

Children's social care data in England

Methodology and Quality Report

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Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information relevant to Ofsted's annual release of Children's social care data in England. This methodology and quality report should be read in conjunction with the background notes contained within the statistical first release, as those notes will include helpful information that is not in this report.

This release can be found at the following webpage:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics under the heading 'Children's social care data in England'.

The statistical first release (SFR) contains data which are sourced from Ofsted's register of social care providers in England, and from inspections. The release includes data about social care providers and places and inspection outcomes.

The inspection outcomes data relates to inspections of:

- local authority (LA) services for children who need help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspections of LA children's services are carried out under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF)¹
- children's homes
- other children's social care providers and residential accommodation for children.

The providers and places data includes:

- children's social care providers, for which Ofsted has a regulatory and/or inspection responsibility
- providers of residential accommodation for children in boarding schools & further education colleges, for which Ofsted has an inspection responsibility.

In terms of the periods covered by the release, providers and places data always reflects the 31 March. Inspection outcome data, for all non-LA provision types, can either be viewed for an annual period (from 1 April to 31 March) or, alternatively, as the latest inspection as at 31 March. For LA inspections the data in this release show the picture as at 30 June 2015.

¹ More information, about all inspection frameworks, can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

The statistical release is published as a full version annually, with an additional six monthly release. The full version includes all provision types, as listed above. The additional release only includes data and tables relating to inspections of children's homes and local authority children's services.

The first full publication of Children's social care data in England contains provisional data. This is because there may have been additional inspections carried out during the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, which had not yet been published at the time of the data being extracted for the release. Any revisions to these 2014-15 data for children's homes will be included with the additional six monthly release, including advisory notes about any impact to figures and findings from the first full release of provisional data. Subsequent publications, however, are intended to be published as final data, therefore it may not be necessary to publish revisions to provisional data. Ofsted's policy on revisions is available on the [Gov.uk website](#). All Children's social care data in England releases are published with a clear description of the release type, period covered and status of the data. All releases are published on the Gov.uk website.²

Ofsted publish a number of official statistics covering children's social care, including fostering, adoption and children looked after placements. These releases can be accessed [here](#).

Ofsted welcomes feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Social Care Data & Analysis Team on: socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk.

Relevance

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted official statistics are released to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing transparency and citizen participation.

Ofsted regulates and inspects registered social care provisions under the Care Standards Act 2000.³ Ofsted inspects LA children's services, under section 136 (2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.⁴ Ofsted conducts reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) under section 15A of the Children Act 2004⁵. More contextual information about social care in England, and Ofsted's inspection

² www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics (under the heading 'Children's social care data in England')

³ The Care Standards Act 2000: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents

⁴ Education and Inspections Act 2006: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents

⁵ Children Act 2004: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

activity, can be found in the statistical first release and the social care annual report.⁶

Social care inspection outcomes is important information for policy development, as well as for planning and providing public services, for example by informing about the quality of social care provisions nationally and by area. There is a demand for inspection outcomes information, for example to help Ofsted meet its obligations under inspection legislation and to influence policy. The data contribute to meetings with organisations such as the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). Inspection reports can be found on the [Ofsted website](#) and statistics about the outcomes of inspections can be found on the [Gov.Uk website](#).

A further use of the data, is that Ofsted analyses the data to enhance insight into this sector. The analysis of the data informs Ofsted policy discussions and decisions, for instance, contributing the reviews of inspection frameworks, evidence and reports. The data contribute to briefings, speeches and in meetings with senior leaders are used as a basis for improvement work being led by Ofsted’s regional inspection teams.

The data are published annually as official statistics. The aggregation of data for official statistics allows us to communicate to users the key data and messages about inspection outcomes and providers and places, for example, at different geographical levels and by provider type. The official statistics draw out the key messages and communicate these in an understandable way, appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes, as the release includes both interactive summary tables as well as underlying data.

The data may, therefore, be used by stakeholder groups, academics and other interested parties across the sector. Local authorities may also use the data themselves, for local and regional use, to inform on areas of practice and to improve processes and standards.

Meeting user needs

The release has recently been reviewed and amended by Ofsted’s Social Care Data & Analysis Team, who produce the social care Official Statistics. In 2014, a consultation was conducted to seek views on the proposed arrangements for the frequency and content of social care inspection official statistics. A report from this consultation can be found [here](#).

Ofsted’s Social Care Data & Analysis Team are also represented at regional meetings of performance leads from LAs. These regional meeting are organised by the ADCS.

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about#corporate-reports

Ofsted has presented relevant information and publications to all of the existing regional groups, and sought feedback about whether its publications meet user needs. Ofsted's participation in these groups helps inform about user views on Ofsted's social care official statistics, and suggested improvements are taken on board. For instance, in addition to the consultation response regarding production of annual data, feedback from providers and stakeholders indicated that a full set of inspection outcomes as at 31 March would be preferred and more comprehensive. Therefore, in addition to the annual statistics, the release now includes an option to view the latest inspection judgement as at the 31 March (i.e. this includes all active providers; not just those inspected during the year).

Social care outputs are also shared with users in other organisations, such as the Department for Education (DfE), LAs, and representatives from the private and voluntary sectors at Ofsted-led stakeholder meetings. These organisations use the data for a range of purposes including informing their own social care outputs (DfE) and benchmarking performance (LAs).

The contact details for the Social Care Data & Analysis Team are included in the releases and users are encouraged to feedback about any unmet needs or improvements that can be made.

There was an Ofsted-wide user consultation survey in January 2012 on all Ofsted official statistics releases. A report from this consultation can be found [here](#).

Coherence and comparability

Comparisons of inspection outcomes across different inspection frameworks are not always possible due to the changes to the evaluation criteria and scope of inspection. More information about inspection frameworks can be found in Annex 1 of this quality report. The release itself makes a clear distinction for framework changes, such that it is clear to users where inspections are not directly comparable. For instance, for local authority children's services, the statistical tables display inspection outcomes according to the specific inspection framework. Where frameworks are not comparable, it is not possible to view data relating to more than one inspection framework at a time.

Comparisons of inspection outcomes across different timescales, within a particular inspection cycle, are not always possible due to the way inspections are risk assessed and selected for inspection. Ofsted takes a proportionate approach to inspection. Some providers are selected for inspection because they are approaching the deadline for re-inspection and others as a result of their previous inspection outcomes. Where this occurs, however, information is given in the release. The revision of the release to present annual, rather than quarterly, statistics allows users to more easily compare inspection outcomes across timescales for some provider types, such as children's homes; which are all inspected annually.

Within the key findings, where statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have improved or declined, this analysis is based on comparable inspections only and uses the most recent relevant inspection outcome.

Inspections of social care provisions in other countries in the UK are carried out by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), the Care Inspectorate, in Scotland and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, in Northern Ireland.⁷ Ofsted is the only inspectorate in the UK that publishes detailed statistics about the quality of social care providers that it regulates and inspects. There are statistics available for Wales and Scotland regarding the number of inspections carried out and the number of providers and places. However, there are no statistics available, that are comparable, regarding the quality of social care providers in countries in the UK.

Accuracy and reliability

A strength of the data is that the data belongs to Ofsted and we have robust systems to capture and record data about registration details and inspections. All data is administrative data which is extracted directly from Ofsted's Regulatory Support Application (RSA) system.

A limitation of the data is that the data is exclusively sourced from Ofsted and there are no other sources to verify.

The inspection outcome data within the release does not use any imputation or other statistical techniques and data are not used to make any estimates about the population or other geographical areas. As the data are solely reporting on events that have occurred, the risk of bias or error is reduced.

The data on places comes from two sources; conditions of registration, and where these are not part of the registration such as with schools, from an annual census Ofsted carries out that asks residential providers what is the maximum number of residential students they could accommodate. Registration conditions form part of the inspection and so are subject to the same rigorous quality assurance processes as inspection reports.

The providers and places data within the release does include estimates; where place data is not held in the Ofsted's RSA system.⁸ These are based on the average number of places for providers of the same type, within the same sector. Providers without place data are excluded from the calculation of average places, consequently the reliability of the average is improved by avoiding underestimation.

⁷ More information about inspections in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from CSSIW (www.cssiw.org.uk), the Care Inspectorate (www.scswis.com) and Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (<http://www.rqia.org.uk/home/index.cfm>).

⁸ More information about database systems can be found in Ofsted's Statement of administrative sources: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics

If there are fewer than 10 providers with valid place data (not null or zero) within a particular sector, the average is calculated from the national group of providers with valid place data. Ofsted does hold place data for the vast majority (99%) of providers and, therefore, the risk of error through estimation is negligible. In total, there are approximately 30 providers for which place data has been estimated and this has remained fairly stable over time.

The data held in Ofsted's system and used for statistical releases are subject to rigorous quality assurance (QA) processes. These processes ensure there is minimal risk of error within the source data in the system and during the extracting, calculation and processing of the data. The QA processes also extend to final release and all accompanying supplementary statistics. The following three paragraphs describe in more detail the quality assurance processes at operational level, system wide level and for the production of statistics.

Ofsted is able to extract all data to ensure that any data entered incorrectly at the operational stage is accounted for and duplicates or incorrect records removed from the data set. This limits the risk of error in the data. Furthermore, data about inspection judgements are made available to the public. All providers are sent copies of their inspection report for a factual accuracy check prior to publication. Inspection judgements held in the data systems will, therefore, always be verified by inspectors and providers are also given the opportunity during the quality assurance phase of the report to check and comment on the inspection judgements. Individual inspection reports are published and this offers a high level of transparency and assurance - if errors were being brought in at the operational level, there is a clear right of reply for stakeholders. Checks of the statistical data against both the system data source and published inspection reports provide an additional level of assurance.

An example of the system wide data checks is the rigorous checking of one particular area of data, which has turned inaccurate and partially completed data into complete and very valuable data. Sectorial data, several years ago, was once input at source, at best, haphazardly, and often wrong. Ofsted statisticians have transformed that into accurate data, by working with the administrative teams on the definition of the various sectors and also on the guidelines for completing the data filed in our database. The social care data team also carried out a national data cleanse of these data which involved contacting every provider and getting them to confirm the sector they were part of. The data now enable Ofsted to report on sectorial both internally and to the wider users of its data. This is important as there is a growing public interest in sectorial data and how the ownership pattern of social care provisions may or may not be changing over time and also the level of service provided by the differing sectors.

More than one analyst is involved in the production and analysis of the data and QA is always conducted by a different team member to the person who produced the work. The QA checks required are carried out at various stages of the production

process, covering everything from: the SQL code used to export data, all processing and calculations, the release template and analysis and contents of the key findings. All outputs are reviewed and subject to a sign off process to ensure suitability for publication.

Timeliness and punctuality

Statistics are produced and published on an annual basis, with an additional six-monthly release that only relates to children's homes. Where possible, supplementary data are also published to improve the accessibility to, and usefulness of, the data. This includes the publication of management information.

Data are published on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule [here](#). Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule. Reasons why a delay may occur include, for example, where more time is necessary to properly quality assure the data to ensure its robustness. Publications are announced on the Ofsted's Twitter page and social media channels on the day of release.

The average timescale for production of the children's social care data release is approximately eight weeks. This time includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and getting the information on to the Ofsted website.

Pre-release is given in accordance with the pre-release access to Official Statistics Order (2008), as detailed in Ofsted's pre-release policy [here](#).

Accessibility and clarity

Ofsted releases are published in an accessible format on the gov.uk website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

The primary function of the data is to meet Ofsted's data requirements for inspections. However, the data are shared for public use with the intention of informing about children looked after placements and for re-use by analysts and researchers (as may be required).

Performance, cost and respondent burden

As data are administrative, there is no associated cost or respondent burden.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

Where sensitive or personal data are held by Ofsted, the disclosure control processes we have in place ensure that this data is not published. All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies which can be found [here](#). All staff using sensitive data have been trained in confidentiality and disclosure awareness.

Some data fields are redacted from the underlying data, for data protection purposes. Data affected by redactions includes fields related to provider names and addresses. All inspection judgements are provided in full; without redaction. All inspection data presented in statistical tables are actual figures; the data are not subject to rounding or suppression.

Methodology

Data processing involves aggregating numbers of inspections, listed by inspection type, provision type, region and inspection outcome. This processing is done using SQL and is reviewed and revised regularly.

Inspection data is summarised in two formats: inspections carried out in a defined period, and latest inspection as at a particular point in time. Both types of inspection data only include inspections which have been published (at the time of producing the statistical first release).

The defined period of inspection data is dependent on the type of provision:

- Data about inspections of local authority children's services includes inspections that were conducted under the current framework, therefore, will not reflect an annual period. The period covered is detailed in the release.
- Data about inspections of all children's social care providers includes inspections that were carried out during the annual period: 1 April to 31 March.

The latest inspection data covers all social care providers, irrespective of when the inspections were carried out. Only one inspection per provider is counted. The data reflects the latest inspection for each provider (i.e. most recent published event, at the time of producing the data). This means that the data will include some inspections that have been carried out under previous inspection frameworks; further explanatory notes are given in the release.

Definitions are provided in the Statistical First Release, for instance the glossary includes a list of the provision types and describes what each provision type offers.

Attached to this quality report is an annex which provides links to further information about Ofsted's inspection frameworks for social care providers

Annex 1

The following table provides links to the relevant inspection frameworks, for social care providers in England.

Provision type	Link to Ofsted framework
Adoption support agencies	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-adoption-support-agencies
Boarding Schools	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-boarding-and-residential-provision-in-schools
Children's homes	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-childrens-homes
Further education (FE) colleges with residential accommodation	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspection-of-residential-provision-in-further-education-colleges
Independent fostering services (IFAs)	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-independent-fostering-agencies
LA children's services	Single Inspection Framework (SIF) and guidance: www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-local-authority-childrens-services
Residential family centres	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-family-centres
Residential Holiday Schemes for Disabled Children	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-holiday-schemes-for-disabled-children
Residential special schools	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-residential-special-schools
Secure training centres	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-secure-training-centres
Voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs)	www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-inspections-of-voluntary-adoption-agencies