care inspectorate

Fostering and adoption 2016–17 statistical bulletin

Published November 2017

HAPPY TO **TRANSLATE**

Fostering and Adoption 2016–17 statistical bulletin

Contents

Key findings

This report sets out data we collected from service providers in their annual returns, covering the period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016. It also includes grading information correct at 31 March 2017.

The Care Inspectorate regulates around 13,500 care services in Scotland, including 38 adoption services and 59 fostering services. These are provided by the local authority and the independent sector. In order to provide scrutiny and improvement support, we hold a significant amount of data about these services.

The data in this report provides insight into the operation of fostering and adoption services in Scotland. These services play a vital role in assessing, approving and supporting carers and prospective adoptive parents in caring for some of our most vulnerable children. We hope this data is of use to providers of fostering and adoption services, and other interested parties, who invest significant time in providing information to us each year.

Foster care services at 31 December 2016

At 31 December 2016, there were 59 registered foster care services, with 32 run by local authorities and 27 by independent services.

- There were 4,011 approved **foster carer households** and a total of 5,435 **children** in a foster care placement, of which 28% were permanent placements.

- There were 209 children in foster care at this point in time who were **waiting for a permanent placement**.

- There were 430 **newly approved households**, with the majority of these applications (47% for local authority services and 56% for independent services) approved within six months. A further 12% of local authority services and 4% of independent services took more than 12 months to register a new household.

- Over the year, 382 **households de-registered**; a net increase of 48 approved households by 31 December 2016. Although the vast majority of enquiries about becoming a foster carer were received by independent services, these converted into more applications for local authority services than for independent services.

- There was pressure for placements in approved foster carer households, especially those that can care for **sibling groups**. Of local authority services, 78% reported instances where the number of children requiring a foster care placement was greater than the placements available. In total, 41 services told us they had households go outwith their approval range in order to look after children, most commonly to keep sibling groups together.

- Finding placements for sibling groups was a difficulty for 59% of local authority services and 19% of independent services. There were 1,039 sibling groups using foster services at 31 December 2016; of these, 211 sibling groups (20%) were **split upon placement**.

Overall, the quality of fostering services was high, with 95% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes, and 42% having grades of very good and excellent across the board. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

Adoption Services at 31 December 2016

At 31 December 2016, there were 38 registered adoption services, 32 run by local authorities and 6 by independent services.

- Over the year, 326 **new households were approved to adopt children** while 403 new **children** were approved for adoption. The number of new households approved closely matched the number of children approved for adoption in each age group.

- At 31 December 2016, 205 **approved households were waiting for children** to be placed while 228 children approved for adoption were waiting to be matched with approved adopters. Of those children waiting, 25% had been approved and waiting over one year and 39% of all children waiting were part of a sibling group.

- Over the year, adoption services reported that they provided 2,716 adoptive households with **post-adoption support**, mainly in the form of counselling, contact facilitation, adoption allowances, support groups and letterbox contact.

Overall, the quality of adoption services was high, with 97% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes, and 45% having grades of very good and excellent across the board. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

Background

Foster care and adoption services are vital in assessing, approving and supporting carers and prospective adoptive parents to care for some of our most vulnerable children. Children who are placed away from home require high-quality care that addresses their emotional and wellbeing needs. Matching children to families who can provide support and care is essential to supporting improved outcomes for children. Ongoing assessment and planning are crucial to make sure the children are being looked after in families, either their own or alternative family placements, that address their best interests throughout childhood. Where permanency is required for some children, planning should not be delayed so that children have the best opportunity to make new attachments within an alternative family placement where they can start to feel secure and cared for. Local authorities have a legal responsibility for ensuring that children in need of foster care and adoption are safe and placed in appropriate placements. Local authorities in Scotland are legally required to provide fostering and adoption services within their areas but can also work with independent fostering and adoption services, which must also be registered with the Care Inspectorate, to place children with carers assessed by them where that is in the child's interest.

The Care Inspectorate is responsible for regulating and supporting improvement in around 13,500 care services in Scotland, including 38 adoption services and 59 fostering services. This includes holding a register of care services, inspecting services and assessing quality of care provided, investigating complaints, and, where necessary, taking enforcement action which can ultimately lead to closure of a service.

In order to do this work effectively, we hold a significant amount of data about registered care services and we produce several statistical publications aimed at sharing this data publicly, in particular to service providers who invest significant time in providing information to us each year. Over the summer of 2015, we worked with colleagues in the Scottish Government, service providers and their representative bodies, to review the content of the Care Inspectorate annual returns. This work has enabled us to collate a more meaningful summary of adoption and fostering statistics across Scotland, which we will add to in coming years.

Also over the course of 2014/15, the Scottish Government developed new placement descriptors. These were to be implemented within local authorities during 2016/17, and we will further review our December 2017 data collection to ensure we are also using these consistent definitions. This may mean some changes to trend data points in the short term.

Data quality note

All data, with the exception of grading information, was provided directly by service providers. In this publication, in order to accurately reflect trends over time and to allow year-on-year comparisons to be made, data has been imputed where a service has not completed an annual return. Data has been imputed from information provided by the service in another year. This may be data imputed from 2015 when no information was provided for 2016 or data imputed for 2015 when information was given in 2016.

Fostering Services

At 31 December 2016, there were 59 registered fostering services in Scotland: 32 run by local authorities and 27 by not for profit organisations (referred to as independent services in this report).

Of the 59 registered services, 58 submitted an annual return for 2016. All data presented in this report relates to the data supplied in these completed annual returns along with data imputed for services that did not provide annual returns in either 2015 or 2016[1].

This report covers four different aspects of fostering services:
- foster carer households
- fostering service usage
- fostering service capacity
- fostering service grading.

Foster carer households

Types of foster care provided

At 31 December 2016, there were 4,011 approved foster carer households in Scotland (down 10% from 4,484 in 2015). The majority of services (69%, up from 61% in 2015) were provided by a local authority (31 services) and 39% (down from 39% in 2015) were provided by independent services (27 services).

The mix of households offering temporary, permanent or both types of placement differed between local authority and independent sectors. For local authority approved households, 51% offered temporary placements only, with a further 23% offering both permanent and temporary placements, and 19% offering only permanent placements.

In the independent sector, there were fewer households (29%) offering temporary placements only, and a much higher 46% of households offering a mixture of temporary and permanent placements. A further 20% offered permanent placements only.

Households approved for some other form of care accounted for 7% of all approved local authority households compared to 5% of all independent approved households.

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[1] One service (Clackmannanshire fostering service) did not complete an annual return for 2016 and three services (West Dunbartonshire council fostering service, Foster Care Connect and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society) did not complete an annual return in 2015. In order to accurately reflect any changes in trends between the years, the figures presented will include imputed information for these services.

Table 1: Numbers of approved foster carer households[1], split by type of care approved to provide

		Both temporary and permanent	Temporary	Permanent	Other[2]	Total
2016	**Local authority**	23% (639)	51% (1415)	19% (525)	7% (186)	2765
	Independent	46% (574)	29% (365)	20% (250)	5% (57)	1246
	Total	**30% (1213)**	**44% (1780)**	**19% (775)**	**6% (243)**	**4011**
2015	**Local authority**	24% (661)	48% (1305)	20% (536)	9% (240)	2742
	Independent	42% (734)	38% (657)	13% (232)	7% (119)	1742
	Total	**31% (1395)**	**44% (1962)**	**17% (768)**	**8% (359)**	**4484**

1. Excluding those approved exclusively for short breaks.
2. 'Other' means care which is neither temporary, permanent or exclusively short-break care.

Of the 4,011 approved households at 31 December 2016, 912 (23%) had blanket approval to care for children of any age. This was more likely to be the case for households registered by independent services (52%) than local authority approved households (10%; Table 2)

Table 2: Numbers of approved households that have 'blanket' approval[1]

		Approved households with blanket approval	% of all households
2016	**Local authority**	269	10%
	Independent	643	52%
	Total	**912**	**23%**
2015	**Local authority**	271	10%
	Independent	614	36%
	Total	**885**	**20%**

1. Blanket approval means that they are approved to care for children of any age.

There were 430 new households approved in the year up to 31 December 2016 (down 7% from 464 households in 2015). Of these, 60% were local authority services and 40% were independent services.

Both local authority and independent services took longer to complete their assessments compared to 2015 however, independent services still had the vast majority of assessments completed within 12 months. For local authority services, 47% of assessments were completed in six months, 41% in 12 months and 12% taking more than 12 months. The independent sector processed fewer applications overall, but completed 56% in six months, 40% in 12 months and 4% taking more than 12 months (Table 3). Placements that took longer than six months were for a variety of reasons, including some at the request of the applicant.

Table 3: Numbers of new foster carer households split by length of assessment completion

		Up to six months	Between six and 12 months	12 months or more	Total new carer households
2016	**Local authority**	47% (122)	41% (105)	12% (32)	259
	Independent	56% (95)	40% (69)	4% (7)	171
	Total	**50% (217)**	**40% (174)**	**9% (39)**	**430**
2015	**Local authority**	46% (125)	26% (71)	9% (26)	274
	Independent	63% (119)	33% (63)	4% (8)	190
	Total	**53% (244)**	**29% (134)**	**7% (34)**	**464**

Sibling groups

Evidence from research relating to the placement of children in foster care demonstrates that sibling relationships are important in nurturing continuity, security and stability for children. Siblings who have experienced neglect and abuse often develop strong attachments with each other that are mutually beneficial. Separation can increase the sense of loss and trauma already being experienced by these children, resulting in emotional distress. It is good practice to place siblings together and where this is not considered to be in children's best interests the assessment of this should be well evidenced and clear.

Recruiting households that would foster sibling groups was a challenge for 24 of the 59 fostering services. This was particularly the case for local authority services, where 59% of services struggled compared to 19% of independent sector services (Table 4).

There is evidence from our inspections that local authorities face some challenges in the recruitment of foster carers. This can result in foster carers not having sufficient approved places for whole sibling groups due to demand for places. Independent fostering services tend to approve carers for fewer children and can sometimes build capacity into placements when the need for siblings being placed together arise. Sibling groups can be very large and that can be a reason for separating siblings.

Table 4: Numbers of services that have difficulties recruiting households that will take sibling groups

		Number of services	% with difficulties
2016	**Local authority**	19	59%
	Independent	5	19%
	Total	**24**	**41%**
2015	**Local authority**	19	59%
	Independent	6	22%
	Total	**25**	**39%**

The level of de-registration in 2015-2016 remained relatively constant from 2014-2015. Only 9% of all households registered at 31 December 2015 had de-registered

by 31 December 2016 (Table 5). There were proportionately fewer de-registrations of households registered with local authorities (7%; 194 households) than of those registered with independent services (11%; 188 households).

Table 5: Numbers of foster carer households that de-registered

		Number of households that de-registered	As a % of households registered at 31 December the previous year
2016	Local authority	194	7%
	Independent	188	11%
	Total	**382**	**9%**
2015	Local authority	180	7%
	Independent	139	11%
	Total	**319**	**8%**

Private fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement where a parent makes an agreement with someone who is not a close relative of the child, to care for that child for more than 28 days. These arrangements are not facilitated by the local authority or a registered service and therefore have the potential to make children very vulnerable. It is very possible that private foster carers will not be aware of their responsibility to notify the local authority of these arrangements or that local authorities do not recognise these arrangements as private fostering. We suspect that there are more private fostering arrangements taking place than we and local authorities are being notified of.

There were fewer than 10 notifications of private fostering in 2016, down from 19 notifications in 2015 (Table 1.6).

Table 6: Numbers of notifications of private fostering arrangements in place[1]

		Number of notifications of private fostering	% notifications of private fostering
2016	Local authority	<5	50%
	Independent	<5	50%
	Total	**<10**	
2015	Local authority	12	63%
	Independent	7	37%
	Total	**19**	

1. Services were asked to provide an estimate if unable to give an exact number.
2. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.

Recruitment of new fostering households

The number of overall enquires about becoming a foster carer fell 28% from 5,305 enquiries in 2015 to 3,796 in 2016. However, the proportion of enquiries that resulted in an application (7% compared to 5% in 2015) and the proportion of

applications ultimately approved (38% compared to 34% in 2015) both increased. The total number of approvals was also higher than in 2015; up 7% to 105 approvals from 98 approvals in 2015.

Independent services (2,859 enquiries) received considerably more enquiries than local authority services (937 enquiries). Only 5% of enquiries to independent services resulted in an application (133 applications) compared to 16% of enquiries to local authority services (146 applications). However, 48% of the applications to independent services resulted in an approved household (64 households) compared to 28% of the applications to local authority services (41 households; Table 7).

Table 7: Recruitment of foster carer households, showing approximate numbers of enquiries received between 1 January and 30 June, approximate numbers of these enquiries that became applications and approximate numbers of these applications that became approved households

			Enquiries	Applications	Approvals	% of enquiries to applications	% of applications approved	% of enquiries approved
2016		Local authority	937	146	41	16%	28%	4%
		Independent	2859	133	64	5%	48%	2%
		Total	**3796**	**279**	**105**	**7%**	**38%**	**3%**
2015		Local authority	1165	152	39	13%	26%	3%
		Independent	4140	138	59	3%	43%	1%
		Total	**5305**	**290**	**98**	**5%**	**34%**	**2%**

Children placed in foster care

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 place a duty on local authorities to provide fostering and adoption services. They are responsible for assessing and making arrangements for children who, as a result of this assessment, require alternative care, either through voluntary arrangements or compulsory measures of care. Local authorities, through service level agreements with independent fostering and adoptions agencies, may place children with carers through these agencies. Independent fostering and adoption agencies also recruit, assess and provide training and support to carers to ensure that they are providing a high-quality service to children and young people. When children are placed with an independent agency it remains the responsibility of local authority to support the child and review the arrangement in place to ensure that it continues to meet the child's needs. Where permanency is required, this may be provided through a permanent foster placement or through adoption.

Type of placement

In total, 5,435 children were placed into approved foster carer households (down 7% from 5,865 children in 2015). At 71%, the majority of these placements were temporary, 28% were permanent and 2% were some other form of placement. This breakdown was similar both for children placed into local authority approved households and for children placed into independent approved households (Table 8).

Table 8: Numbers of children using foster services[1] split by placement type

		Temporary placement[2]	Permanent placement[3]	Other[4]	Total
2016	Local authority	72% (2785)	27% (1031)	1% (55)	**3871**
	Independent	68% (1058)	30% (477)	2% (29)	**1564**
	Total	**71% (3843)**	**28% (1508)**	**2% (84)**	5435
2015	Local authority	75% (3499)	23% (1068)	2% (105)	**4672**
	Independent	68% (814)	27% (325)	5% (54)	**1193**
	Total	**74% (4313)**	**24% (1393)**	**3% (159)**	5865

1. 'Using fostering services' means children who were approved and placed by a local authority with one of their approved foster carer households.
2. Temporary placement is care other than that which is a result of a permanence order, or which is not exclusively short break care.
3. Permanent placement is care given as a result of a permanence order.
4. 'Other' means a placement which is neither temporary, permanent, or exclusively short-break care.

Overall, 71% of children were placed with a local authority approved household (down from 80% in 2015) and 29% were placed with an independent approved household (up from 20% in 2015). Local authority services had a higher share than independent services of placements for all placement types. However, independent services considerably increased their share of temporary (up from 19% to 28%) and permanent placements (up from 23% to 32%) from 2015. The breakdown is shown below in Table 9.

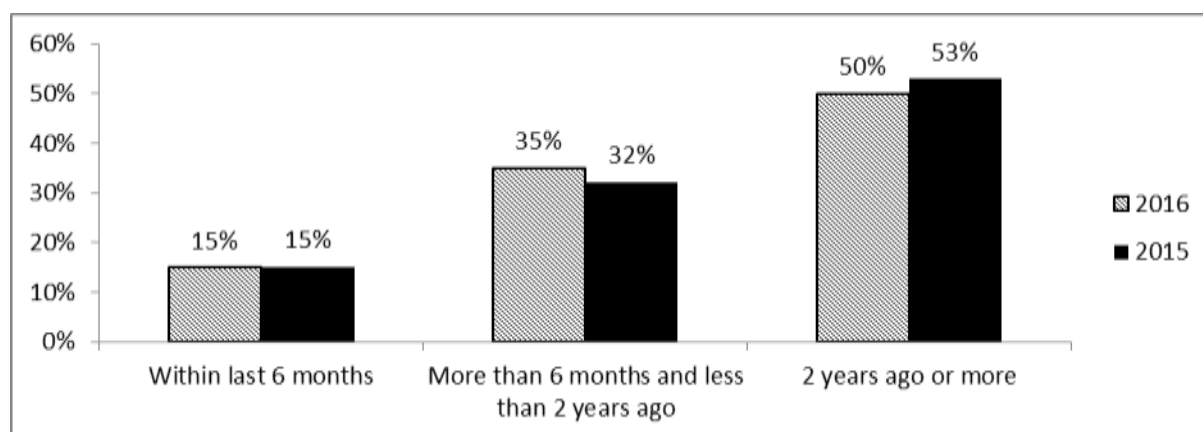## Table 9: Proportion of children using foster services[1] split by sector

		Temporary placement[2]	Permanent placement[3]	Other[4]	Total
2016	Local authority	72% (2785)	68% (1031)	65% (55)	**71% (3871)**
	Independent	28% (1058)	32% (477)	35% (29)	**29% (1564)**
	Total	**3843**	**1508**	**84**	**5435**
2015	Local authority	81% (3499)	77% (1068)	66% (105)	**80% (4672)**
	Independent	19% (814)	23% (325)	34% (54)	**20% (1193)**
	Total	**4313**	**1393**	**159**	**5865**

1. 'Using fostering services' means children who were approved and placed by a local authority with one of their approved foster carer households.
2. Temporary placement is care other than that which is a result of a permanence order, or which is not exclusively short break care.
3. Permanent placement is care given as a result of a permanence order.
4. 'Other' means a placement that is neither temporary, permanent, or exclusively short-break care.

Time in latest placement

The majority of children (50%; 2,047) using local authority foster services started their current episode of foster care two or more years ago. Thirty-five per cent of children (1,434) started their current episode of foster care more than six months but less than two years ago and 15% of children (613) started their current episode of foster care within the last six months (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Numbers of children using local authority foster services[1] split by when the current episode of foster care[2] began

1. 'Using fostering services' means children who were approved and placed by a local authority with one of their approved foster carer households.
2. Measured as the time between the date of the child's most recent reception into accommodation and the 31 December. Within that time, the child may have had a number of different fostering placements. It is not the duration of their current placement that is captured here, but the current period of using the fostering service.

Children awaiting permanent placement

There were 209 children (down 30% from 297 in 2015) reported by 18 different services (22 services in 2015) using local authority foster services that were not in, or not moving towards, a placement secured by a permanence order, but were identified as needing such a placement (Table 10).

There were 25 children (down 11% to 28 children in 2015) reported by six different services (10 services in 2015) living at home or with kinship carers that were waiting for a foster care placement to become available.

Table 10: Numbers of children using local authority foster services at 31 December, that were not in, or not moving towards, a placement secured by a permanence order and the numbers of children living at home or with kinship carers at 31 December that were waiting for a foster care placement to become available[1]

	Children not in or moving towards permanent placement		Waiting for placement to become available	
	Number of children	Number of services	Number of children	Number of services
2016	209	18	25	6
2015	297	22	28	10

1. Only includes children where a decision had been made to place the child in foster care.

Placements ending on an unplanned basis

In total, 387 placements ended on an unplanned basis across 44 services. Of these, 18% (70 placements) were permanent placements. Both local authority and independent services had a similar level of permanent placements end on an unplanned basis. Local authority services had more placements end on an unplanned basis (65%; 255 placements) than independent services (35%; 132 placements). However, independent services had a higher rate (84 placements ending unplanned per 1,000 placements) compared to local authority services (66 placements ending unplanned per 1,000 placements). In the case of local authority services, 91% of placements (232) that ended unplanned had been approved by the placing local authority and 9% (23 placements) were approved by another local authority (Table 11).

Table 11: Numbers of foster placements that ended on an unplanned basis, between 1 January and 31 December [1,2], split by who approved the foster carer household

	Number of placements ended		Number of permanent placements		Number of services where placements ended	
	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
Local authority placements ended	**255**	**212**	**47**	**36**	**27**	**28**
Approved by placing authority	232	182	42	36	26	27
Approved by another local authority	23	30	5	<5	7	8
Local authority placement ended rate per 1,000 placements[3]	66	45	46	37	-	-
Total independent placements ended	**132**	**145**	**23**	**27**	**17**	**17**
Independent placement ended rate per 1,000 placements[3]	84	121	48	83	-	-
Total	**387**	**356**	**70**	**63**	**44**	**45**

1. Where the placement was a sibling group, each child has been counted separately.
2. Placements that end on an unplanned basis are ones where removal of a child from a foster placement stemmed from a crisis or unexpected event occurring.
3. Placements that have been made from 1 January through to 31 December 2015.
4. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.

Local authority placements with another service

There were 403 children placed by a local authority into a foster carer household approved by another service (up 3% from 391 children in 2015). Of these placements, 95% (382) were purchased through the national contract and 5% (21) were exclusively short breaks.

Table 12: Numbers of children placed by a local authority into a foster carer household approved by another service[1], between 1 January and 31 December

		Number	Rate per 1,000 placements[2]
2016	Number of placements purchased through the national contract	382	99
	Number of placements that were exclusively short breaks	21	5
	Total	**403**	**104**
2015	Number of placements purchased through the national contract	369	79
	Number of placements that were exclusively short breaks	22	5
	Total	**391**	**84**

1. Includes placements that were exclusively short-break situations, temporary placements, permanent placements or any other type of placement.
2. Placements that have been made from 1 January through to 31 December.

Of fostering services, 15% (nine services) had children and young people with asylum-seeking and refugee status registered with them. Local authority services had a higher proportion of services with children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status registered (22%; seven services) than independent services (7%; two services).

Table 13: Breakdown of whether services had children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status registered

		Yes	No
Local authority	**Services**	7	25
	% Split	22%	78%
Independent	**Services**	2	25
	% Split	7%	93%
Grand total	**Services**	**9**	**50**
	% Split	**15%**	**85%**

Over sixteen children with asylum-seeking and refugee status were placed with fostering services in 2016. The majority (16 children) were placed in local authority services while fewer than five were placed in independent services.

Table 14: Numbers of children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status placed with foster services

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Total	**16**	**<5**	**16**

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.

Fostering service capacity

Households exceeding approval range

Between 1 January and 31 December 2016, 25 services (78% of local authority services) reported instances where the number of children coming into foster care exceeded the number of new foster carer households. This was a slight decrease from 2015, where 27 services (84% of local authority services) reported instances where the number of children coming into foster care exceeded the number of new foster carer households.

Table 15: Numbers of services where the number of children coming into foster care between 1 January and 31 December exceeded the numbers of new foster carer households

	2016	2015
Total number of services:	25	27
% of local authority services	78%	84%

There were 724 occasions across 41 services where children placed in foster carer households resulted in the household going outwith their approval range (Table 16). This was an increase of 14%, up from 634 occasions across 37 services in 2015. Of these occasions, 88% were in local authority placements and 12% were in independent placements. Ninety-seven per cent of local authority services and 37% of independent services have had children outwith their approval range placed in a household. This issue was far more frequent in local authority services where there were 164 occasions per 1,000 placements where a household went outwith their approval range compared to 57 occasions per 1,000 placements for independent services. The rate of placements outwith the approved range increased substantially from 2015 where in local authority services there were 128 occasions per 1,000 placements where a household went outwith their approval range and 32 occasions per 1,000 placements for independent services.

The main reason for households going outwith their approval range was to keep sibling groups together (placing a sibling group would not count as going out with approval range for the total number of children). Other common reasons included: to cope with emergency placements; to place a child with a previous carer familiar to them; to place a child whose age was outside the approval range (especially baby placements); and to keep children in their local area.

Table 16: Numbers of services and occasions where children placed in foster carer households resulted in the household going outwith their approval range[1], between 1 January and 31 December 2015

		Number of occasions	% of occasions	Occasions per 1,000 placements	Number of services
2016	**Local authority**	635	88%	164	31
	Independent	89	12%	57	10
	Total	**724**	**100%**	**133**	**41**
2015	**Local authority**	596[2]	94%	128	30
	Independent	38	6%	32	7
	Total	**634**	**100%**	**108**	**37**

1. Note that approval range can be age, gender, numbers, or other.
2. Data for Glasgow City Council has been imputed for 2015 from 2016 data as this section of the annual return was not completed

Sibling group separations

There were 1,039 sibling groups using fostering services at 31 December 2016; an increase of 20% from 864 in 2015. Of these, 20% (211 sibling groups) were split upon placement. The majority (90%) of the sibling groups split on placement were placed with local authority services and 10% were placed with independent services. Services could select from four different reasons for why they had to separate a sibling group throughout the year. The main reason listed, from the choices provided, for splitting a sibling group was following assessment. Other reasons included: due to lack of resource; emergency situations; siblings being received into care at different times and reasons other than the aforementioned (Table 18).

Table 17: Sibling group separations

		Number of sibling groups	Number of sibling groups separated	% Separated
2016	**Local authority**	755	189	25%
	Independent	284	22	8%
	Total	**1039**	**211**	**20%**
2015	**Local authority**	561	181	32%
	Independent	303	21	7%
	Total	**864**	**212**	**24%**

Table 18: Reasons services separated sibling groups

		Following Assessment	Lack of Resource	Emergency Situation	Other
2016	**Local authority**	22	22	17	5
	Independent	9	<5	<5	<5
	Total	**31**	**22**	**17**	**5**
2015	**Local authority**	20	20	13	7
	Independent	7	<5	<5	<5
	Total	**27**	**20**	**13**	**7**

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.
2. Services were able to select as many reasons as were applicable.

Fostering service grading

The following grading information is correct for fostering services with grades as of 31 March 2017.

Overall, the quality of fostering services was high, with 95% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes, and 42% having grades of very good and excellent across the board. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

Table 19: Breakdown of grades for all quality themes

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Grades good or better for all quality themes	93.7% (30)	96.3% (26)	**94.9% (56)**
Grades adequate or lower for all quality themes	6.3% (2)	3.7% (1)	**5.1% (3)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (27)**	**100.0% (59)**

A breakdown of quality for each quality theme is provided in tables 20 to 22 below. These show that the quality of care and support and staffing were particularly high, with 72.9% and 76.3% respectively regarded as very good or excellent for these themes.

Table 20: Breakdown of quality of care and support theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Adequate	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	**1.7% (1)**
Good	40.6% (13)	7.4% (2)	**25.4% (15)**
Very good	56.3% (18)	92.6% (25)	**72.9% (43)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (27)**	**100.0% (59)**

Table 21: Breakdown of quality of management and leadership theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Adequate	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	**1.7% (1)**
Good	43.8% (14)	51.9% (14)	**47.5% (28)**
Very good	50.0% (16)	48.1% (13)	**49.2% (29)**
Excellent	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	**1.7% (1)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (27)**	**100.0% (59)**

Table 22: Breakdown of quality of staffing theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Adequate	0.0% (0)	3.7% (1)	**1.7% (1)**
Good	34.4% (11)	7.4% (2)	**22.0% (13)**
Very good	65.6% (21)	81.5% (22)	**72.9% (43)**
Excellent	0.0% (0)	7.4% (2)	**3.4% (2)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (27)**	**100.0% (59)**

Summary of foster care

At 31 December 2016, there were 59 registered foster care services, 32 run by local authorities and 27 by independent services[2].

At 31 December there were 4,011 approved foster carer households and a total of 5,435 children in a foster care placement, of which 28% were permanent placements. There were 209 children in foster care at that time who were waiting for a permanent placement.

There were 430 newly approved households in the year to 31 December 2016 with the majority of these (47% for local authority services and 56% for independent services) approved within six months. A further 12% of local authority services and 4% of independent services took more than 12 months to register a new household.

Over the year, 382 households de-registered, a net increase of 48 approved households by 31 December 2016. Although the vast majority of enquiries about becoming a foster carer are received by independent services, these converted into more applications for local authority services than for independent services.

There is pressure for placements in approved foster carer households, especially those that can care for sibling groups. 78% of local authority services reported instances where the number of children requiring a foster care placement was greater than the placements available. In total, 41 services told us they had households go outwith their approval range in order to look after children, most commonly to keep sibling groups together. Finding placements for sibling groups was a difficulty for 59% of local authority services and 19% of independent services.

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[2] All 2016 statistics are based on the 58 services which provided an annual return and data imputed for Clackmannanshire fostering service. All 2015 data is based on annual return data for 56 services and data imputed for West Dunbartonshire council fostering service, Foster Care Connect and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.

Fostering and adoption 2016–17 statistical bulletin

There were 1,039 sibling groups using foster services at 31 December 2016, 20% of which were split upon placement.

Overall, the quality of fostering services was high, with 95% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes and 42% having grades of very good and excellent across the board. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

Adoption Services

At 31 December 2016, there were 38 registered adoption services in Scotland: 32 run by local authorities and six not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in this report).

Of the 38 registered services, 36 submitted an annual return. All data presented in this report relates to the data supplied in these completed annual returns along with data imputed for services that did not provide annual returns in either 2015 or 2016[3].

This report covers three different aspects of adoption services:
- adoptive households
- adoption service usage
- other services and locations
- adoption service grading.

Adoptive households

There were 326 new households approved to adopt children in the year ending 31 December 2016 (down 8% from 355 households in 2015). The majority of these new households (75%) were approved by local authorities and 25% were approved by independent services.

For the new adoptive households, 66% of local authority areas had some cases that were completed within six months, 79% had some cases completed within a year but over six months and 39% had some cases completed in a year or more.

Table 23: Proportion of local authority areas by length of time it took to approve new households

		Some cases completed within six months	Some cases completed over six months but less than a year	Some cases completed in a year or more
2016	**Local authority**	66% (21)	78% (25)	41% (13)
	Independent	67% (4)	83% (5)	33% (2)
	Total	**66% (25)**	**79% (30)**	**39% (15)**
2015	**Local authority**	72% (23)	78% (25)	47% (15)
	Independent	50% (3)	67% (4)	17% (1)
	Total	**68% (26)**	**76% (29)**	**42% (16)**

1: Number of local authorities in brackets.

Age groups

The benefits of adoption for children requiring permanency is well researched but evidence shows that agencies have less success in placing children over the age of six years for adoption. Where adoption is not feasible or recommended for older children, it may be more likely that long-term or permanent foster placements will be sought for these children.

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[3] Two services (Clackmannanshire adoption service and West Lothian council adoption service) did not complete an annual return for 2016 and one service (West Dunbartonshire council adoption agency) did not complete an annual return in 2015. In order to accurately reflect any changes in trends between the years, the figures presented will include imputed information for these services.

For both local authority and independent services, the majority of new households approved for adoption were for children aged between two and six years old (62%; 201 households equal to 62%; 219 households in 2015). A higher proportion of new households for independent services (77%; 63 services) were approved for children aged between two and six years than for local authority services (57%; 138 services).

Households approved to adopt children less than two years of age accounted for the next highest proportion of new households approved (52%; 170 services) and had increased substantially from 2015 (40%; 141 services). Local authority services (53%; 129 services) and independent services (50%; 41 services) were very similar in the proportion of new adoptive households approved for this age range. Households approved to adopt children over six years of age accounted for 12% (39 services and up from 2015 (9%; 32 services)) of all new approved households. Independent services had a slightly higher proportion of new households (15%; 12 services) approved to adopt children aged six years or older compared to local authority services (11%; 27 services).

Table 24: Numbers of new households approved for adoptions split by age range approval

	2016			2015		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
Total new carers	244	82	**326**	252	103	**355**
Approved for younger than two years old	53% (129)	50% (41)	**52% (170)**	41% (104)	36% (37)	**40% (141)**
Approved for between two and six years old	57% (138)	77% (63)	**62% (201)**	53% (134)	83% (85)	**62% (219)**
Approved for between six and 11 years old	11% (27)	15% (12)	**12% (39)**	9% (22)	10% (10)	**9% (32)**
Approved for older than 11 years old	<1% (<5)	0% (0)	**<1% (<5)**	<1% (<5)	0% (0)	**<1% (<5)**

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.

Sibling groups

Evidence from research relating to the placement of children for adoption demonstrates that placing siblings together may be important in nurturing continuity, security and stability for children. Siblings who have experienced neglect and abuse often develop strong attachments with each other that are mutually beneficial. Separation can increase the sense of loss and trauma already being experienced by these children, resulting in emotional distress. It is good practice to place siblings together and where this is not considered to be in children's best interests the assessment of this should be well evidenced and clear.

Of the 326 new approved households, 78 (24%) were approved to adopt sibling groups in the year ending 31 December 2016 (down from 27%; 101 services in 2015). Of these, 64% (50 households) were local authority services and 36% (28

households) were independent services. Most new households were approved for groups of only two siblings, with just a few households approved for groups of up to three siblings. There were no new households approved for sibling groups of more than three children.

Table 25: Numbers of new households approved for adoptions split by sibling group approval

	2016			2015		
	Local authority	**Independent**	**Total**	**Local authority**	**Independent**	**Total**
Total of new households	244	82	**326**	252	103	**355**
Those approved for two-children sibling groups	20% (50)	34% (28)	**24% (78)**	25% (63)	32% (33)	**27% (96)**
Those approved for three-children sibling groups	<5% (<5)	<5% (<5)	**<5% (<5)**	2% (5)	<5% (<5)	**3% (5)**
Those approved for sibling groups of more than three children	0% (0)	0% (0)	**0% (0)**	0% (0)	0% (0)	**0% (0)**

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<5%".

Households waiting for children to be placed

A total of 205 approved households were waiting for children to be placed at 31 December 2016 (up 5% from 196 in 2015). The majority (76%) were approved by local authority services (Table 26).

Table 26: Numbers of approved households that were waiting for children to be placed[1]

		Number of households	% approved households
2016	Local authority	155	76%
	Independent	50	24%
	Total	**205**	100%
2015	Local authority	142	72%
	Independent	54	28%
	Total	**196**	100%

1. Excludes those approved for inter-country adoption.

Recruitment of new adoptive households

Over the first six months of 2016, there were 985 new enquiries from potential adoptive households (up 30% from 759 in 2015). Of these, 166 subsequently submitted an application (17% of enquiries) by 31 December 2016 and in turn, 83 of these applications (50% of applications) had progressed to become an approved

household by the end of the year. Note that further applications may still have been processing and resulted in approved households in 2016.

Local authority services received more enquiries (520) than independent services (465). Of the enquiries to local authority services, 23% resulted in an application (119 applications) compared to 10% of enquiries (47 applications) to independent services.

However, only 39% of the applications to local authority services resulted in an approved household (46 approvals) compared to 79% of the applications to independent services, perhaps suggesting that the independent services may be faster or better at screening the initial applications (37 approvals) (Table 27).

Table 27: Recruitment of adoptive households, showing approximate numbers of enquiries received, applications received and applications approved between 1 January and 30 June

			Enquiries	Applications	Approvals	% of enquiries to applications	% of applications approved	% of enquiries approved
2016		**Local authority**	520	119	46	23%	39%	9%
		Independent	465	47	37	10%	79%	8%
		Total	**985**	**166**	**83**	**17%**	**50%**	**8%**
2015		**Local authority**	432	128	35	30%	27%	8%
		Independent	327	47	28	14%	60%	9%
		Total	**759**	**175**	**63**	**23%**	**36%**	**8%**

Children approved for adoption

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to provide an adoption service. They are responsible for assessing and making arrangements for children who, as a result of this assessment, require alternative permanent care. Local authorities may, after following robust legal and matching processes, place children with adopters approved by them or by independent adoption agencies. Local authority and independent adoption agencies recruit, assess and provide training and support to prospective adopters to ensure that they can meet the needs and provide high quality care to children.

Children approved and placed

In total, 403 children were approved for adoption (down 21% from 504 children in 2015) between 1 January and 31 December 2016 (Table 5.1). The majority of children approved for adoption (51%; 207) were younger than two years old, with 41% (167 children) aged between two and six years and 7% (29 children) aged six years old or older.

Table 28: Numbers of children approved for adoption[1] between 1 January and 31 December, split by age at time of approval

Age at time of approval	2016		2015	
Younger than two years	207	51%	269	53%
Aged two years to less than six years	167	41%	208	41%
Aged six years to less than 11 years	29	7%	33	6%
Aged 11 years or over	<5	<1%	<5	<1%
Total number of children approved	**403**		**510**	

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals

In terms of the length of time taken from agreeing the need for permanence to approval at the adoption panel, 50% of local authorities had some cases that took less than three months to complete (53% in 2015); 78% had some cases that took between three and six months to complete (88% in 2015); and 72% had some cases that took more than six months to complete (the same as in 2015) (Table 29).

Table 29: Proportion of local authorities by length of time some placements took to complete

	2016	2015
Less than three months	50% (16)	53% (17)
Between three and six months	78% (25)	88% (28)
More than six months	72% (23)	72% (23)

Between 1 January and 31 December 2016, 484 children were placed with prospective adoptive families (up 5% from 462 children in 2015). Of these children:

- 75% (362 children) were placed with a local authority approved household (down from 78%; 361 children in 2015)
- 25% (122 children) were placed with a household approved by an independent service (22%; 101 children in 2015).

Table 30: Numbers of children placed with prospective adoptive families[1] between 1 January and 31 December

		Number of children placed	% of placed children
2016	**Local authority**	362	75%
	Independent	122	25%
	Total	**484**	
2015	**Local authority**	361	78%
	Independent	101	22%
	Total	**462**	

1. Services were instructed to count children approved for adoption by their own adoption panel and then placed in an adoptive household regardless of whether the household was approved by themselves or another service. This was to avoid double counting.
2. Services were instructed not to count children approved by another local authority adoption service and placed with one of their approved households. This was to avoid double counting.
3. Services were instructed to count children regardless of when they were approved for adoption.
4. Services were instructed, in the case of sibling groups, to count each child separately.

In terms of placements and the time from registration at panel to matching at panel: 38% of local authorities had some cases that were completed within less than three months (down from 44% in 2015); 47% of local authorities had some cases that took between three and six months to complete (down from 53% in 2015); 47% of local authorities had some cases that took more than six months and less than 12 (no change from 48% in 2015); and 47% of local authorities had some cases that took 12 months or more to complete (down from 50% in 2015) (Table 31).

Table 31: Proportion of local authorities split by length of time it took, from registration to matching, to place a child with a family

	Less than three months	Between three and six months	Over six months but less than 12 months	12 months or more
2016	38% (12)	47% (15)	47% (15)	47% (15)
2015	44% (14)	53% (17)	47% (15)	50% (16)

Between 1 January and 31 December 2016, 309 children were legally adopted (up 12% from 276 children in 2015). Adopted means a child is placed with an adoptive household through an order by a court, transferring parental rights and responsibilities. Of these children, 13% (40 children) were adopted through a local authority service after being approved by a different local authority (down from 16%; 43 children in 2015).

Of these adoptions, from the time between placement with the adoptive family and the granting of a full adoption order: 41% of local authorities had some cases that were completed within less than six months; 75% of local authorities had some cases that took between six and 12 months to complete; and 66% of local authorities had some cases that took more than 12 months to complete (Table 32).

Table 32: Numbers of children adopted and lengths of time it took to adopt a child from placement to full adoption order

	2016	**2015**
Number of adoptions	309	276
Approved by other local authority	13% (40 children)	16% (43 children)
Local authority placement time:		
Less than six months	41% (13)	53% (17)
Between six and 12 months	75% (24)	88% (28)
More than 12 months	66% (21)	75% (24)

Children awaiting placement

At 31 December 2016, a total of 228 children approved for adoption were waiting to be matched with approved adopters (up 9% from 210 children in 2015). Of the 228 children, 39% (90 children across 45 sibling groups) were part of a sibling group similar to 2015 (41% of children waiting; 86 children across 42 sibling groups).

Table 33: Numbers of children approved for adoption and waiting to be matched with approved adopters[1,2] at 31 December and the numbers that were part of a sibling group that the services were trying to keep together[3]

	2016	**2015**
Total number of children approved and waiting	228	210
Total number waiting that are part of sibling group	90	86
% of all children waiting	39%	41%
Total number of sibling groups waiting	45	42

1. 'Approved for adoption' means placed with an adoptive household through an order by a court, transferring parental rights and there is an approved plan for permanence that recommends adoption.
2. 'Matched' refers to the making of a recommendation by the adoption panel.
3. Services were instructed to count children individually, so two children who are siblings were counted as two.

Of children approved and waiting to be matched, 25% (57 children) had been waiting over a year to be placed. This was an increase from the previous year (20%; 41 children). Of the children waiting to be matched: 50% of local authorities had some children younger than two who were waiting; 75% of local authorities had some children aged two years or over but under six waiting; 41% of local authorities had some children aged six years or older but younger than 11 who were waiting; and no local authorities had any children 11 years or older waiting (Table 34).

Table 34: Numbers of children approved for adoption and waiting to be matched with approved adopters[1, 2] at 31 December, and the age breakdown

	2016	2015
Total number of children approved and waiting	228	210
Total number waiting that over 1 year	57	41
% of all children waiting	25%	20%
Age breakdown of children waiting:		
Less than two years old	50%	50%
Two or over but under six years old	75%	75%
Six or over but under 11 years old	41%	28%
11 years old or over	0%	0%

1. 'Approved for adoption' means placed with an adoptive household through an order by a court, transferring parental rights and there is an approved plan for permanence which recommends adoption.
2. 'Matched' refers to the making of a recommendation by the adoption panel.

Adoptions that break down

In total, 32 adoptions broke down either before or after the orders were granted (up from 26 breakdowns in 2015): of these categories where there were more than five reportable cases, 71% of these (17 adoptions) broke down before the order was granted and 29% (7 adoptions) broke down after the order was granted.

Of the adoptions that broke down, the majority were for children placed with a local authority approved household and broke down before the adoption order was granted.

Table 35: Numbers of adoptions that broke down by time and placement

		2016	2015
Broke down before adoption order granted	**Approved and placed by service**	17	14
	Approved and placed by other service	<5	<5
	Placed with independent service	<5	<5
	Total	**17**	**14**
Broke down after adoption order granted	**Approved and placed by service**	7	5
	Approved and placed by other service	<5	<5
	Placed with independent service	0	0
	Total	**7**	**5**
	Overall total	**32**	**26**

1. Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5" and "<1%". These revised values have been excluded from any subtotals but included at the overall total.

Services provided

Local authorities have a duty to provide post-adoption support to families who adopt and children who are adopted. They also have a duty to provide support and guidance to adult adoptees who wish to obtain their birth records.

Adoption services reported that they provided 2,716 adoptive households with post-adoption support (up 16% from 2,341 adoptive households in 2015) between 1

January and 31 December 2016. Of the post-adoption support provided to households, 74% (to 2,019 households) was provided by local authority services and 26% (to 697 households) was provided by independent services.

Counselling was the main type of post-adoption support provided. Other types of support included contact facilitation, adoption allowances, support groups and letterbox contact.

Services outside Scotland

There were six children from elsewhere in the UK placed in adoptive households in Scotland (seven children in 2015). There were 28 children from Scotland placed in adoptive households elsewhere in the UK (33 children in 2015) (Table 36).

Table 36: Numbers of children from elsewhere in the UK placed in adoptive households in Scotland and the numbers of children from Scotland placed elsewhere in the UK, between 1 January and 31 December

	2016	2015
Placed in Scotland from elsewhere in UK	6	7
Placed elsewhere in UK from Scotland	28	33

Adoption service grading

The following grading information is correct for adoption services with grades as of 31 March 2017.

Overall, the quality of adoption services was high, with 97% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes and 45% having grades of very good and excellent across all quality themes. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

Table 37: Breakdown of grades for all quality themes

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Grades good or better for all quality themes	96.8% (31)	100% (6)	**97.3% (37)**
Grades adequate or lower for all quality themes	3.1% (1)	0% (0)	**2.6% (1)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (6)**	**100.0% (38)**

A breakdown of grades for each quality theme is provided in tables 38 to 40 below. These show that the quality of care and support and staffing were particularly high, with 63.2% of services regarded as very good or excellent for these themes.

Table 38: Breakdown of quality of care and support theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Adequate	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	**2.6% (1)**
Good	37.5% (12)	16.7% (1)	**34.2% (13)**
Very good	59.4% (19)	50.0% (3)	**57.9% (22)**
Excellent	0.0% (0)	33.3% (2)	**5.3% (2)**
Total	**100.0% (32)**	**100.0% (6)**	**100.0% (38)**

Table 39: Breakdown of quality of management and leadership theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Good	43.8% (14)	50.0% (3)	44.7% (17)
Very good	53.1% (17)	33.3% (2)	50.0% (19)
Excellent	3.1% (1)	16.7% (1)	5.3% (2)
Total	100.0% (32)	100.0% (6)	100.0% (38)

Table 40: Breakdown of quality of staffing theme

	Local authority	Independent	Grand total
Good	40.6% (13)	16.7% (1)	36.8% (14)
Very good	59.4% (19)	66.7% (4)	60.5% (23)
Excellent	0.0% (0)	16.7% (1)	2.6% (1)
Total	100.0% (32)	100.0% (6)	100.0% (38)

Summary of adoption services

At 31 December 2016, there were 38 registered adoption services, 32 run by local authorities and six by independent services.

Over the year to 31 December 2016, 326 new households were approved to adopt children and 403 new children were approved for adoption. The number of new households approved closely matched the number of children approved for adoption in each age group.

At 31 December 2016, 205 approved households were waiting for children to be placed and 228 children approved for adoption were waiting to be matched with approved adopters. Of those children waiting, 25% had been approved and waiting over one year and 39% were part of a sibling group.

Over the year, adoption services reported that they provided 2,716 adoptive households with post-adoption support, mainly in the form of counselling, contact facilitation, adoption allowances, support groups and letterbox contact.

Overall, the quality of adoption services is high, with 97% of services having grades of good or better for all quality themes and 45% having grades of very good and excellent across all quality themes. No services were evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory for any theme.

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