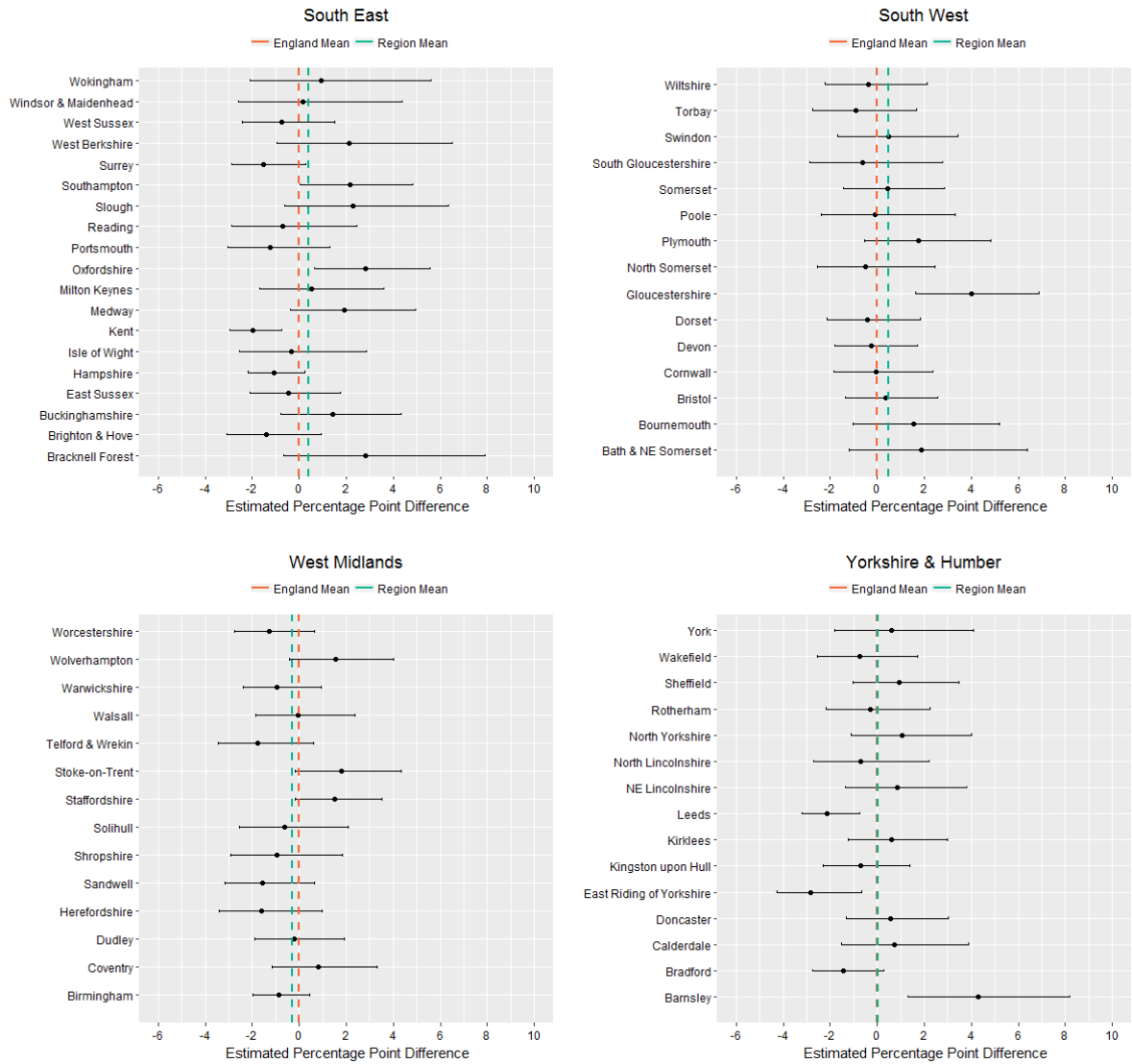
Adjusted percentage of mid-year school moves by region

Region	Value
East of England	9.31
East Midlands	7.93
London – Inner	8.42
London – Outer	9.22
North East	5.54
North West	6.16
South East	7.66
South West	8
West Midlands	6.71
Yorkshire & Humber	7.11

Figure 7, below, shows the analysis for local authorities, by comparing each area's estimated percentage of mid-year school moves to national and regional levels (after controlling for child characteristics and placement moves). Each black dots shows the differences between the percentage of children experiencing mid-year school in that authority compared against the national average, while the horizontal line shows the 95% confidence intervals around that difference. The vertical dashed red line represents the national average (centred at 0), and the vertical dashed blue line represents the regional average.

We see that most authorities are broadly in line with the national picture, in the sense that their difference from the national average does not appear to be statistically significant in most cases. However, there is noticeable variation across local authorities in some regions such as Outer London.

Figure 7: Estimated percentage point differences of children experiencing mid-year school moves by Local Authority, with 95% Confidence Intervals, controlling for children's characteristics. England mean = red line, region mean = blue line.

South East · England Mean · Region Mean

South West · England Mean · Region Mean

West Midlands · England Mean · Region Mean

Yorkshire & Humber · England Mean · Region Mean

These graphs illustrate local authority variation in the percentage of children in care experiencing a mid-year school move which cannot be explained by other factors included in our analysis. It is unclear whether these differences are due to variations in practice, data quality, data reporting, other characteristics of the local authority or other child factors that have not been controlled for. Further research is required to understand the drivers of school moves, and how these might vary across areas. Below we summarise some potential insights into potential causes and consequences of school moves, that we have learned from our workshops with children in care and care leavers.

Children and young people's views and experiences of school moves

While our analysis of school moves looks at 2015/16 only, it is important to remember that children in care may experience school moves throughout their schooling years, and the moves may occur while they are not in care. In our workshops, children and young people's experiences of school moves seemed to vary. Some had only moved during their "natural transition periods" between primary and secondary, while others had moved multiple times over several years.

"I've not moved schools."

"I've been to about 5 new schools."

"I got kicked out of 2 schools."

When exploring the causes of school moves, placement moves and behaviour problems were the main reasons raised by children and young people. Children in care told us about sometimes falling outside their school catchment area after their placement changed, so that their current school was too far away to attend. They also talked about how children in care are more likely to move school because adults may fail to understand their behaviour problems or mental health problems, and they are unable to get support. Children and young people mainly talked about not being understood by social workers or their carers, rather than their teachers.

"You don't get any help and your social workers don't understand or they aren't trained to help you with your mental health. You can't get access to CAMHS [Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service]"

"Social workers and foster carers can't tell how you feel. There's a communication problem."

While some children talked about moving school being a good thing, many children and young people said school moves had a negative impact on learning, friendships and mental health. Several children complained about moving school during exam time, which affected their results. Many talked about having to move suddenly, not having time to transition and readjust to their new environment. They also talked about losing all their school work and struggling to build new relationships while getting used to the new school. One young person shared an experience of being told by their carer that they were moving school that same day, and having to attend their new school in their old school uniform.

> *"[Moving school] impacts mental health. Pressure increases anxiety and depression due to uncertainty."*
>
> *"In the middle of my GCSE [exams], my carers text me that I was going to change school. I said no and refused."*

These views and experiences of school moves were confounded by the feeling that adults expected them to fail, and perhaps that the impact of moving school was overlooked or not taken seriously.

> *"They expect me to fail."*
>
> *"Teachers and social workers say we are more likely to fail." "I've been told many times."*

Children and young people thought their experience of school moves could be improved with greater preparation, transition time and a proper induction. They thought visiting the school in advance of the move would be helpful, where they get to meet new teachers and staff members. Some suggested a transition experience week, where they attend the school for a few days before fully moving.

> *"It'd be nice if we got more warning if we had to move quickly."*
>
> *"Would be beneficial to [see] a new school more than once."*

Social Worker Changes

Our scoping exercise highlighted that most local authorities systematically record social worker changes for their children in care, but that this information is not centrally collected or readily available. We therefore carried out a pilot data collection to make this data available for the first time, and to test the feasibility of a national data collection.

Our pilot involved 22 local authorities across 9 regions in England. Participating areas were invited to provide the number of primary social worker changes[19] for each of child that was looked after on the 31st March 2016. The changes in social workers were limited to those which occurred while the child was in care, between the 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. Further information on the pilot data collection is available in the Appendix.

We received valid information on 12,508 children in care. Figure 8 below shows the percentage of these who experienced social worker changes. In 2015/16, **1 in 4** children (25.2%) in the pilot data experienced 2 or more changes in social workers, and **1 in 10** children (10.2%) experienced 3 or more changes.[20]

Figure 8: Percentage of children by social worker changes between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016, for the returned pilot sample.
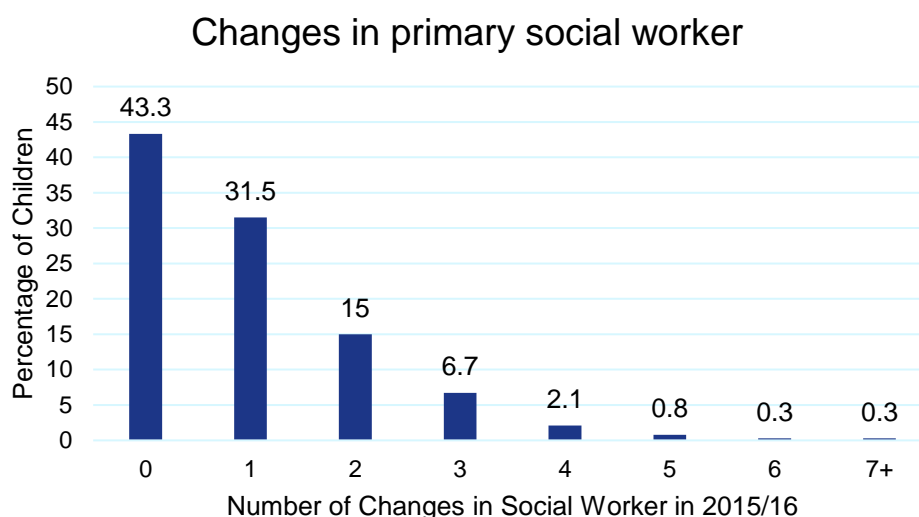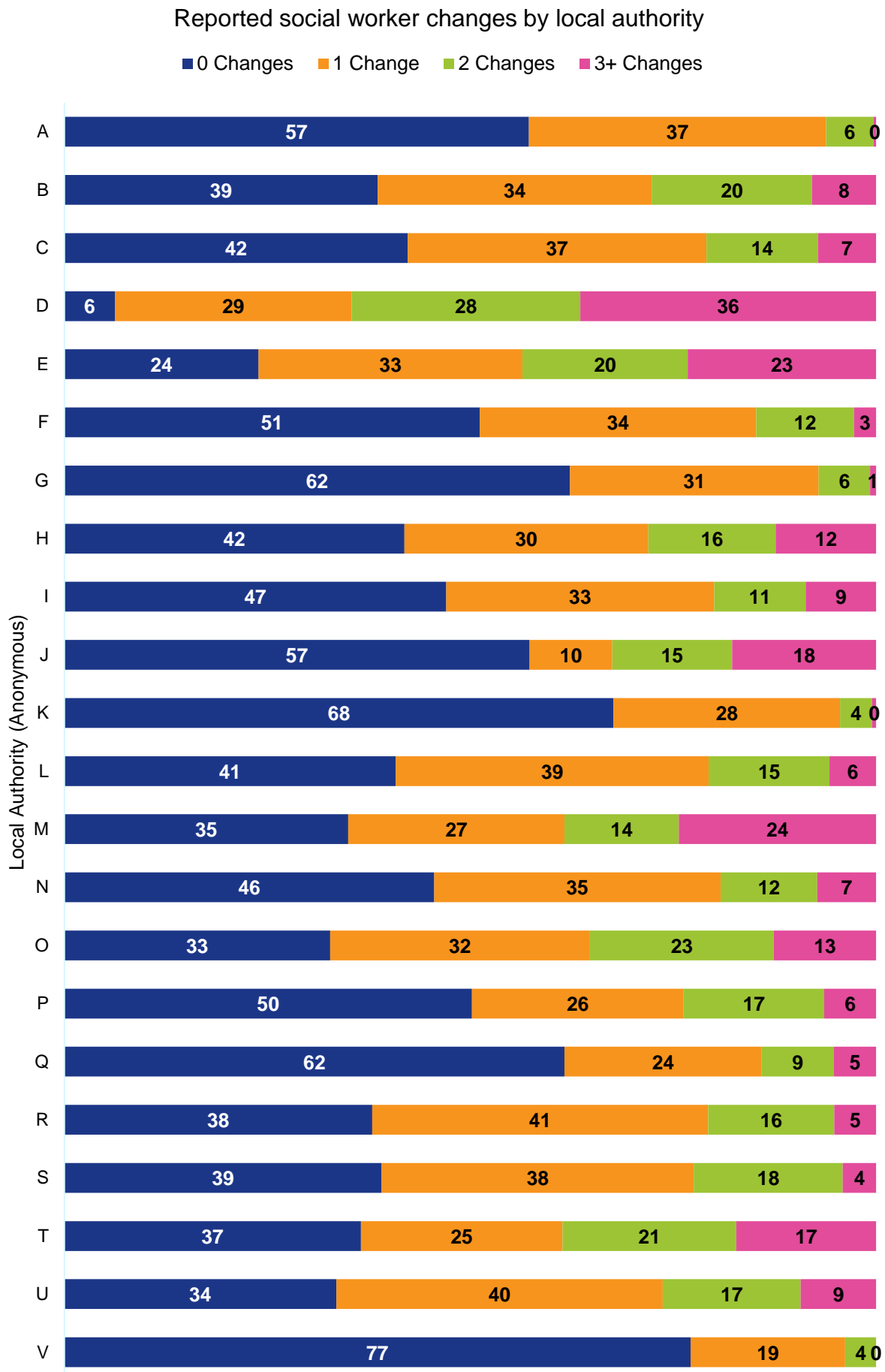

The table below provides the breakdown for each participating local authority. We found considerable variation across areas: for example, in local authority A 57% of children in care were reported to experience no change in social worker, whereas in local authority D the figure was only 6%. It is unclear at this stage why such large variation exists; the feedback we received from local authorities suggest that the methods of recording and collating data on social worker changes vary between areas. We therefore recommend some caution in interpreting these results.

---

[19] By primary social worker, we mean the primary staff responsible for the child's case, which may be known across Local Authorities as allocated caseworker, key worker or lead practitioner.
[20] These numbers do not include all changes in social workers for a small group of children who left and re-entered care in the 12-month period preceding 31st March, and therefore may slightly underestimate the true number of social worker changes.

Figure 9: Distribution of social worker changes across 22 local authorities in the pilot.

Reported social worker changes by local authority

Legend: ■ 0 Changes ■ 1 Change ■ 2 Changes ■ 3+ Changes

| Local Authority (Anonymous)	0 Changes	1 Change	2 Changes	3+ Changes
A	57	37	6	0
B	39	34	20	8
C	42	37	14	7
D	6	29	28	36
E	24	33	20	23
F	51	34	12	3
G	62	31	6	1
H	42	30	16	12
I	47	33	11	9
J	57	10	15	18
K	68	28	4	0
L	41	39	15	6
M	35	27	14	24
N	46	35	12	7
O	33	32	23	13
P	50	26	17	6
Q	62	24	9	5
R	38	41	16	5
S	39	38	18	4
T	37	25	21	17
U	34	40	17	9
V	77	19	4	0

Exploring characteristics associated with social worker changes

We matched our pilot data on social worker changes to our placement moves data (from the Children Looked After Census) and our school moves data (from the School Census). We were able to match 99.4% of the eligible cases to the placement moves data (n=12,080), and 99.2% to the school moves data (n=7,269).

Figure 10 below shows how the likelihood of experiencing social worker changes varies with the number of placement changes. It suggests that more frequent social worker changes are, on average, associated with more frequent placement moves – although the association is not strong or absolute. Many children still experience frequent changes of placement without any change in social worker, and vice versa.

Figure 10: Percentage of children who experienced placement moves by the number of social worker changes in 2015/16.

Number of social worker changes by number of placement moves
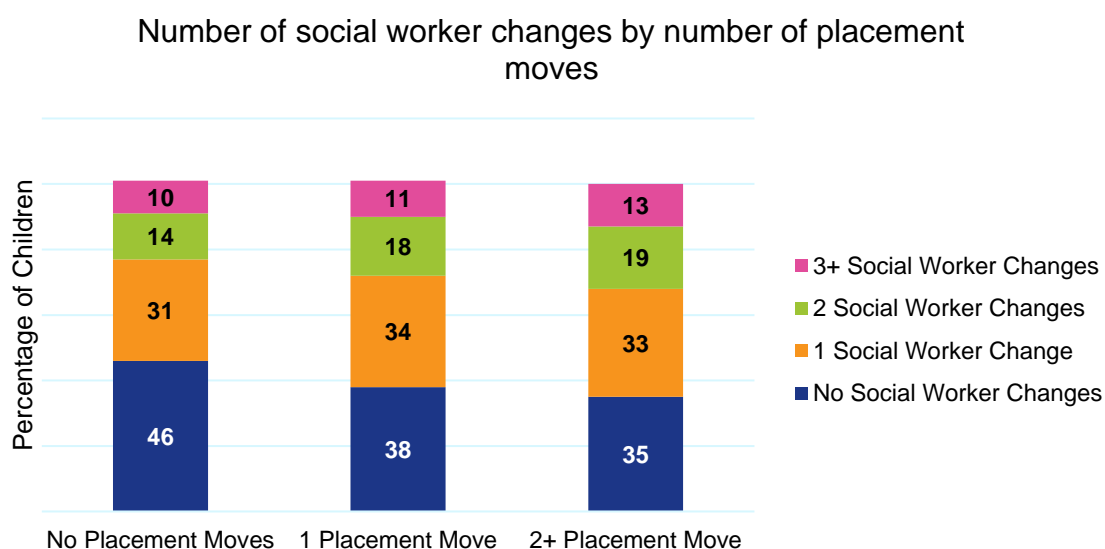
Similarly, Figure 11 below shows how the number social worker changes varies depending on whether a child changed school mid-year. As with placement moves, mid-year school moves are associated with a higher likelihood of social worker changes – although again the association is not strong or absolute. Many children still experience a mid-year change in school without any change in social worker, and vice versa.

Figure 11: Percentage of children who experienced a mid-year school move by the number of social worker changes in 2015/16.

Number of social worker changes by school moves
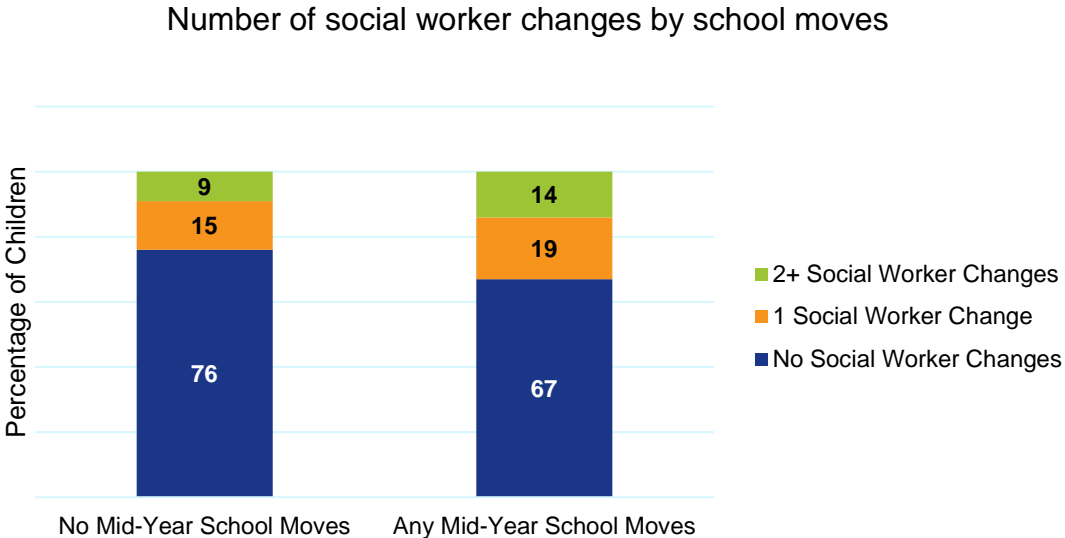
Overall, our analyses suggest that experiencing instability in one dimension is broadly associated with a higher risk of experiencing instability in other dimensions – although the correlation is not perfect. Even so, we stress that our data on social worker changes are preliminary findings from a sample of 22 local authorities, with potential variation in the recording and reporting of social worker changes between areas. Further research is required, based on a larger sample and consistent reporting methods, for a comprehensive understanding of social worker changes and the relationships between the different dimensions of stability.

Children and young people's views and experiences of social worker changes

While our findings above suggested considerable variation in the number social worker changes, children and young people in our workshops told us that it is common to experience a change of social worker.

"I've had 7 social workers."

"I've had so many."

"I've lost count of the amount of social workers I've had."

With the exception of one young person, children told us that they were not always informed when their social worker changed.

"They just left. I didn't know anything about it."

"They just leave."

"They told me they were leaving. My old social worker brought my new social worker with her so I could meet her before she left."

When discussing why they might have a change of social worker, children and young people said that it usually occurs without explanation, and that the reasons why are unknown to them in most cases.

Children and young people talked about the problems they might experience when their social workers change. Issues raised tended to focus on rebuilding relationships, rebuilding trust and understanding how to get along with each other. Some children and young people shared their story of difficulties with their new social workers, such as feeling patronised, feeling pressured and having difficulties in bonding.

"My social worker changed and we didn't get on. So I saw her once a year."

"They have to get to know you. They think they know you from your file."

*"New social workers sometimes patronise you because they don't know you."*

Children and young people told us that change is easier to deal with when social workers are friendly and honest, and show interest in the child. Some children said "the right approach" was important in building new relationships, making sure children and young people did not feel pressured to talk about themselves or other topics that might be uncomfortable. They wanted the first meeting with a new social worker to be positive and fun, and not like a formal counselling session.

Exploring stability across measures

Using the pilot data, we explored children's experiences of stability across all three measures. Of the 12,080 children in the pilot data who appeared in the 2015/16 Children Looked After Census, 71% experienced any change across any measure (any change in placement, school or social worker). This is equivalent to around 50,000 children in care on the 31st March 2016.

Complete information on all three stability measures - placement moves, school moves and social worker changes - was limited to the 7,269 children who appeared in both the Children Looked After Census and the Autumn and Summer School Census. Of these children, 69% of children experienced any change in at least one measure, while 5% experienced a change in all three.

Figure 12: Percentage of children in care attending school in the pilot data experiencing any change across stability measures.

Number of children in care experiencing any change across stability measures
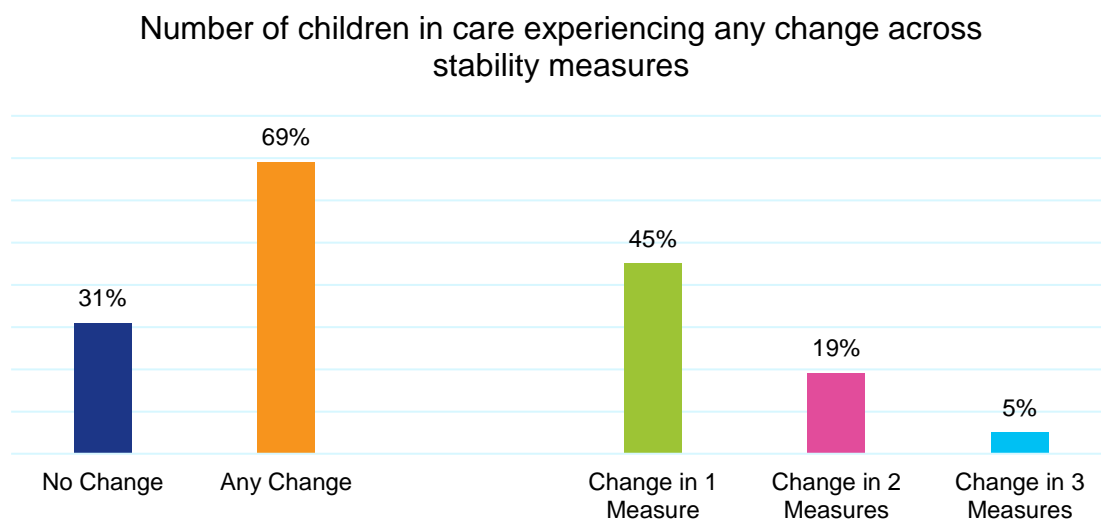
Focusing on high levels of instability, meaning multiple placement moves, mid-year school moves and multiple social worker changes, 35% of children had experienced at least one type of high instability in any measure. A small proportion of children - 0.55% - had experienced high instability across all three measures, meaning they had experienced multiple placement moves, a mid-year school move and multiple social worker changes in 2015/16. While this is a small proportion of children, it is equivalent to around 220 children looked after on the 31st March 2016 who appeared in the school censuses.

Percentage of children in care experiencing high instability
across stability measures
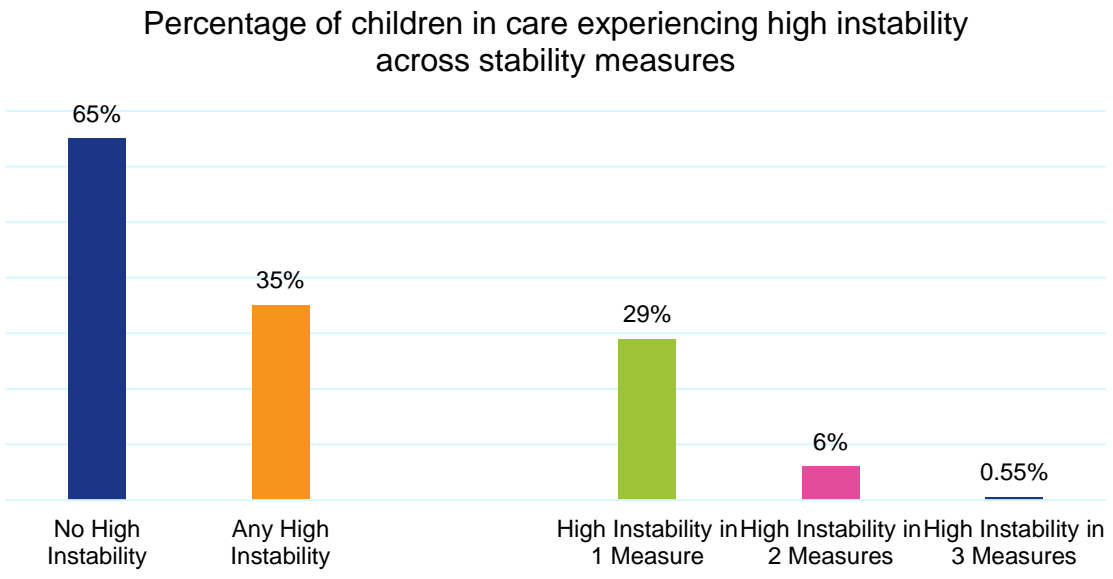
Conclusions

Summary of Findings

Children in care have consistently raised stability as an important issue in their care experience. Our preliminary analyses complement their views and provide important new evidence on the extent and level of stability that children in care experience.

We found that 1 in 10 children in care experienced two or more placement moves in 2015/16 (in line with the most recent statistical release from the Department for Education). Nationally, that works out at over 7,000 children in care at any one time[21].

Further analysis reveals that in most local authorities the percentage of children experiencing multiple placement moves over 12 months is broadly in line with the national average – with a few exceptions. Where differences remain, we are unable to judge whether they are due to variations in practice, data quality, data reporting, other characteristics of the local authority or other child factors that have not been controlled for.

By linking the Children Looked After Census to the School Census, we have provided new evidence on recent school moves for children in care. A relatively similar proportion of children in care experienced school moves over the summer months compared to the national average for all children. However, at least 1 in 10 children in care moved school in the middle of the academic year in 2015/16, which is considerably higher than the population average of 3 in 100.

Even after controlling for children's characteristics, we found significant differences between areas in the proportion of children experiencing mid-year school moves. Overall, it is highest in East of England and Outer London, and lowest in the North East and North West. It is not clear why these differences exist: they could be due to variations in practice, data quality, data reporting, other characteristics of the local authority or other child factors that have not been controlled for.

Instability in placements may be associated with instability at school: children who experience a placement move are nearly three times more likely to experience a mid-year school move, while children who experience multiple placement moves are nearly four times more likely to do so. At the same time, however, more than half of children who experienced a mid-year school move did not experience a placement move in 2015/16, so other factors also play a role.

The results from our pilot data collection suggest that 1 in 4 children experienced 2 or more changes in social workers, and 1 in 10 experienced 3 or more changes. We also found considerable variation across participating local authorities, which may be due to local variability in how information on social worker changes is recorded.

When looking at stability across all three dimensions – placement, school and social worker – we find from our pilot data that 7 in 10 children experienced some form of change in their placement, school or social worker in 2015/16. Approximately 2 in 100 children in care who

---

[21] Based on 70,438 children looked after on 31st March 2016.

also attended school experienced high levels of instability across all three measures, with multiple placement moves, a mid-year school move and multiple social worker changes.

Initial analysis suggests that experiencing a change of placement or school is associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing a change in social worker. However, the correlation is not perfect – many children experience no change in social worker despite changing placement or school – and other factors are likely to play a role.

Limitations

It is important to note that our findings are exploratory, intended as a first step in the long-term development of the Stability Index. Our analyses focus on the experiences of stability in 2015/16 for children in care on the 31st March 2016, and therefore only provide a snapshot.

In our workshops, children in care told us that a single year does not fully capture stability. A better understanding of stability for children in care would involve analysing multiple years (i.e., longitudinal analyses). Extending the Stability Index in this way will allow us to explore long-term stability, the trajectories of stability, and how previous instability in one dimension may be associated with future instability in another. It will also allow us to better explore the predictors of stability, looking at factors such as the nature of the moves and the characteristics of placements/schools.

Our measures of stability have other limitations. Some changes in placement and social worker may be inevitable as a child progresses through their care pathway, and it is important to recognise that the process of becoming looked after is inherently unstable for a child. Hence the "acceptable" level of instability may vary depending on the context.

Moreover, the changes we measure may be caused by different factors – some positive, some negative. Placement moves may be a positive step for children if they involve the child being placed into a well-matched long-term home, such as adoption. A placement move due to a breakdown after a longer period in care may be a more negative experience. Planned and unplanned moves may have very different consequences for the child's wellbeing and outcomes. We therefore need to distinguish "positive change" from "negative change" as the Index develops over time. With this in mind, we are not currently able to indicate whether lower rates of placement, school and social worker change are necessarily desirable outcomes for areas to aspire to.

Furthermore, while we attempt control for certain child-level factors in our analyses, our analyses are limited by the information available in the census datasets such as children's age, gender and ethnicity. There may be other important local factors and trends which impact our measures of stability, and may confound area-level comparisons. Since there could be multiple factors behind regional and local differences, including differences in data reporting, we recommend caution with interpretation of those findings.

In spite of these limitations, we believe our preliminary findings provide an important first step towards a useful measure of stability for looked after children at national and local levels. For the first time, we have gone beyond placement moves to include school moves and social worker changes, and we have begun some exploratory work on how instability in

one dimension relates to another. We will continue to work on the Stability Index in future, evolving and refining our analysis with the ultimate aim of supporting improved practice, stability and outcomes for children and young people in care.

Appendix

Further information on the characteristics of the eligible sample of children in care

The current series of findings are based on a sample of children looked after by the local authority on the 31st of March 2016 and eligible to be included in the SSDA903 Children Looked After Census. Further information on the Children Looked After Census is available in the Guide to the SSDA903 collection[22].

Our core sample of children in care matches the Department for Education's sample for their statistical first release on looked after children, and excludes:

> Children with respite care arrangements
> Children who left care on the 31st March 2016

Our initial sample of looked after children was 70,443.

In our initial data exploration, we noticed that a small number of looked after children had very high numbers of care episodes (max 52), but were not recorded as having respite care arrangements. 7 cases with more than 15 care episodes between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016 were visually examined. Of these, 5 cases had regular movements between 2 placements at set intervals. These cases were deemed to be similar to respite care arrangements, and therefore excluded from the sample.

This brought our final sample of looked after children to 70,438.

The descriptive statistics of the final eligible sample are outlined below.

		Children looked after on 31st March 2016
		N=70,483
Gender (%)		
	Male	56.31
	Female	43.69
Ethnicity (%)		

---

22 Department for Education (2015) Children looked after by local authorities in England: guide to the SSDA903 collection – 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

White	75.46
Asian	4.41
Black	7.31
Mixed	8.87
Other	3.25
Missing	0.71

LA Region (%)

East of England	8.99
East Midlands	7.42
London – Inner	5.75
London – Outer	8.25
North East	6.25
North West	17.81
South East	14.03
South West	8.11
West Midlands	13.12
Yorkshire and Humber	10.27

Need Status (%)

N1 (abuse or neglect)	60.33
N2 (child's disability)	3.20
N3 (parental illness or disability)	3.32
N4 (family in acute distress)	8.83
N5 (family dysfunction)	15.63
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	1.53
N7 (low income)	0.17
N8 (absent parenting)	6.99

Age (years)[1]		
	Mean	10.66
	Median	12
	Min	0
	Max	19
	SD	0.02

Total Duration in Care (months)[2]		
	Mean	38.57
	Median	25
	Min	0
	Max	215
	SD	0.15

Age: categorised (%)[1]		
	0-4 years	17.77
	5-11 years	30.12
	12-14 years	19.12
	15-16 years	19.68
	17+ years	13.32

Total Duration in Care: categorised (%)[2]		
	0-5 months	17.03
	6-8 months	7.00
	9-11 months	6.52
	12-18 months	11.76
	1.5-3 years	18.80
	More than 3 years	38.90

[1]Note, "age in years" is estimated based on year and month of birth.

The table below explores the characteristics of children in our eligible sample depending on their age.

	Age on 31st March 2016				
	0-4 years	5-11 years	12-14 years	15-16 years	17+ years
Total duration of care					
0-5 months	35.09	13.43	11.32	15.4	11.64
6-8 months	12.73	5.41	4.65	6.79	6.6
9-11 months	11.42	5.45	4.18	6.02	6.47
12-18 months	19.11	10.68	8.58	10.1	11.43
1.5-3 years	16.86	23.41	16.43	16.27	18.08
More than 3 years	4.79	41.61	54.83	45.43	45.78
Gender					
Male	53.04	55.66	56.43	57.19	60.68
Female	46.96	44.34	43.57	42.81	39.32
Ethnicity					
White	78.92	79.68	77.78	70.60	65.12
Asian	2.52	2.73	4.49	7.04	6.74
Black	3.68	5.97	6.94	9.31	12.72
Mixed	1.31	1.14	2.01	5.71	8.73
Other	10.93	10.20	8.60	7.01	6.25
Missing	2.64	0.28	0.19	0.32	0.45
Need Status					
N1 (abuse or neglect)	71.30	68.20	61.08	49.92	42.21
N2 (child's disability)	0.64	2.15	4.44	4.73	4.98

N3 (parental illness or disability)	4.24	3.55	3.41	2.56	2.56
N4 (family in acute distress)	6.02	7.98	9.82	10.69	10.35
N5 (family dysfunction)	16.10	16.11	15.42	15.35	14.63
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	0.52	0.71	1.51	2.68	3.05
N7 (low income)	0.08	0.18	0.19	0.14	0.28
N8 (absent parenting)	1.10	1.13	4.12	13.92	21.95

The table below explores the characteristics of children in our eligible sample depending on their duration of care, excluding children's age which is covered above.

	Total duration of care:					
	0-5 months	6-8 months	9-11 months	12-18 months	1.5-3 years	3 Years +
Gender						
Male	56.93	59.76	57.21	55.23	54.63	56.40
Female	43.07	40.24	42.79	44.77	45.37	43.60
Ethnicity						
White	68.16	66.54	70.83	74.01	78.02	80.23
Asian	6.78	6.78	5.51	4.72	3.91	2.91
Black	7.82	10.57	10.37	7.34	6.22	6.50
Mixed	8.56	8.28	8.43	8.80	8.88	9.19
Other	6.72	6.45	4.10	4.06	2.55	1.10
Missing	1.96	1.38	0.76	1.07	0.42	0.07
Need Status						
N1 (abuse or neglect)	55.16	50.55	55.38	56.40	57.91	67.54
N2 (child's disability)	2.24	3.37	2.64	3.25	3.94	3.32
N3 (parental illness or disability)	3.17	2.82	2.70	3.01	2.96	3.85
N4 (family in acute distress)	8.29	8.81	9.41	8.91	9.30	8.73
N5 (family dysfunction)	16.20	15.71	15.47	17.01	18.88	13.40
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	2.05	2.05	2.55	1.94	1.49	0.93
N7 (low income)	0.13	0.16	0.22	0.11	0.23	0.17
N8 (absent parenting)	12.76	16.54	11.63	9.38	5.29	2.06

The table below explores the characteristics of children in our eligible sample depending on their primary need status, excluding children's age and duration of care which is covered above.

	Need status:							
	N1 abuse or neglect	N2 child's disability	N3 parental illness or disability	N4 family in acute distress	N5 family dysfunction	N6 socially unacceptable behaviour	N7 low income	N8 absent parenting
Gender								
Male	52.82	68.88	53.78	56.23	53.8	64.16	58.68	85.8
Female	47.18	31.12	46.22	43.77	46.2	35.84	41.32	14.2
Ethnicity								
White	79.44	79.43	69.22	77.33	82.59	70.29	58.68	25.4
Asian	3.33	4.92	3.89	3.25	2.27	2.41	9.92	20.3
Black	5.97	7.18	11.67	6.85	4.35	14.39	11.57	22.33
Mixed	1.3	1.91	0.9	1.77	1.3	1.76	5.79	28.27
Other	9.25	6.29	13.47	10.18	8.75	10.4	11.57	2.74
Missing	0.7	0.27	0.86	0.63	0.74	0.74	2.48	0.96

Further information on our analyses on placement moves

Deriving Placement Moves

Using data in the SSDA903 Looked After Children Dataset, we created an indicator of placement moves between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 16. Each episode was counted as a new placement if:

> A looked after child began a new placement due to starting care
> A looked after child began a new placement with different carers without changing legal status
> A looked after child began a new placement with different carers with change in legal status

A new placement did not include:

> Return home
> Adoption into a new home

> Respite care arrangements

A placement move was counted for each additional new placement between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 16. We do not take into account whether the child has returned to a familiar placement (e.g., a move from placement A to B, then back to A is counted as 2 moves instead of 1).

Our current focus on creating an indicator of placement experiences *during care*. For our eligible sample, if a child ceases to be looked after and re-enters care between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 16, their total placement will be counted as 2 with a placement move of 1. We do not treat return home as a new placement. This is because if we include home as an additional status for children when they are out of care, children entering care will automatically be coded as having 2 placements within the year.

The exception to the above is children who may have exited care through adoption but re-entered care in the 12 months preceding 31st March 2016. This is because the Child ID changes with adoption, meaning we are unable to track re-entry into care for adopted children. For the total eligible sample, this could lead to an underestimation of placement moves. At a national level, this is unlikely to have impact on the final results with the assumption that such cases will be relatively few in number.

Analysis Methods

Analysis began with initial exploration of placement moves at national, regional and local-authority level. Due to the strong positive skew of placement moves, placement moves were categorised as 0, 1, or 2+ placement moves between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016.

This was followed by preliminary analysis of child-level and local authority-level predictors of placement moves. In these analyses, placement moves were treated as a binary indicator, with 0 or 1 move coded as 0, and 2 or more moves coded as 1. We note that moving placements can be a positive change for children in care depending on individual circumstances. However, we view multiple placements within a short period is more likely to be disruptive and stressful for children in care. We therefore take 2 or more placements moves between 1st April 2015 and 31sr March 2016 to be an indicator of instability in placements.

We conducted random-intercept logistic regressions with placement moves as the dependent variable, where children are treated as level 1 and Local Authorities as level 2. All analyses were carried out in R v. 3.3.2. We explored the following individual-level variables and its association with having 2 or more placement moves: Gender of child, Age (categorical), Ethnicity, Total duration in care (categorical), and Children in Need status[23]. We also explored the following Local Authority level variables: Region, Rate of looked after children, Percentage of placements in top 25% deprived areas, Percentage of placements in top 25% crime areas, Percentage of placements provided by the Local Authority,

---

[23] Note, categorical indicators of Age and Total duration in care were used due to improved model fit in dingle-level models, based on change in AIC values. Compared to the null model, continuous Age with a quadratic term improved model fit by 1009 AIC points, while categorical age improved model fit by 1037 AIC points. Continuous Total duration in care with a quadratic term improved model fit by 399 AIC points, while categorical Total duration in care improved model fit by 1738 AIC points.

Percentage of placements over 20 miles away from Local Authority border, and Percentage of placements in urban areas (where all variables apart from Region and Rate of Looked After Children are from 2015 figures published by Ofsted). This allowed us to identify factors associated with multiple placement moves.

Finally, we explored variations in the predicted levels of multiple placement moves across local authorities while controlling for factors which were identified as relatively good predictors of placement moves. In short, this means we explored the levels of multiple placement moves while taking important differences between Local Authorities into account (of which we could identify in the data).

Descriptive Statistics: Placement Moves at National and Regional Levels

The table below outlines placement moves in England and across the regions.

		Placement Moves (%)		
	N	**0**	**1**	**2+**
England	70438	72.78	17.87	9.53
East of England	6332	72.27	18.19	9.54
East Midlands	5230	73.27	17.55	9.18
London – Inner	4052	73.25	16.73	10.02
London – Outer	5810	72.34	18.62	9.04
North East	4403	75.02	16.99	7.99
North West	12545	75.88	16.73	7.39
South East	9880	67.9	20.94	11.15
South West	5710	69.7	18.74	11.56
West Midlands	9241	73.62	17.2	9.19
Yorkshire & Humber	7235	74.22	16.35	9

Exploring Predictors of 2+ Placement Moves

We conducted a series of analyses to identify if and how individual and Local Authority level characteristic are associated with multiple placement moves. The purpose of these analyses were to identify factors which predict placement moves, allowing us to adjust for important differences in local characteristics to better understand variations in placement moves between Local Authorities.

For our initial exploration, we conducted simple random-intercept models with each available variable (with child at level 1 and Local Authority at level 2)[24].

The following table outlines the descriptive statistics of various individual and local-authority level characteristics by children in care who experienced 2 or more moves, and those who did not.

N=70438	Children in care on 31st March 2016	
	0 - 1 placement move	**2+ placement moves**
	n=63851	**n=6587**
Gender (%)		
Male	56.44	55.02
Female	43.56	44.98
Ethnicity (%)		
White	75.50	75.03
Asian	4.45	4.05
Black	7.18	8.49
Mixed	8.88	8.74
Other	3.25	3.25
Missing	0.74	0.44
LA Region (%)		
East of England	8.97	9.17
East Midlands	7.44	7.29
London – Inner	5.71	6.16

[24] As preliminary analyses, all models were estimated with Maximum Likelihood Estimation based on adaptive Gaussian Hermite approximation using 10 integration points.

London – Outer	8.28	7.97
North East	6.34	5.34
North West	18.20	14.07
South East	13.75	16.73
South West	7.91	10.02
West Midlands	13.14	12.89
Yorkshire and Humber	10.26	10.35
Need Status (%)		
N1 (abuse or neglect)	60.87	55.05
N2 (child's disability)	3.39	1.37
N3 (parental illness or disability)	3.39	2.64
N4 (family in acute distress)	8.57	11.33
N5 (family dysfunction)	15.31	18.75
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	1.36	3.20
N7 (low income)	0.17	0.21
N8 (absent parenting)	6.94	7.45
Age: categorised (%)		
0-4 years	18.07	14.82
5-11 years	31.47	16.97
12-14 years	19.14	18.93
15-16 years	18.74	28.72
17+ years	12.57	20.56
Total Duration in Care: categorised (%)		
0-5 months	17.65	10.96

6-8 months	6.48	12.01
9-11 months	5.53	16.05
12-18 months	11.06	18.60
1.5-3 years	19.12	15.71
More than 3 years	40.16	26.67

	LA-Level Variables
	N=151
Rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 children)	
Mean	6.54
SD	2.45
Min, Max	2.2, 16.4
% Placements in top quartile of deprived areas	
Mean	28.24
SD	13.94
Min, Max	5, 62.63
% Placements in top quartile of crime incidence areas	
Mean	27.87
SD	13.23
Min, Max	4.55, 58.54
% Placements provided by LA	
Mean	63.77
SD	14.38
Min, Max	3.41, 94.59

% Placements over 20 miles from LA border		
	Mean	12.07
	SD	7
	Min, Max	1.68, 40
% Placements in urban areas		
	Mean	82.78
	SD	13.92
	Min, Max	41.67, 98.61

The table below outlines the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) scores and intercept variance for each random-intercept model. AIC is a measure of relative model-fit. Smaller AIC scores suggest better fit, where smaller AIC scores compared to the Null Model would suggest that the independent variable is likely to be a good predictor of 2 or more placement moves[25]. The intercept variance shows the differences in the probability of having 2 or more placement moves between Local Authorities, given the independent variables.

	Full sample		
	N (child) = 70438 ; N (LA) = 151		
	AIC	**Change in AIC**	**Intercept Variance**
Null Model	43507	--	0.07
+ Gender	43503	-4	0.07
+ Ethnicity	43497	-10	0.07
+ Need Status	43197	-310	0.07
+ Age (categorical)	42509	-998	0.06
+Total Duration in Care (categorical)	41796	-1711	0.07
+ Region	43495	-12	0.05
+ Rate of looked after children	43504	-3	0.07
+ % Placements in top quartile of deprived areas	43503	-4	0.06
+ % placements in top quartile of crime incidence areas	43509	+2	0.07
+ % placements provided by LA	43509	+2	0.07
+ % placements over 20 miles away from LA border	43507	0	0.07
+ % of placements in urban areas	43508	+1	0.07

25 Akaike, H. (2011) Akaike's Information Criterion. *International Encyclopaedia of Statistical Science* Springer Berlin Heidelberg

The result suggests that Children's Need Status, Age and Duration in Care may be relatively good predictors of multiple placement moves between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016.

Further, Local Authority characteristics are not good predictors of 2 or more placement moves. Note, this does not mean that individual placement characteristics do not predict risk of moves. Rather, we did not find evidence that being looked after by Local Authorities with characteristics such as high rate of looked after children and high rate of Local Authority placement provision increases children's risk of multiple moves.

Following initial exploration, the null and best fit model (based on AIC scores) for the full sample is presented below[26]. Note, we repeated the analyses with our sub-sample of children in care, excluding children who had multiple care periods. There were no notable differences in the model output between the full sample and sub-sample.

	Full sample								
	N (child) = 70,438 ; N (LA) = 151								
	Null Model				**Best Fit Model**				
	B	**SE**	**Odds**	**95% OR CI**	**B**	**SE**	**OR**	**95% OR CI**	**Predicted Prob. (%)**
Intercept	-2.30***	0.03	0.10	0.10, 0.11	-3.15***	0.05	0.04	0.04, 0.05	--
Ethnicity									
White (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7.54
Asian	--	--	--	--	-0.27***	0.07	0.76	0.66, 0.88	5.85
Black	--	--	--	--	-0.05	0.05	0.95	0.86, 1.06	7.22
Mixed	--	--	--	--	0.05	0.05	1.05	0.95, 1.16	5.62
Other	--	--	--	--	-0.31***	0.08	0.73	0.62, 0.86	7.89
Missing	--	--	--	--	-0.49*	0.20	0.61	0.41, 0.90	4.75
Age									

---

26 Estimated with Maximum Likelihood Estimation based on adaptive Gaussian Hermite approximation using 25 integration points.

0-4 yrs (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4.68
5-11 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.09*	0.05	0.54	0.47, 0.61	4.28
12-14 yrs	--	--	--	--	0.68***	0.05	0.91	0.83, 1.00	8.84
15-16 yrs	--	--	--	--	1.11***	0.05	3.02	2.76, 3.31	12.92
17 yrs +	--	--	--	--	1.22***	0.05	3.39	3.07, 3.74	14.26
Need Status									
N1 (abuse or neglect) (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7.74
N2 (child's disability)	--	--	--	--	-1.24***	0.11	0.29	0.23, 0.36	2.36
N3 (parental illness or disability)	--	--	--	--	-0.13	0.08	0.88	0.75, 1.04	6.88
N4 (family in acute distress)	--	--	--	--	0.11*	0.05	1.12	1.02, 1.22	8.55
N5 (family dysfunction)	--	--	--	--	0.12**	0.04	1.13	1.05, 1.21	8.63
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	--	--	--	--	0.36***	0.08	1.44	1.22, 1.70	10.76
N7 (low income)	--	--	--	--	0.18	0.30	1.19	0.66, 2.14	9.09
N8 (absent parenting)	--	--	--	--	-0.62***	0.07	0.54	0.47, 0.61	4.33
Total Duration in Care									
0-5 mnths (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6.03
6-8 mnths	--	--	--	--	1.10***	0.06	3.01	2.70, 3.36	16.19
9-11 mnths	--	--	--	--	1.53***	0.05	4.60	4.15, 5.11	22.80

12-18 mnths	--	--	--	--	0.94***	0.05	2.57	2.32, 2.83	14.13
1.5 – 3 yrs	--	--	--	--	0.15**	0.05	1.16	1.05, 1.29	6.93
More than 3 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.26***	0.05	0.77	0.70, 0.85	4.72
Intercept Variance	0.070					0.064			
AIC Score	43597					40157			

*** P<=0.001; ** P<=0.01; * P<=0.05

Overall, the model suggests that older children are more likely to experience multiple placement moves, while children who have been in care for a longer period are less likely to experience placement moves. (Note, for duration of care, the percentages for children who have been in care for less than 12 months are not directly comparable with children who have been in care for a year or longer. Further information is available in the footnote[27].)

We also see that children from Asian, Other and Missing ethnic backgrounds are less likely to experience multiple placement moves (although the differences are small), and children recorded as having the primary need status of "child's disability" and "absent parenting" are less likely to experience 2 or more placement moves.

[27] To clarify, this is because children who have been in care for less than 12 months have a more limited time to experience 2 or more moves in the 12 months preceding 31st March compared to children who have been in care for a year or longer. The results suggest that 6% of children in care experienced 2 or more placements within the first 5 months of care, 16% within the first 8 months of care, and 23% within the first 11 months of care. For children who have been in care for a year or more, 14% of children in care experienced 2 or more placement moves in the preceding 12 months if they were in care for 12-18 months, 7% if they were in care for 1.5 to 3 years, and 4% if they were in care for more than 3 years.

Further information on our analyses on school moves

Deriving School Moves

Of the 70,438 children in our final sample of children in care on the 31st March 2016, 55,336 (78.6%) had a Unique Pupil Number, indicating that they had or were attending a maintained school. We matched the sample of children in care with Unique Pupil Numbers to the 2015/16 Summer Census held on the 18th March 2016, which holds information on the most recently available school enrolment date for each child. The School Censuses hold data from nurseries, primaries, secondaries, special schools, academies, free schools, pupil referral units and alternative provisions. It excludes independent schools. Further information on the School Censuses is available in the National Pupil Database user guide[28].

We excluded children attending nurseries and children under the age of 5, as it is common for this group of children to enter the school system mid-year which would bias our count of school moves. We also excluded children who did not appear in the 2015/16 Autumn Census to exclude children who joined the eligible school system mid-year, such as unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrived in England mid-year, whose school move experiences are not comparable[29]. Finally, we excluded the secondary records for children in cases of dual school registrations. This reduced our sample to 40,068.

We focused on deriving two different measures of school moves, start-year school moves and mid-year school moves, due to the potentially different impact of the two types of moves on children. We note that well-managed school moves can lead to positive outcomes for children in care. Start-year school moves correlate with common transitions such as moving into secondary school or college. Moving school mid-year may be more disruptive academically due to sudden changes in the class curriculum, as well as having to build new relationships in an environment where established friendship groups already exist which can be daunting. During our workshop with children in care and care leavers, children mentioned how you "lose your work" when you move school during term. Young people also raised the difficulties in re-choosing GCSE options and catching up with work when original options are not offered at the new school. Studies show school moves are associated with negative impact on social relationships and low attainment[30,31,32].

School moves were calculated by the registered enrolment date available in the Summer Census, which captures when children began attending their school[33]. We focused on two measures:

> **School moves at the beginning of the academic year** (Start-Year School Moves): Children were coded as moving to a new school over the summer if their most recent

[28] Department for Education (2016) NPD user guide.
[29] Note, this group of children had notably higher levels of alternative provisions schooling. After removing this group of children from our sample, we did not have enough alternative provision cases to include in our analyses.
[30] Pribesh, S. & D. B. Downey (1999) Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance? *Demography* 36:4:521-534
[31] Leckie, G. (2009) The complexity of school and neighbourhood effects and movements of pupils on school differences in models of educational achievement. *Statistics in Society* 172: 3: 537-554
[32] Strand, S. & F. Demie (2007) Pupil mobility, attainment and progress in secondary school. *Educational Studies* 33: 3: 313-331
[33] Some children have multiple entries in the School Censuses, for instance if they are registered at 2 schools. Our measure is based on their main school records as coded in the School Censuses.

enrolment date fell between 1st August 2015 and 17th September 2015. We chose the 3rd Thursday in September as an enrolment cut-off for the new academic year, taking into account of varying term dates and potential delays in enrolment, with the assumption that school moves over the summer should be completed by the 3rd Friday of September.

> School moves during the academic year (Mid-Year School Moves): Children were coded as moving to a new school during the academic year if their most recent enrolment date fell between 18st September 2015 and 30th May 2016. The May cut-off was determined by the fact that the Summer School Census usually takes place on the third Thursday of May.

We note that these measures are approximations of children's experiences of school moves. For instance, children who experienced a school move during the academic year may have also experienced a school move at the start of the year. The current measures reflect children's most recent experiences of school moves.

Analysis

Analysis began with initial exploration of school moves at national, regional and local-authority level in the 2015/16 academic year. This was followed by preliminary analysis of child-level predictors of school moves. In these analyses, school moves were treated as a binary indicator due to the small number of children known to have experienced 2 school moves, where 0 indicated no moves and 1 indicated any school moves.

Following preliminary analysis, we conducted random-intercept logistic regressions with school moves as the dependent variable, where children are treated as level 1 and Local Authorities as level 2. All analyses were carried out in R v. 3.3.2. We explored the following variables and its association with any school moves during the academic year: Gender of child, Age (categorical), Ethnicity, Total duration in care (categorical), Children in Need status, Alternative provision status, SEN status, Placement moves and Region. This allowed us to identify factors associated with mid-year school moves.

Finally, we explored variations in the predicted levels of mid-year school moves across local authorities while controlling for factors which were identified as relatively good predictors of moving school. In short, this means we explored the levels of mid-year school moves while taking important differences between Local Authorities into account (of which we could identify in the data).

Descriptive Statistics: School Moves during Academic Year at National and Regional Levels

The table below outlines school moves in England and across the regions. Overall, around 14.1% of children looked after on the 31st March moved schools at the start of the academic year. In addition, around in 9.7% of children looked after on the 31st March 2016 are estimated to have moved school mid-year by the end of May 2016. In total, 1 in 4 (23.8%) of looked after children experienced at least 1 school move by end of May 2016.

As comparison, nationally, we estimated that 11.8% of children moved school at the start of the academic year, while only 2.8% of children moved school during the year by May 2026[34]. This suggests looked after children are at significantly higher risk of moving school during the academic year compared to the national average.

	Children in care on 31st March who appeared in at least one School Census in 2015/16			
		School Moves (%)		
	N	**Start-Year**	**Mid-Year**	**Any Move**
England	40068	14.11	9.70	23.81
East of England	3589	14.68	11.84	26.53
East Midlands	2808	15.31	10.51	25.82
London – Inner	2105	12.45	9.03	21.47
London – Outer	2791	12.72	11.29	24.01
North East	2716	13.95	8.03	21.98
North West	7612	14.00	8.64	22.65
South East	5303	14.92	9.71	24.63
South West	3362	14.25	11.84	26.09
West Midlands	5375	15.00	8.86	23.85
Yorkshire & Humber	4407	12.66	9.03	21.69

Exploring Predictors of Mid-Year School Moves

We conducted a series of analyses to identify if and how children's characteristics are associated with mid-year school moves. We focused on mid-year school moves due to the particularly high rates of moving during the academic year for looked after children compared to the general population. As with placement moves, the purpose of these analyses were to identify factors which predict school moves, allowing us to adjust for

---

[34] National figures estimated following same method of deriving school moves for children in care. N=7,201,609.

important differences in children's characteristics between local authorities to better understand area-level variations.

For our initial exploration, we conducted simple random-intercept models with each available variable (with child at level 1 and local authority at level 2)[35]. The following table outlines the descriptive statistics of the various variables by children in care who experienced mid-year school moves, and those who did not. Note, the most recent SEN status available for our sample of children was from the 2015 Summer School Census.

N=40,068	*Children in Care on 31st March 2016 who appear in the 2015/16 Autumn and Summer School Censuses*	
	No Mid-Year Moves **n=36,180**	**Any Mid-Year Moves** **n=3,888**
Gender (%)		
Male	53.66	52.83
Female	46.34	47.17
Ethnicity (%)		
White	79.28	80.86
Asian	3.54	2.98
Black	6.60	5.58
Mixed	8.97	9.21
Other	1.43	0.95
Missing	0.18	0.41
LA Region (%)		
East of England	8.75	10.93
East Midlands	6.95	7.59
London – Inner	5.29	4.89
London – Outer	6.84	8.10
North East	6.90	5.61

---

[35] As preliminary analyses, all models were estimated with Maximum Likelihood Estimation based on adaptive Gaussian Hermite approximation using 10 integration points.

North West	19.22	16.92
South East	13.23	13.25
South West	8.19	10.24
West Midlands	13.54	12.24
Yorkshire and Humber	11.08	10.24
Need Status		
N1 (abuse or neglect)	64.22	63.97
N2 (child's disability)	3.80	1.49
N3 (parental illness or disability)	3.63	3.11
N4 (family in acute distress)	8.91	10.73
N5 (family dysfunction)	15.80	17.80
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	1.11	1.44
N7 (low income)	0.16	0.33
N8 (absent parenting)	2.37	1.13
Age: categorised (%)		
5-11 years	46.93	57.20
12-14 years	28.72	28.14
15-16 years	21.42	14.22
17+ years	2.92	0.44
Total Duration in Care: categorised (%)		
0-5 months	10.38	18.42
6-8 months	4.26	9.05
9-11 months	4.41	7.10
12-18 months	8.78	16.90

1.5-3 years	19.75	20.29
More than 3 years	52.42	28.24

SEN Status in 2015
Summer Census (%)

None	45.27	48.43
SEN without a Statement	7.23	8.36
SEN with a Statement	18.18	9.16
Unknown	29.32	34.05

Placement Moves
2015/16

None	83.42	55.48
One	11.15	27.42
Two or more	5.43	17.10

The table below outlines the AIC scores and intercept variance for each random-intercept model. The results suggest that children's need status, age, total duration in care, SEN status and placement moves may be relatively good predictors of mid-year school moves by end of May 2016.

	Full Sample		
	N (child) = 40,068 ; N (LA) = 151		
	AIC	**Change in AIC**	**Intercept Variance**
Null Model	25391	--	0.09
+ Gender	25392	+1	0.09
+ Ethnicity	25375	-16	0.10
+ Need Status	25272	-119	0.10
+ Age (categorical)	25098	-293	0.10
+Total Duration in Care (categorical)	24398	-993	0.08

+ Region	25386	-5	0.07
+ SEN status	25159	-232	0.10
+ Placement Moves	24077	-1314	0.09

Following initial exploration, the null and best fit model (based on AIC scores) is presented below[36]. After controlling for differences in children's characteristics between areas, there was a notable difference in the probability of experiencing a mid-year school move between regions.

	Full Sample								
	N (child) = 40220; N (LA) = 151								
	Null Model				**Best Fit Model**				
	B	**SE**	**Odds Ratio**	**95% OR CI**	**B**	**SE**	**OR**	**95% OR CI**	**Predicted Prob. (%)**
Intercept	-2.25***	0.03	0.11	0.10, 0.11	-1.61***	0.11	0.20	0.16, 0.25	--
Ethnicity									
White (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7.60
Asian	--	--	--	--	-0.25*	0.11	0.78	0.63 , 0.96	6.00
Black	--	--	--	--	-0.36***	0.08	0.70	0.59 , 0.82	5.44
Mixed	--	--	--	--	-0.09	0.06	0.92	0.81, 1.04	7.02
Other	--	--	--	--	-0.33	0.18	0.72	0.51, 1.02	5.60

[36] Estimated with Maximum Likelihood Estimation based on adaptive Gaussian Hermite approximation using 25 integration points.

Missing	--	--	--	--	0.48	0.30	1.61	0.9, 2.89	11.71
Age									
5-11 yrs (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9.01
12-14 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.16***	0.04	0.85	0.78, 0.92	7.77
15-16 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.67***	0.05	0.51	0.46, 0.57	4.85
17 yrs +	--	--	--	--	-1.64***	0.25	0.19	0.12, 0.32	1.89
Need Status									
N1 (abuse or neglect) (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7.43
N2 (child's disability)	--	--	--	--	-0.41***	0.14	0.66	0.5, 0.88	5.07
N3 (parental illness or disability)	--	--	--	--	-0.18	0.10	0.83	0.68, 1.02	6.28
N4 (family in acute distress)	--	--	--	--	0.13*	0.06	1.14	1.01, 1.28	8.37
N5 (family dysfunction)	--	--	--	--	0.01	0.05	1.01	0.92, 1.12	7.53
N6 (socially unacceptable behaviour)	--	--	--	--	0.09	0.15	1.10	0.81, 1.48	8.09
N7 (low income)	--	--	--	--	0.60	0.33	1.82	0.95, 3.48	12.75
N8 (absent parenting)	--	--	--	--	-0.59***	0.16	0.56	0.4, 0.77	4.27
Total Duration in Care									
0-5 mnths (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12.16
6-8 mnths	--	--	--	--	-0.05	0.08	0.95	0.82, 1.1	11.61

					Coef	SE	OR	95% CI	
9-11 mnths	--	--	--	--	-0.47***	0.08	0.63	0.53 , 0.73	7.96
12-18 mnths	--	--	--	--	-0.03	0.06	0.97	0.86 , 1.1	11.86
1.5 – 3 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.42***	0.06	0.65	0.58 , 0.73	8.30
More than 3 yrs	--	--	--	--	-0.90***	0.05	0.41	0.36 , 0.45	5.32
Region									
East of England (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9.31
East Midlands	--	--	--	--	-0.18	0.15	0.84	0.63 , 1.12	7.93
London – Inner	--	--	--	--	-0.11	0.15	0.90	0.67 , 1.2	8.42
London – Outer	--	--	--	--	-0.01	0.13	0.99	0.76 , 1.28	9.22
North East	--	--	--	--	-0.56***	0.14	0.57	0.43 , 0.76	5.54
North West	--	--	--	--	-0.45***	0.12	0.64	0.51 , 0.81	6.16
South East	--	--	--	--	-0.21	0.13	0.81	0.63 , 1.03	7.66
South West	--	--	--	--	-0.17	0.13	0.85	0.65 , 1.1	8.00
West Midlands	--	--	--	--	-0.36***	0.13	0.70	0.54 , 0.9	6.71
Yorkshire & Humber	--	--	--	--	-0.29*	0.13	0.75	0.58 , 0.96	7.11
SEN Status									
None (ref)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7.65
SEN without Statement	--	--	--	--	0.08	0.07	1.08	0.95 , 1.23	8.20
SEN with Statement	--	--	--	--	-0.45***	0.06	0.64	0.56 , 0.73	5.04

Unknown					0.07	0.04	1.08	1 , 1.17	8.20
Placement Moves in 2015/16									
0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5.84
1	--	--	--	--	1.14***	0.04	3.12	2.86 , 3.4	16.21
2+	--	--	--	--	1.45***	0.05	4.28	3.84 , 4.76	20.96
Intercept Variance	0.09				0.06				
AIC Score	25391				22,997				

*** P<=0.001; ** P<=0.01; * P<=0.05

Overall, the model suggests that older children in care are less likely to experience mid-year school moves, while children with Missing ethnicities are more likely to experience mid-year school moves.

The association between duration of care and mid-year school moves seem complex, perhaps capturing different phases in their care period. While the risk of experiencing a mid-year school move is highest for children who have recently entered care and lowest for children who have been in care for 3 or more years, we do not find a gradual fall in mid-year school moves with duration of care.

As we saw with placement moves, children recorded as having a primary need status of "child's disability" and "absent parenting" were least likely to experience mid-year school moves. We suggest exercising caution to the finding of "low income" having the greatest risk of mid-year school moves due to the low number of children in this category of primary need (which means results are less likely to be accurate).

Children in care with statemented SEN status were less likely to experience a mid-year school move, and placement moves were strongly correlated with mid-year school moves.

Further information on the pilot data collection on social worker changes

Pilot Recruitment

Of the 152 Local Authorities with Children's Services, 151 had children in their care in 2015/16 and were eligible to take part in the pilot data collection on social worker changes. In November 2016, 39 Local Authorities with Children's Services were initially invited to take part in a pilot data collection of social worker changes for the Stability Index.

Local Authorities were invited to take part based on previous engagement with the Children's Commissioner's Office (including the pilot consultation interview), Partners in Practice with the Department for Education, and geographical location (to ensure participation from all regions in England). Invitations were also sent to several local authorities who contacted the Children's Commissioner's Office to express interest in the Stability Index pilot. Of the 39 local authorities initially invited, 22 took part in the pilot data collection on social worker changes.

Pilot Data Collection Specification

The eligible sample of the of the data collection matched the 2015/16 SSDA903 Children Looked After Census, with individual-level information requested on all children being looked after by the local authority on the 31st of March 2016.

To match the returned pilot data to the Looked After Children Dataset and the School Census, we requested information on the child identifier used for the SSDA903 return, the unique pupil number, gender and year of birth, all with the same specifications as the 2015/16 SSDA903 Children Looked After Census.

Further, we requested the number of changes in primary social workers allocated to the child between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. The specification of the request is outlined on the next page.

We would like the number of changes in primary social workers a child with looked after status on the 31st March experienced between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2017 while in care.

By "primary social worker," we mean the primary staff responsible for the child's case, which may be known across authorities as "allocated case worker", "key worker" or "lead practitioner".

The reported value should be numerical and a whole number (i.e., 1).

Examples:

A looked after child in care between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016 was allocated a new primary social worker mid-year. This means the child had 2 different primary social workers across the year, but experienced 1 change in social worker. Therefore, the reported value would be 1.

A child known to children's services entered care between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. A new primary social worker was allocated upon the child entering care. While this child experienced a social worker change between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016, the child did not experience any change while in care. Therefore, the reported value would be 0.

Some local authorities may allocate a team of social workers for a looked after child. In those instances, we are interested in the changes in the primary social worker only (who has key responsibility of the child's case).

Regarding changes to primary social workers due to leave (maternity leave, sick leave and holidays), only include this as a change if a new primary social worker was officially allocated to a looked after child. (We believe this is more likely to happen in cases of planned extended leave, and least likely to happen for shorter leave such as holidays. However, we realise there may be variation between Local Authorities.)

When reallocation of primary social workers occurs, some local authorities may make short-term allocations of the case to several staff members for sign-off purposes. Such changes recorded for administrative purposes should be excluded.

Analysis

In this pilot stage, we focused on preliminary exploration of the data. We conducted initial checks to look for errors, followed by descriptive statistics on the returned sample.

The pilot data was then matched to our previously described final eligible sample from Placement Moves (the SSDA903 Looked After Children Dataset) and School Moves (children ages 5+ appearing in the SSDA903 and the Summer School Censuses). This was followed by preliminary explorations on the associations between placement moves, school moves and social worker changes.

Summary of Returned Data

From 22 local authorities, we received information on 12538 children in care. Of these, 1 case had an impossible number of primary social worker changes (-1) and was removed from the analyses on social worker changes. Further, there were 30 duplicate cases based on the Child ID, whereby the case with the lowest number of social worker changes were removed. This reduced the sample to 12508. The descriptive statistics of social worker changes are outlined in the table below. Overall, the majority of children in our sample (75%) were reported to have experienced no or 1 social worker change. 1 in 4 children (25%) experienced 2 or more changes, and 1 in 10 children (10%) experienced 3 more social worker changes.

Social worker changes		Breakdown by social worker changes (%)	
N(LAs)	22	0	43.3
N(children)	12508	1	31.5
Mean	0.98	2	15.0
Median	1	3	6.7
Min	0	4	2.1
Max	9	5	0.8
Lower Quartile	0	6	0.3
Upper Quartile	2	7+	0.3

We also found notable differences between local authorities in their reported numbers of primary social worker changes. For example, in Authority A, only 0.3% of looked after children were reported to have experienced 3 or more changes in their primary social workers, while in Authority D 36.4% of children experienced 3 or more changes. Note, all local authorities had a sample size of more than 100 looked after children. We do not report the actual number of children looked after by each authority on the 31st March 2016 to protect the anonymity of the local authority due to the exploratory nature of this pilot data collection.

Local Authority	Primary Social Worker Changes (%)			
	0 Changes	1 Change	2 Changes	3+ Changes
A	57.23	36.62	5.85	0.31
B	38.6	33.77	19.74	7.89
C	42.31	36.79	13.73	7.17
D	6.25	29.12	28.2	36.43
E	23.93	32.5	20.36	23.21
F	51.18	34.04	12.06	2.72
G	62.29	30.66	6.33	0.73
H	41.88	30.05	15.71	12.36
I	47.05	32.99	11.3	8.66
J	57.31	10.18	14.78	17.73
K	67.65	27.9	3.95	0.49
L	40.84	38.55	14.89	5.73
M	34.97	26.65	14.07	24.31
N	45.56	35.28	11.92	7.24
O	32.73	32.01	22.66	12.59
P	50.22	26.06	17.32	6.4
Q	61.62	24.28	8.88	5.22
R	37.92	41.39	15.55	5.14
S	39.09	38.44	18.36	4.1
T	36.53	24.85	21.41	17.22
U	33.51	40.21	17.01	9.28
V	77.14	19.05	3.81	0

It is important to highlight in this pilot stage that the variations in social worker changes between local authorities may, at least in part, be due to variations in methodologies. Due to the differences in practice and systems of recording changes, information on primary social workers may have been derived in different ways between authorities. For example, in our consultations some local authorities implied they would need to derive their data from a record of all social worker allocations (including temporary allocations such as student social workers, emergency allocation, cover for a colleague, allocation to a manager for sign-off), while others would need to derive data from a record of primary social workers whereby temporary allocations were not included. From our optional feedback form and follow-up correspondence, some local authorities excluded changes to social workers based on their assessment of a temporary allocation. However, it is not clear whether all local authorities followed the same methodology, and whether they operated in the same definition of a "temporary allocation".

Further, the current measures under-report social worker changes for the small group of children who leave and re-entering care between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. Children who leave and re-enter care often experience a change in social worker with their transition. However, our specification requested information on changes to social workers children experienced while in care. If a child who left and re-entered care did not experience a change in social worker *while in care*, they will be reported as experiencing no change.

Initial Matching with the 2015/16 Looked After Children Dataset

In our initial matching process, we were able to match 12080 of the 12508 cases (96.6%) based on the Child ID and Local Authority ID. However, of the 428 unmatched cases, 350 cases were for children not included in the 2015/16 Looked After Children Dataset suggesting error with eligibility criteria in the returned pilot data (for instance, including children who left care on the 31st March 2016, or including all children in care between 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016). Excluding these cases, we were able to match 99.4% of eligible cases returned to the Children's Commissioner's Office.

Initial Matching with the 2015/16 School Censuses

Our final School Census data included 7327 cases from the 22 Local Authorities taking part in the pilot. We were able to match 7269 cases (99.2%) from the pilot sample to our School Censuses data based on the Child ID and Local Authority ID.

Further information on the consultations with children and young people with care experience.

A total of four workshops were carried out with children and young people with care experience.

Three workshops were carried out in November 2016 at the East of England Children in Care Council meeting, involving around 40 children in care and care leavers from the East of England region. Two workshops were held with secondary school age children or older. In these sessions, children and young people were asked to put down their thought on A2 sheets of paper on "moving school," "changing professionals like social workers," and "moving home." This was followed by group discussions. One workshop was held with primary school aged children, where children were asked to put down their thoughts on "school," "home," and "social workers." The sessions were primarily led by children and young people, although support staff from local authorities and the Children's Commissioner's Office were present in the room and occasionally asked questions.

One workshop was carried out in February 2017 involving around 10 children in care from four local authorities who took part in the pilot data collection. The workshop involved a series of activities, which began with young people writing down their thoughts on stability at "people", "places," and "things." This was followed by a group discussion on the preliminary findings of the Stability Index, how the Index can be improved and how the Index might be used. Three members of staff from the Children's Commissioner's Office were there to lead and facilitate the session.

Informed consent was obtained for and from children and young people who took part. Children and young people were told that participation was voluntary, and they did not have to take part if they did not want to. They did not have to share anything they did not want to, and everything they told us will be kept anonymous. We do not identify the age, gender or the local authorities of the children and young people who took part in the workshops to maintain their confidentiality.