

Fostering and adoption 2018–19

A statistical bulletin

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Key points

Fostering services in Scotland

- At 31 December 2018 there were 32 local authority fostering services and 28 independent fostering services.
- At 31 March 2019, 90% of fostering services were evaluated as “good” or better across all quality themes and 10% were evaluated as “adequate” or lower in at least one quality theme.
- There were 3,758 approved foster care households at 31 December 2018, a total which has gradually decreased from 4,414 in 2015.
- In 2018, local authority services approved fewer new households than the previous year (210 compared to 227) and independent services approved more (160 compared to 138).
- In 2018, 41% of fostering services experienced a net loss in foster care households (compared to 45% in 2017).
- The number of children and young people using fostering services has gradually decreased from 5,853 in 2015 to 5,171 in 2018.
- An increasing number of children and sibling groups were placed in households approved by independent services over the period 2015-2018, while a decreasing number were placed in local authority approved households approved.
- In 2018, independent services were less likely than local authority services to place siblings separately and where they did, the most common reason cited was ‘following assessment’, while in local authority services the most common reason cited was ‘lack of resources’.

Adoption services in Scotland

- At 31 December 2018 there were 32 local authority adoption services and six independent adoption services.
- At 31 March 2019, 95% of adoption services were evaluated as “good” or better across all quality themes and 5% were evaluated as “adequate” or lower in at least one quality theme.
- There were 280 new adoptive households approved in 2018, down from 317 in 2017; local authority services approved fewer than the previous year (186 compared to 229) while independent services approved slightly more (94 compared to 88).
- Of the new adoptive households, 28% were approved to adopt sibling groups of two, 2% were approved for sibling groups of three, and none were approved to adopt sibling groups of four or more.
- At 31 December 2018, 194 children and young people were approved for adoption and waiting to be matched to an adoptive household - 35% were part of a sibling group and 22% had been waiting for over one year.
- In 2018, 286 children and young people were legally adopted, down from 328 in 2017.

Introduction

This report sets out data collected by the Care Inspectorate from service providers in their 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 annual returns. It also includes service evaluation (grading) information correct at 31 March 2019.

The most recent annual return data covers the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018.

At 31 December 2018 there were around 13,000 care services registered with the Care Inspectorate, including 38 adoption and 60 fostering services. These are provided by the local authority and the voluntary/not-for-profit sector. We hold a significant amount of data about these services which informs the public, service users and commissioners on the quality of these services. The information also supports us to target our scrutiny and improvement interventions.

The data in this report provides insight into the operation of fostering and adoption services in Scotland. 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.

Background and notes

Foster care and adoption services are vital in assessing, approving and supporting foster carers and the recruitment and assessment of prospective adoptive parents to care for some of our most vulnerable children. Children who are placed away from their home require high-quality care that addresses their emotional and wellbeing needs. Matching children to families who can provide high quality care is essential to supporting improved outcomes for children. Ongoing assessment and planning are crucial to make sure 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, planning for a placement 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 have appropriate placements. Local authorities in Scotland are legally required to provide fostering and adoption services within their authority areas but can also work with voluntary/not-for-profit fostering and adoption services to place children with carers (where that is in the child's interest).

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 meaningful summary of adoption and fostering statistics across Scotland. This is the third in the series of Adoption and Fostering statistical bulletins; all of which can be accessed at <http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/publications-statistics/19-public/statistics>.

A national review of foster care was completed in 2013. One of the outcomes from this was the establishment of the national placement descriptors to be used consistently by all fostering services to standardise the description of the types of fostering placements they make available. The descriptors were published in 2015 with the expectation that all fostering placements are classified and recorded according to them. We incorporated the descriptors into the 2017 annual return, and this is the second time we have reported on them. Visit <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foster-care-glossary-placement-descriptions/> for a full glossary of the placement descriptors.

We added some further questions to the 2018 Fostering annual return regarding Continuing Care for young people aged 16 to 21 years following the enactment of part 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Continuing Care.¹ We will continue to collect data in the Fostering annual return on Continuing Care and will publish a national level summary of the responses when we are satisfied that the data being recorded provides statistical evidence for reporting purposes.

For the ease of writing, throughout this bulletin 'children and young people' is often shortened to 'children'.

Data quality note

All data, apart from service evaluation (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.

All 38 registered adoption services and 59 of the 60 registered fostered services submitted a 2018 annual return.

We have excluded the adoption service Birthlink² from all the adoption statistics that follow (except the evaluation statistics). This means that the 2015 and 2016 figures published in [Table 24](#) of this report do not match those published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin.

We have also excluded two fostering services, Scottish Adoption (Fostering Service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society³, from all the foster care figures apart from the

¹ Continuing Care is the continued provision of accommodation and other assistance that is being provided immediately before a young person ceases to be looked after until their 21st birthdays. Only children who cease to be looked after aged 16 years of over and were looked after away from home are eligible for Continuing Care.

² Birthlink is an adoption support service and is not involved in the approval of households or children for adoption.

³ These services are predominantly adoption services that provide a limited fostering service and require two registrations one for fostering and one for adoption. The focus of these services is the recruitment, approval and

evaluation statistics. This means that some of the 2015 and 2016 foster care statistics presented here do not match those published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin. Tables are footnoted where this is the case.

The data published in this report is consistent with figures published in the Scottish Government's [Children's Social Work Statistics 2017-18](#). The slight differences in numbers are due to different reporting periods, and differences in the level and criteria at which the data is gathered and cleaned.

The national placement descriptors replaced the former placement categories in the 2017 annual return. The extent to which this change affected the count of both foster care households and children and young people using fostering services is unknown, but it is possible that there were categories of households and placements of children that were included in the 2015 and 2016 counts and not included thereafter.

support of pre-adoptive and adoptive parents and of post placement and post adoption work with families and adopted adults. The fostering and family placement part of the service is for children who require a fostering placement prior to adoption - in these cases the household is given dual approval (foster care approval and adoption approval). The foster care households do not add to the pool of foster carers in Scotland. See Dual Approval Status section in Chapter 19 of [Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#).

Foster care

Fostering services

At 31 December 2018, there were 60 fostering services in Scotland registered with the Care Inspectorate, 32 local authority services and 28 voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in the statistics that follow).

Of the 60 registered services, 59 submitted a 2018 annual return. The data presented in this report relates to the annual returns covering the period 2015-2018 and service evaluation data at 31 March 2019. Where a service did not submit an annual return for a given year, we impute data from the preceding year.

Two of the 60 services have been excluded from the statistics that follow (except the fostering service evaluation statistics) because they do not provide a foster service as such.

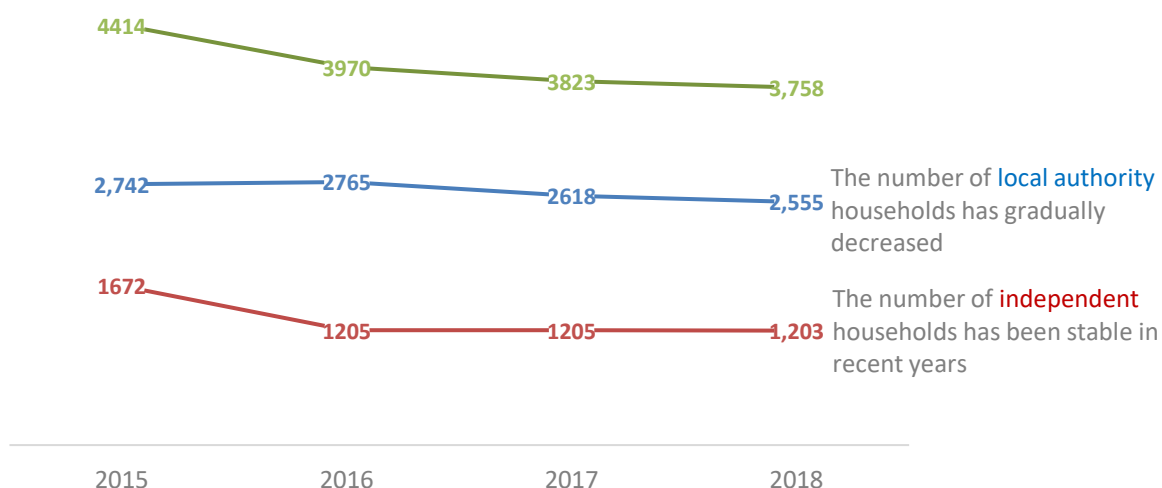
This report covers four different aspects of fostering services:

- foster care households
- care experienced children and young people
- fostering service capacity
- fostering service evaluation

Foster care households

Figure 1. The **total** number of approved foster care households has decreased each year since 2015

Approved foster care households, Scotland, at 31 December 2015-2018, with sector split



At 31 December 2018, there were 3,758 approved foster care households in Scotland⁴ (down 2% from 3,823 in 2017).

Most households (68%) were approved by local authority services and 32% were approved by independent services.

Table 1. Number of approved foster care households¹, at 31 December, split by sector

	2018	2017	2016	2015
Local authority	2,555	2,618	2,765	2,742
Independent	1,203	1,205	1,205	1,672
Total	3,758	3,823	3,970	4,414

1 Excludes those approved exclusively for short breaks.

2 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.

3 The national placement descriptors replaced the former placement categories in the 2017 annual return. This change to the data collection may account for some of the difference between the number of foster care households in 2015 and 2016 and the number thereafter.

4 The numbers in this table exclude the disaggregated values presented in Table 2 that have fewer than five observations.

Fifty-two fostering services said they had incorporated the placement descriptors into their recording system and six said they had not. Of the six services that were not yet categorising placements according to the agreed descriptors, they appear to have used a best-fit approach to record the number of approved care households broken down by placement type.

The most common type of placement approval was 'all placement types', particularly in independent services where 75% of care households were approved to provide any placements type, compared to 43% in local authority services.

The split of households approved to provide either permanent only, long-term only, interim only or emergency only placements differed across sectors. For example, in independent services, 5% of registered households were only approved for permanent placements compared to 30% in local authority services.

The number of households approved to provide only emergency placements decreased from 19 in 2017 to fewer than five in 2018.

⁴ This may be subject to some double counting. Regulations allow a foster carer to be 'registered' with more than one agency, however this is intended as an enabling provision in certain circumstances not one which should be regularly used ([Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007 – Chapter 11 The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers](#))

Table 2. Number of approved foster care households¹ at 31 December, split by sector and placement type²

		2018			2017		
		Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
Number of approved care households ¹		2,555	1,203	3,758	2,618	1,205	3,823
Approval to provide all types of placements	no.	1,110	908	2,018	883	750	1,633
	%	43%	75%	54%	34%	62%	43%
Permanent placements only	no.	384	154	538	377	202	579
	%	15%	13%	14%	14%	17%	15%
Long Term placements only	no.	284	86	370	333	142	475
	%	11%	7%	10%	13%	12%	12%
Interim placements only	no.	777	55	832	1,017	100	1,117
	%	30%	5%	22%	39%	8%	29%
Emergency placements only	no.	0	<5	0	8	11	19
	%	0%	<1%	0%	0.3%	0.9%	0.5%

1 Excluding those approved exclusively for short breaks.

2 Placements are categorised based on the national placement descriptors, information on which can be found in the introduction page.

3 Prior to 2017 placements were categorised differently.

4 Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5". These revised values have been excluded from the overall total.

On the 31 December 2018, there were 489 households approved only to provide short breaks (up 16% from 423 in 2017). The increase was mainly driven by local authority fostering services, with an additional three approving short break households in 2018.

Table 3. Number of foster care households approved only to provide short breaks, at 31 December, split by sector

Year	Sector	number of households approved for short breaks only	number of services that have approved short break households
2018	Local authority	347	29
	Independent	142	18
	Total	489	47
2017	Local authority	285	26
	Independent	138	17
	Total	423	43

1 This data was not collected prior to the 2017 annual return.

Of the 3,758 approved households, 902 (24%) had approval to care for children of any age. As in previous years, this was more likely to be the case for households registered by independent services (50%) than local authority households (12%).

Table 4. Number of households that have approval for any age range of child or young person, at 31 December, split by sector

		number	% of all households
2018	Local authority	300	12%
	Independent	602	50%
	Total	902	24%
2017	Local authority	342	13%
	Independent	544	45%
	Total	886	23%
2016	Local authority	269	10%
	Independent	643	53%
	Total	912	23%
2015	Local authority	271	10%
	Independent	614	37%
	Total	885	20%

1 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.

Private fostering

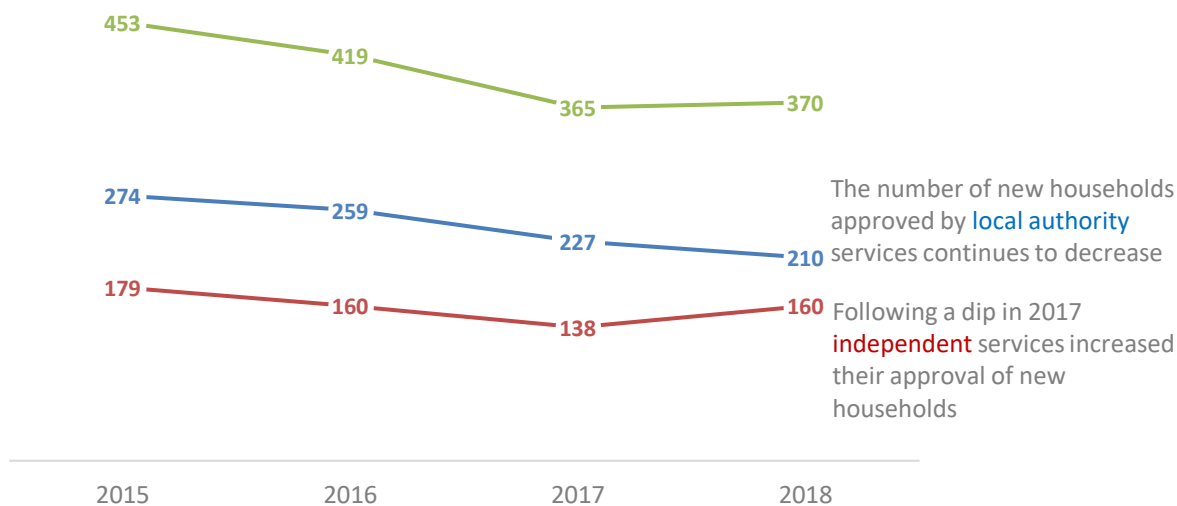
Private fostering is an arrangement where a parent makes an agreement with someone who is not a close relative of the child, to care for that child for more than 28 days. These arrangements are not facilitated by the local authority or a registered service. It is very possible that private foster carers 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 six notifications of private fostering in 2018, and five in 2017.

Recruitment and de-registration

Figure 2. The **total** number of new foster care households increased slightly this year after a two-year decline.

New foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2015 – 2018, with sector split



Throughout 2018, there were 370 new foster care households approved (almost the same amount as the preceding year) – 57% were approved by local authority services and 43% were approved by independent services.

The gap between the number of new carers approved by local authority services (210) and the number approved by independent services (160) is narrowing.

[Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) states that authorities should normally aim to complete an assessment within six months of receiving an application. The length of the assessment is measured as the time between when the application was received and approval by the agency decision maker.

Just under half (46%) of new foster carer assessments were completed within six months (down from previous years), and 47% were completed between six months and a year. A small amount (28 assessments or 8%) took a year or more to complete.

Comparing across years, both local authority and independent services had a higher proportion (when compared to previous years) of assessments that took more than the recommended six months.

Table 5. Number of new foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector and length of assessment completion

		Up to six months		Between six & 12 months		12 months or more		Total new care households
		no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
2018	Local authority	99	47%	95	45%	16	8%	210
	Independent	70	44%	78	49%	12	8%	160
	Total	169	46%	173	47%	28	8%	370
2017	Local authority	115	51%	94	41%	14	6%	227
	Independent	73	53%	51	37%	12	9%	138
	Total	188	52%	145	40%	26	7%	365
2016	Local authority	122	47%	105	41%	32	12%	259
	Independent	90	56%	63	39%	7	4%	160
	Total	212	51%	168	40%	39	9%	419
2015	Local authority	125	46%	71	26%	26	9%	274
	Independent	114	64%	57	32%	8	4%	179
	Total	239	53%	128	28%	34	8%	453

- 1 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.
- 2 The number of new households may include a small amount of double-counting at the national level, owing to the rare situation where households register with more than one fostering service.

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. 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 30 fostering services (52% of all services). As in the two previous years, this was particularly the case for local authority services, with 69% of services finding it difficult compared to 31% of independent services.

All the services that reported problems recruiting households in 2017 that would foster sibling groups continued to report difficulties in 2018, and three services that didn't have problems in this area in 2017 reported difficulties in 2018.

The main reason described by services was accommodation constraints. The increased demand on placements arising from Continuing Care was also cited as a reason.

Table 6. Number of services that have difficulties recruiting households that will take sibling groups, split by sector

		Number	% of all services
2018	Local authority	22	69%
	Independent	8	31%
	Total	30	52%
2017	Local authority	20	63%
	Independent	6	23%
	Total	26	45%
2016	Local authority	19	59%
	Independent	5	19%
	Total	24	41%
2015	Local authority	19	59%
	Independent	6	23%
	Total	25	43%

1 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.

Difficulties around recruitment, and foster carers choosing to deregister for a variety of reasons, means that capacity is a real challenge faced by many services.

In total, at the national level, 406 households de-registered and 370 new households were approved. This suggests there was a net decrease of 36 foster care households across Scotland in 2018. However, there is some uncertainty around these figures because it is possible (albeit rare) for households to have dual or derivate approval⁵ which results in double counting. At an individual service level, where double counting is removed, the data suggests that 24 fostering services (41% of all services that recruit and approve foster carers) experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2018.

⁵ See ([Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007 – Chapter 11 The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers](#)) (regulation 23) for definition of dual approval and derivate approval.

Table 7. Number of foster care households that de-registered between 1 January and 31 December, and the number/percentage of services that experienced a net loss of foster care households, split by sector

		Number of households that de-registered	Services that experienced a net loss in foster care households over the year	
			No.	% of all services
2018	Local authority	263	15	47%
	Independent	143	9	35%
	Total	406	24	41%
2017	Local authority	228	16	50%
	Independent	175	10	38%
	Total	403	26	45%
2016	Local Authority	194	Data not available	
	Independent	188		
	Total	382		
2015	Local Authority	180	Data not available	
	Independent	139		
	Total	319		

1 The number of households that de-register may include a small amount of double-counting at the national level, owing to the rare situation where households are registered with more than one fostering service.

In 2018 to 30 June, fostering services across Scotland received approximately 3,506 enquiries from potential foster cares, 8% of which led to applications, of which 40% were approved.

Local authority services received considerably fewer enquiries but more applications than independent services; and local authority services approved approximately one out of every three applications whilst independent services approved around one in two.

Table 8. Recruitment of foster care households: approximate number of enquiries received between 1 January and 30 June, and the number leading to applications and approved households, split by sector

		Enquiries	Applications	Approvals	% of enquiries to applications	% of applications approved
2018	Local authority	982	158	57	16%	36%
	Independent	2,524	110	50	4%	45%
	Total	3,506	268	107	8%	40%
2017	Local authority	1,038	173	73	17%	42%
	Independent	3,094	131	55	4%	42%
	Total	4,132	304	128	7%	42%
2016	Local authority	937	146	41	16%	28%
	Independent	2,859	133	64	5%	48%
	Total	3,796	279	105	7%	38%
2015	Local authority	1,165	152	39	13%	26%
	Independent	4,140	138	59	3%	43%
	Total	5,305	290	98	5%	34%

Care experienced children and young people

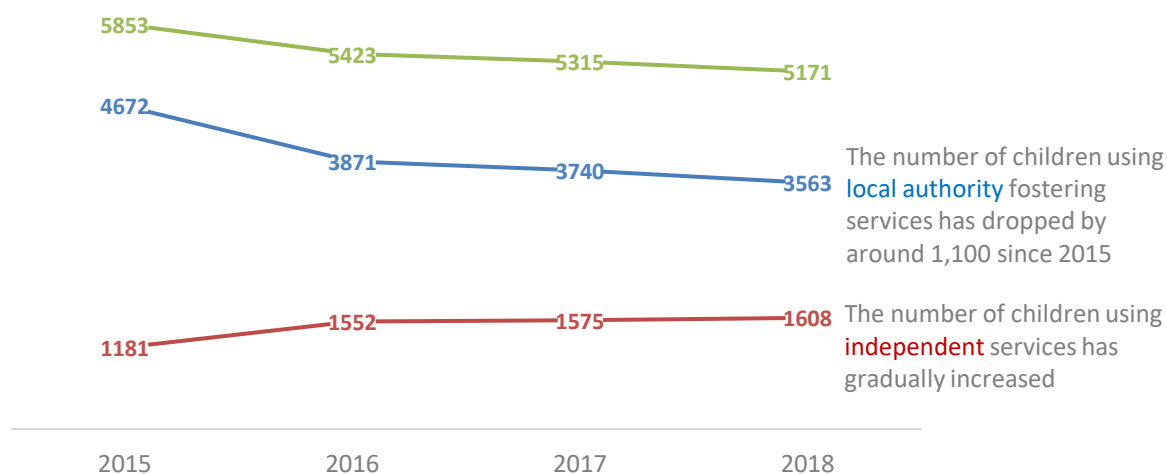
The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 place a duty on local authorities to provide fostering and adoption services. They are responsible for assessing and planning for children, who as an outcome of this assessment, require alternative care, either through voluntary arrangements or compulsory measures of care. Local authorities, through service level agreements with independent fostering and adoption services, may place children with carers through these services. Independent fostering and adoption services 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 the 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.

Placements

In the 2018 annual return services were asked to record the number of children and young people using their service categorised by the national placement descriptors. Of the six services that were not yet categorising placements according to the agreed descriptors, they appear to have used a best-fit approach to record the number of children and young people in each placement type.

Figure 3. The **total** number of children and young people using fostering services has decreased each year since 2015

Number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, Scotland, 2015 – 2018, with sector split



According to the data gathered in our annual return, 5,171 children were in a placement with an approved foster care household at 31 December 2018 (a 3% decrease on the 2017 figure of 5,315 and down for the third consecutive year). Of these 5,171 children, 69% (3,563) were placed in local authority approved households and 31% (1,608) were placed in households approved by independent services.

This is consistent with figures published in the Scottish Government’s [Children’s Social Work Statistics 2017-18](#), that states at 31 July 2018 there were 5,058 children and young people looked after by foster carers.

Table 9. Total number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	2018	2017	2016	2015
Local authority	3,563	3,740	3,871	4,672
Independent	1,608	1,575	1,552	1,181
Total	5,171	5,315	5,423	5,853

- 1 'Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in a way that reduces double counting.
- 2 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret’s Children and Family Care Society.
- 3 The national placement descriptors replaced the former placement categories in the 2017 annual return. This change to the data collection may account for some of the difference between the number of foster care households in 2015 and 2016 and the number thereafter.

The most common placement type was an interim foster care placement with a local authority approved foster care household – 31% (1,600) of the total number of children in foster care were in this type of placement. Thirty per cent were in a permanent placement, mainly provided by local authority approved households, compared to 27% the year before.

There were 116 children in an emergency placement (mainly provided by local authority services), up 35% from 86 in 2017.

Table 10. Children and young people using fostering services¹ at 31 December, split by sector and placement type²

		2018			2017		
		Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
Permanent placement	No.	1054	472	1,526	981	474	1,455
	% of sector	30%	29%		26%	30%	
	% of total	20%	9%	30%	18%	9%	27%
Long Term placement	No.	801	351	1,152	920	475	1,395
	% of sector	22%	22%		25%	30%	
	% of total	15%	7%	22%	17%	9%	26%
Interim placement	No.	1,600	777	2,377	1,769	610	2,379
	% of sector	45%	48%		47%	39%	
	% of total	31%	15%	46%	33%	11%	45%
Emergency placement	No.	108	8	116	70	16	86
	% of sector	3%	0.5%		2%	1%	
	% of total	2%	0%	2%	1%	0%	2%

1 'Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in such a way as to eliminate double counting.

2 Placements are categorised based on the national placement descriptors.

3 Prior to 2017, placements were categorised differently.

Children and young people awaiting permanent placement

At 31 December 2018, there were 232 children and young people identified by 18 fostering services as needing a placement secured by a Permanence Order that were not in or not moving towards such a placement (around the same number as previous years). That's 7% of the children using local authority fostering services, around the same proportion as the two previous years.

At the same time there were 29 children, across eight services, living at home or with kinship carers and waiting on a foster care placement to become available. This is higher than last year when there were 23 children waiting across seven services.

Table 11. Number of children and young people using local authority fostering services at 31 December, that were waiting for a foster care placement to become available

	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
2018	232	18	29	8
2017	224	20	23	7
2016	209	18	25	6
2015	297	22	28	10

1 Only includes children and young people where a decision has been made to place them in foster care.

Placements ending on an unplanned basis

The table below shows that 346 placements of children and young people ended on an unplanned⁶ basis throughout 2018, down 3% from 355 in 2017. The majority were in households approved by the placing authority. Of the placements that ended, 20% (69) were permanent placements (consistent with the previous year).

Table 12. Number of foster placements that ended on an unplanned basis, between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector

		Local authority placements			Independent placements	Total
		all LA placements	LA placements involving household provided by placing authority	LA placements involving household purchased by local authority		
Number of placements	2018	209	199	36	137	346
	2017	232	203	29	123	355
	2016	255	232	23	132	387
	2015	212	182	30	145	357
Number of permanent placements	2018	52	47	5	17	69
	2017	43	43	<5	28	71
	2016	47	42	5	23	70
	2015	36	36	<5	27	63
Number of services where placements ended	2018	31	30	10	20	51
	2017	28	27	10	19	47
	2016	27	26	7	17	44
	2015	28	27	8	17	45

- 1 Where the placement was a sibling group, each child or young person 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 Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with "<5". These revised values have been excluded from any totals and subtotals.

Local authority commissioned placements

Throughout 2018, 490 children were placed in a foster care placement purchased by a local authority, down for the second year in a row and by 14% from 569 in 2017.

Just over two thirds (69%) of the places were purchased through the national contract; 3% were exclusively short breaks.

⁶ Unplanned is defined as 'when removal of a child from a foster placement stemmed from a crisis or unexpected event occurring'.

Table 13. Number of children and young people placed by a local authority into a foster care household approved by another service, between 1 January and 31 December

	number of children and young people placed ¹	Number of placements purchased through the national contract (and percentage of placed)	Number of placements that were exclusively short breaks
2018	490	339 (69%)	17(3%)
2017	569	317 (56%)	9 (2%)
2016	864	382 (44%)	21(2%)
2015	694	369 (53%)	22(3%)

- 1 Includes placements that were exclusively short break situations, as well as temporary placements, permanent placements and any other type of placement.
- 2 The 2015 and 2016 data presented here differs from that published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 Statistical Bulletin owing to a change in the way we have interpreted the data.
- 3 The rise in the number of children and young people placed between 2015 and 2016 can be explained by a large increase in the number recorded by Glasgow City Council Fostering Service in 2016 compared to 2015.

Asylum seekers and refugees

There are several children and young people placed in care services who have come to Scotland without the support of an adult and have the status of being asylum seeking and refugee children and young people. In order to get a picture of the extent of this in the foster care system, we asked in the annual return if services had any children with refugee or asylum-seeking status using their service.

In 2018, 10 fostering services reported that they had placed children with refugee or asylum-seeking status. Seven were local authority and three were independent fostering services.

Seventeen children with asylum seeking and refugee status were using local authority fostering services at 31 December 2018. Fewer than five were using independent services.

Table 14. Breakdown of whether services had placed children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status at 31 December, split by sector

		Had placed	Had not placed
2018	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	3 (12%)	23 (88%)
	Total	10 (17%)	48 (83%)
2017	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	3 (11%)	25 (89%)
	Total	10 (17%)	50 (83%)
2016	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	2 (7%)	25 (93%)
	Total	9 (16%)	50 (85%)

1. This data was not gathered prior to 2016.

Table 15. Number of children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	2018	2017	2016
Local authority	17	14	16
Independent	<5	<5	<5
Total	17	14	16

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

2 This data was not gathered prior to 2016.

Fostering service capacity

Between 1 January and 31 December 2018, the number of children coming into foster care exceeded the number of new foster care households in 30 of the 32 local authority services. This is the highest incidence of this situation over the four-year period 2015-2018

Table 16. Number of local authority services where the number of children and young people coming into foster care between 1 January and 31 December exceeded the number of new foster care households

	2018	2017	2016	2015
Total number of services:	30	29	25	27
Percentage of local authority services	94%	91%	78%	84%

In situations where the number of children exceeds the number of available foster care households, an option for local authority services is to commission places with independent fostering services. Where this is not feasible or possible the local authority services may approve placements with their own foster care households that result in the household exceeding their approval range.

The table below shows that throughout 2018 households exceeded their approval range on 785 occasions across 30 local authority fostering services and 11 independent fostering services. Services reported in their annual return that households exceeded their approval range for a variety of reasons. The main reason was to keep siblings together and to facilitate emergency placements. Other common reasons included: to enable child/young person to remain close to their home community and school; to minimise placement moves; to make the most appropriate match between child/young person and their foster carer.

Table 17. Number of occasions and number of services where children and young people placed in foster care households resulted in the household going out-with their approval range, split by sector

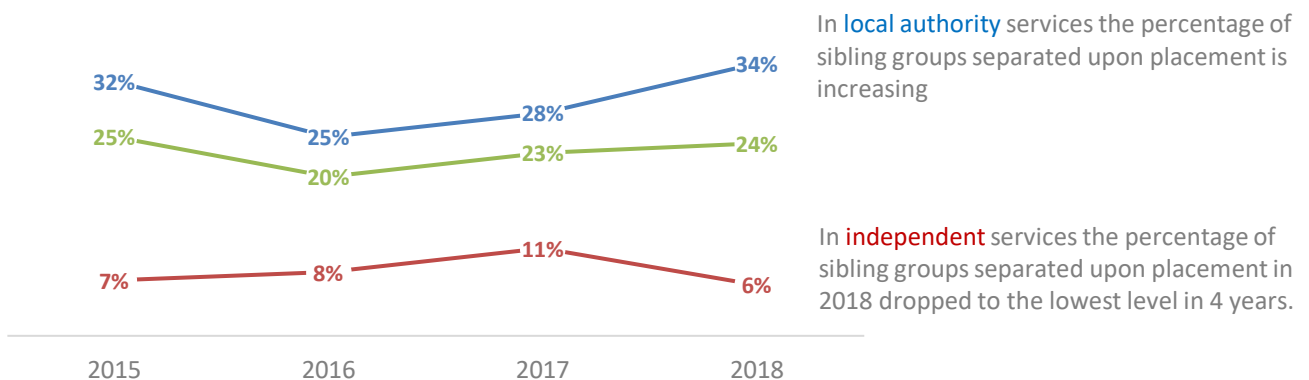
		Number of occasions	Number of services
2018	Local authority	681	30
	Independent	104	11
	Total	785	41
2017	Local authority	619	32
	Independent	130	11
	Total	749	43
2016	Local authority	635	31
	Independent	89	10
	Total	724	41
2015	Local authority	596	30
	Independent	38	7
	Total	634	37

1 Note that approval range can be age, gender, numbers or other.

Sibling group separation

Figure 4. the **total** number of sibling groups separated upon placement ranged from 20% to 25% over the four-year period 2015-2018

The number of sibling groups at 31 December that were separated upon placement, Scotland, 2015-2018, with sector split



At 31 December 2018, there were 1,042 sibling groups in foster care. Like the preceding year 24% were separated upon placement.

In recent years, the number of sibling groups placed in local authority approved households has been decreasing while the number placed in households approved by independent services has been increasing.

The data shows that independent services are less likely than local authority services to place siblings separately. Thirty-four per cent of the 666 sibling groups using local authority fostering services were separated upon placement and 6% of the 376 sibling groups using independent fostering services were separated.

The most common reason, selected by 23 local authority services, for separating sibling groups was due to lack of resources. For independent services the most common reason was 'following assessment', which was selected by eight services, fewer than three cited lack of resources as a reason. Thirteen local authority services cited Emergency Situation as a reason for separating siblings.

As Table 6 shows, Independent services were less likely than local authorities to report problems recruiting households that will take sibling groups (31% compared to 69%), which concurs with the gap between local authority services and independent services in terms of the number of siblings separated upon placement (illustrated in figure 4 above).

Table 18. Number of sibling groups using fostering services at 31 December, and the number that were placed separately

		Number of sibling groups	Number of sibling groups separated	% placed separately
2018	Local authority	666	228	34%
	Independent	376	24	6%
	Total	1,042	252	24%
2017	Local authority	703	199	28%
	Independent	309	33	11%
	Total	1,012	232	23%
2016	Local authority	755	189	25%
	Independent	282	22	8%
	Total	1,037	211	20%
2015	Local authority	561	181	32%
	Independent	301	21	7%
	Total	862	212	25%

1 The 2015 and 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin because they exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society.

Table 19. Reasons for separating sibling groups, broken down by the number of services that selected each option

		Following Assessment	Lack of Resource	Emergency Situation	Other
2018	Local authority	18	23	13	8
	Independent	8	<5	<5	<5
	Total	26	23	13	8
2017	Local authority	23	24	17	6
	Independent	8	<5	5	<5
	Total	31	24	22	6
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

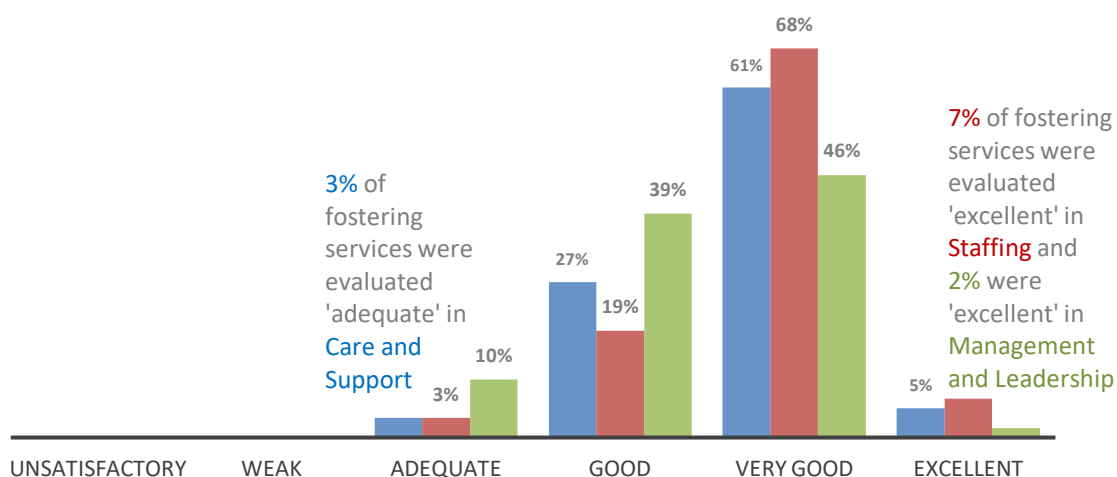
1 Services were able to select as many reasons as were applicable.

Fostering service evaluation (grading)

Fostering services are graded by our inspectors, using a six-point scale, across three quality themes – Care and Support, Staffing, and Management and Leadership. Information on the evaluation criteria can be found in the document: [How we inspect](#). The following evaluation is correct for fostering services as of 31 March 2019.

Figure 5. The most common evaluation of fostering services was 'very good'

Evaluation of Fostering services resulting from inspection, by quality theme, Scotland, 31 March 2019



Overall the quality of fostering services was high. At 31 March 2019, 59 of the 60 fostering services registered with the Care Inspectorate had been inspected and 90% of these services

had evaluations of ‘good’ or better across all quality themes. No services were evaluated as ‘adequate’ or lower across all quality themes. Furthermore, 46% were evaluated ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ across all quality themes. This grading profile is very similar to the previous year, although there was a slightly higher percentage of local authority services with grades of adequate or lower for a least one quality theme.

Table 20. Overview of fostering service grades at 31 March 2019, split by sector

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Grades of very good and excellent for all quality themes	12	38%	15	56%	27	46%
Grades of good or better for all quality themes	28	88%	25	93%	53	90%
Grades of adequate or lower for at least one quality theme	4	13%	2	7%	6	10%
Grades of adequate or lower for all quality themes	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

The grading profile of fostering services for the quality theme Care and Support is very positive, with many services (36 of 59) being evaluated as ‘very good’. Three services in the independent sector were evaluated as ‘excellent’. One local authority service was rated ‘adequate’ for Care and Support (down from ‘good’), as was one independent service (down from ‘very good’). For staffing, four independent services were evaluated as ‘excellent’; the majority were rated ‘very good’. Two independent services and four local authority services were rated ‘adequate’ for management and leadership (down from ‘good’ or ‘very good’) and the rest were evaluated as ‘good’ or ‘very good’, with one (independent service) rated ‘excellent’.

Table 21. Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Care and Support, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	1	3%	1	4%	2	3%
Good	14	44%	2	7%	16	27%
Very Good	17	53%	19	70%	36	61%
Excellent	0	0%	3	11%	3	5%

Table 22. Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Staffing, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	1	3%	1	4%	2	3%
Good	9	28%	2	7%	11	19%
Very Good	22	69%	18	67%	40	68%
Excellent	0	0%	4	15%	4	7%

Table 23. Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Management & Leadership, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	4	13%	2	7%	6	10%
Good	13	41%	10	37%	23	39%
Very Good	15	47%	12	44%	27	46%
Excellent	0	0%	1	4%	1	2%

Summary of foster care

At 31 December 2018, there were 60 fostering services in Scotland registered with the Care Inspectorate, 32 local authority services and 28 independent services.

All but two of these services recruit and approve foster care households and at 31 December 2018 there were a total of 3,758 approved foster care households in Scotland – a total that has decreased each year since 2015.

Despite the decrease in the overall number of care households, the total number of new households approved rose slightly from 365 in 2017 to 370 in 2018 (after a two-year decline). This increase was driven by independent services. The number of new households approved by local authority services continued to decrease causing the gap between the number of new carers approved by local authority services (210) and the number approved by independent services (160) to narrow.

As in previous years, recruiting households that would foster sibling groups was a challenge for many fostering services, particularly local authority ones, with 69% finding it difficult compared to 31% of independent services. The main reason described by services was accommodation

constraints. The increased demand on placements arising from Continuing Care was also cited as a reason.

There is a slight upward trend in the number of households that de-register each year across Scotland. In 2018, there were 406. At an individual service level, where double counting is removed, the data suggests that 24 fostering services (41% of all services that recruit and approve foster carers) experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2018.

Fostering services approve and place children and young people in foster care placements. At 31 December 2018, 5,171 children were in a placement with an approved foster care household (the most common being an interim placement). This total has decreased each year since 2015. A steady decrease in children placed in local authority approved households offsetting a gradual increase in the number of children using independent services is driving the overall trend.

At 31 December 2018, there were 232 children and young people identified as needing a placement secured by a Permanence Order that were not in or not moving towards such a placement. That's 7% of the children using local authority fostering services, around the same proportion as the two previous years. There were also 29 children waiting on a foster care placement to become available.

Each December since 2016 there has been just over 1,000 sibling groups in the Scottish fostering system. In 2018 24% were placed separately, a very slight increase on the two preceding years.

Time series analysis shows a decreasing number of sibling groups being placed in local authority approved households and an increasing number being placed in households approved by independent services. The data also shows that independent services are less likely than local authority services to place siblings separately and where siblings are placed separately independent services cite 'following assessment' as the most common reason while local authority services cite 'lack of resource'.

Overall the quality of fostering services was high. At 31 March 2019, 59 of the 60 fostering services registered with the Care Inspectorate had been inspected and 90% of these services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes. No services were evaluated as 'adequate' or lower across all quality themes and only 10% had an evaluation of 'adequate' or lower in at least one quality theme. Furthermore, 46% were evaluated 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes. This grading profile is very similar to the previous year, although there was a slightly higher percentage of local authority services with grades of adequate or lower for a least one quality theme this year compared to last.

Adoption

Adoption services

At 31 December 2018, there were 38 registered adoption services in Scotland: 32 local authority services and six voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in this report).

All 38 registered services submitted a 2018 annual return.

One independent service (Birthlink) operates as a support service for those who have been affected by adoption in Scotland and doesn't offer an adoption service as such, therefore this service has been excluded from the statistics that follow (except the evaluation statistics).

The 2018 data in this report is therefore based on the data submitted by 37 adoption services in their 2018 annual return, together with evaluation data as at 31 March 2019 for 38 adoption services. This bulletin also includes data from annual returns covering the period 2015-2017 and where a service did not submit an annual return for a given year, we impute data from the preceding year.

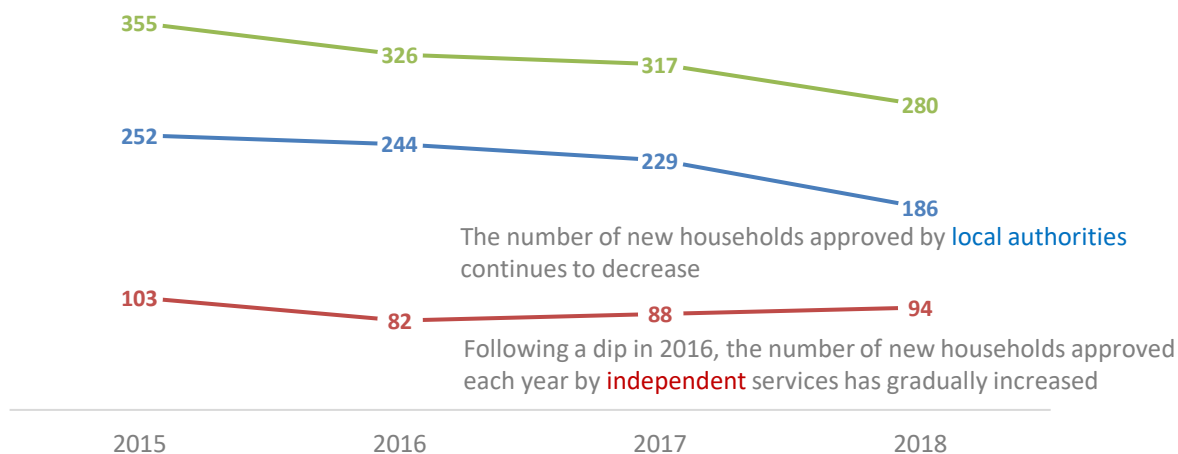
This report covers four different aspects of adoption services:

- new approved households
- children and young people
- other services
- adoption service evaluation

New approved households

Figure 6. The **total** number of new households approved each year has decreased year-on-year since 2015

New approved households approved between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2015-2018, with sector split



In 2018, 280 new households were approved for adoption across 35 adoption services (down 12% from 317 in 2017). The decrease over time is directed, more recently, by local authority services, and while local authority services still approve more households each year than independent services the gap has gradually narrowed.

Timescales to approval

The table below shows that many services (71% of the services that approved new households in 2018) approved some of their new households within six months, while 12 services (34%) took a year more to approve some households (30% of local authority services and three of the five independent services).

Table 24. Number and percentage of all adoption services that approved new households split by length of time to approve new households for adoption between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector

		Some cases completed within six months		Some cases completed in over six months but less than a year		Some cases completed in a year or more	
		number	% of all services	number	% of all services	number	% of all services
2018	Local authority	21	70%	23	77%	9	30%
	Independent	4	80%	4	80%	3	60%
	Total	25	71%	27	77%	12	34%
2017	Local authority	22	79%	23	82%	13	46%
	Independent	5	100%	5	100%	3	60%
	Total	27	82%	28	85%	16	48%
2016	Local authority	21	66%	25	78%	13	41%
	Independent	4	80%	5	100%	2	40%
	Total	25	68%	30	81%	15	41%
2015	Local authority	23	72%	25	78%	15	47%
	Independent	3	60%	4	80%	1	20%
	Total	26	70%	29	78%	16	43%

1 The 2015 and 2016 percentages for Independent services and Total services presented here have been revised to exclude Birthlink and therefore do not match the percentages published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016-17 statistical bulletin.

Age group approval

Many of the new households were approved to adopt children younger than six years of age (53% approved to adopt children younger than two years old and 62% approved to adopt children aged two to five years old). Less than 1% were approved to adopt children aged 11 years old or older.

In independent services, the most common age group approval was children aged two to five years old (86% of new households in independent services were approved for this age group). In local authority services, the most common age group approval was children younger than two years old (60% were approved for this age group).

Table 25. Number and proportion of new approved households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by age range approval

		number of new households	approved to adopt children in the age range:							
			less than two years old		two years old or more but less than six		six years old or more but less than 11		11 years old or more	
			No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households
2018	Local authority	186	112	60%	92	49%	20	11%	<5	<1%
	Independent	94	36	38%	81	86%	15	16%	0	0%
	Total	280	148	53%	173	62%	35	13%	<5	<1%
2017	Local authority	229	128	56%	125	55%	28	12%	6	3%
	Independent	88	17	19%	73	83%	16	18%	0	0%
	Total	317	145	46%	198	62%	44	14%	6	2%
2016	Local authority	244	129	53%	138	57%	27	11%	<5	<1%
	Independent	82	41	50%	63	77%	12	15%	0	0%
	Total	326	170	52%	201	62%	39	12%	<5	<1%
2015	Local authority	252	104	41%	134	53%	22	9%	<5	<1%
	Independent	103	37	36%	85	83%	10	10%	0	0%
	Total	355	141	40%	219	62%	32	9%	<5	<1%

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 group approval

Of the 280 new approved households, just over a quarter (28%) were approved to adopt sibling groups of two children (in line with previous years). Five new households (all local authority) were approved to adopt sibling groups of three children. No households were approved for sibling groups of more than three children.

Table 26. Number and proportion of new approved households between 1 January and 31 December, split by sibling group approval

		sibling group of two children		sibling group of three children		sibling group of more than three children	
		No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households
2018	Local authority	43	23%	5	3%	0	0%
	Independent	35	37%	0	0%	0	0%
	Total	78	28%	5	2%	0	0%
2017	Local authority	59	26%	<5	<5%	0	0%
	Independent	30	34%	<5	<5%	0	0%
	Total	89	28%	<5	<5%	0	0%
2016	Local authority	50	20%	<5	<5%	0	0%
	Independent	28	34%	<5	<5%	0	0%
	Total	78	24%	<5	<5%	0	0%
2015	Local authority	63	25%	5	2%	0	0%
	Independent	33	32%	<5	<5%	0	0%
	Total	96	27%	5	2%	0	0%

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.

Households waiting

At the 31 December 2018, 187 approved households, across 31 adoption services, were waiting for children to be placed (down 13% from 215 in 2017, and the lowest number in the last four-year period in both sectors). Most of these households (74%) were with local authority adoption services.

Table 27. Number of approved households, at 31 December, that were waiting for children or young people to be placed, split by sector

		number of households	% of total	number of services
2018	Local authority	138	74%	26
	Independent	49	26%	5
	Total	187	100%	31
2017	Local authority	159	74%	29
	Independent	56	26%	5
	Total	215	100%	34
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 exclusively for inter-country adoptions.

Recruitment

An estimated 782 enquiries from potential adopters were received across 36 adoption services between 1 January and 30 June 2018; 22% of these progressed to applications to become an approved household of which 32% were approved.

There was a small increase in the percentage of enquiries received by independent services that led to applications (20% in 2018 compared to between 10% and 14% in previous three years), and a small decrease in the percentage of applications approved by local authority services (15% in 2018 compared to between 26% and 39% in previous three years).

Table 28. Recruitment of adopters: approximate number of enquiries received between 1 January and 30 June, and the number leading to applications and approved households, split by sector

		enquiries	applications	Approvals	% of enquiries to applications	% of applications approved	services with enquiries
2018	Local authority	421	104	16	25%	15%	31
	Independent	361	71	40	20%	56%	5
	Total	782	175	56	22%	32%	36
2017	Local authority	372	89	23	24%	26%	27
	Independent	399	52	29	13%	56%	3
	Total	771	141	52	18%	37%	30
2016	Local authority	520	119	46	23%	39%	Data not available
	Independent	465	47	37	10%	79%	
	Total	985	166	83	17%	50%	
2015	Local authority	432	128	35	30%	27%	
	Independent	327	47	28	14%	60%	
	Total	759	175	63	23%	36%	

Children and young people

Children and young people 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 planning 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 services. Local authority and independent adoption services 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.

Figure 7. The number of children and young people approved for adoption continues to decrease

Number of children and young people approved for adoption by local authority services between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2015-2018



In 2018, there were 323 children approved for adoption (across 31 local authority adoption services), down 14% from 375 in 2017, and for the third year in a row. Just over half of the children (53%) were younger than two years old when they were approved for adoption.

Table 29. Number of children and young people approved for adoption¹ by local authority services, between 1 January and 31 December, broken down by the age of the child at the time of approval

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Total number of children approved for adoption		323	375	403	510
Age less than two years old	number	171	166	207	269
	% of total	53%	44%	51%	53%
Age two years old or more but less than six	number	135	175	167	208
	% of total	42%	47%	41%	41%
Age six years old or more but less than 11	number	14	30	29	33
	% of total	4%	8%	7%	6%
Age 11 years old or more	number	<5	<5	<5	<5
	% of total	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

1 'Approved for adoption' means that the child has an approved plan for permanence, which recommends adoption. This includes all such children, whether placed or not placed, within the year.

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.

Timescales to approval

Research has found that it is the early stages of care and permanence planning following a child being accommodated that take the longest time in the overall process⁷.

Once it has been identified that a child should be permanently placed away from home, the Adoption and Permanence Panel decide whether to formally recommend adoption.

The table below shows that in 24 local authority adoption services (77% of the services that approved children for adoption) there were cases where it took six months or more for this part of the process to be completed. This is up from 17 local authorities the previous year.

Twenty local authority services (65%) reported that for some cases this part of the process took less than three months, compared to 26 services (87%) the year before.

Table 30. Number and percentage of all local authority services that approved children for adoption, by the length of time between agreeing the need for permanence and the adoption panel approving the child for adoption

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Less than three months	number	20	26	16	17
	%	65%	87%	50%	53%
Three months or more, but less than six months	number	24	24	25	28
	%	77%	80%	78%	88%
Six months or more	number	24	17	23	23
	%	77%	57%	72%	72%

Children and young people approved and placed with families

In 2018, 255 children were placed with their new adoptive family. This includes children approved for adoption in 2018 or in the previous year/years. The number of children placed is down for the second consecutive year, and by 28% from 352 in 2017. Two-thirds (169) of the placements were interagency.

Timescales to match

The Adoption and Permanence Panel find a 'match' for the child in terms of who their long-term carer should be. The table below shows that in 14 local authority services (50% of the services that placed children with families) there were some cases that took less than three months to match a child with a family; likewise, in 14 local authority services there were some cases that took 12 months or more to match a child.

⁷ Permanence Planning and Decision Making for Looked After Children in Scotland: Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, published by the Children's Reporter and Scottish Government, 3 December 2015.

Where cases took longer than 12 months, services reported in their annual return the following reasons: difficulty finding matches for children with complex needs and larger sibling groups; complex legal situations; adopters withdrawing due to length of time of legal process.

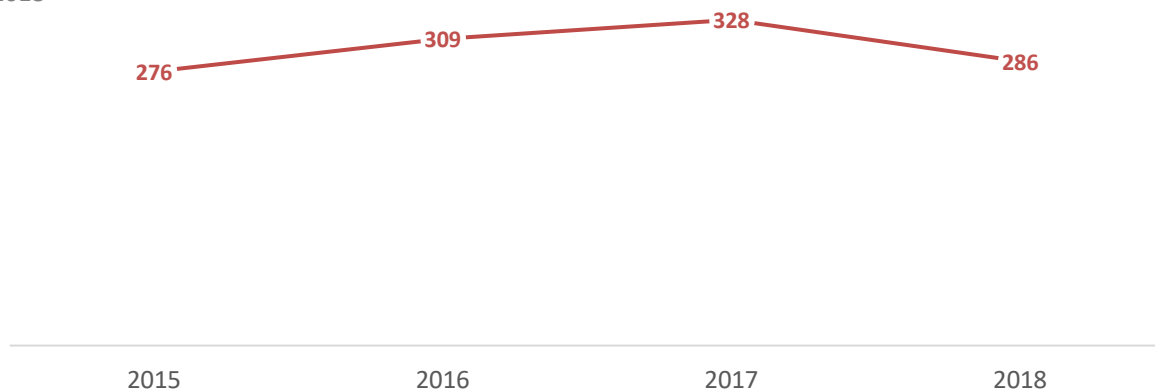
Table 31. Number and percentage of all local authority services that placed children, split by length of time placements took from registration at panel to matching at panel, in the year ending 31 December

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Less than three months to match a child with a family	number	14	17	12	14
	% of services	50%	57%	38%	44%
Three months or more but less than six months to match a child with a family	number	11	18	15	17
	% of services	39%	60%	47%	53%
Six months or more but less than 12 months to match a child with a family	number	13	21	15	15
	% of services	46%	70%	47%	47%
Twelve months or more to match a child with a family	number	14	18	15	16
	% of services	50%	60%	47%	50%

Children and young people adopted

Figure 8. After a two-year rise, the number of children and young people legally adopted in 2018 dropped

Children and young people adopted (by court order) between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2015-2018



In 2018, 286 children were legally adopted, down 13% from 328 in 2017.

The Scottish Government reported in [Children's Social Work Statistics 2017-18](#) that between 1 August 2017 and 31 July 2018, 321 children ceased to be 'looked after' by the local authority because they were adopted (down 13% from 367 the previous reporting year).

Both sources show a pattern of an increase over time in the number of children being adopted, followed by a drop in the most recent year.

Timescales to adopt

The table below shows that in 12 local authority adoption services (40% of the services that completed adoptions) the time between placement with an adoptive family and granting the full adoption order was, in some cases, less than six months. However, 23 services (77%) had cases that took longer than 12 months for the full adoption order to be granted.

Table 32. Total number of children and young people adopted between 1 January and 31 December, and the number and percentage of all services that completed adoptions, by the length of time between placement and granting of full adoption order

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Total number of children adopted		286	328	309	276
Services where there were placements that took:					
Less than six months to grant the full adoption order	Number	12	19	13	17
	%	40%	70%	41%	53%
Between six and 12 months to grant the full adoption order	Number	25	25	24	28
	%	83%	93%	75%	88%
More than 12 months to grant the full adoption order	Number	23	24	21	24
	%	77%	89%	66%	75%

Children and young people awaiting placement

At the 31 December 2018, there were 194 children and young people across 27 services that had been approved for adoption and were waiting to be matched with approved adopters. This was down 11% from 217 in 2017⁸, and parallels the fall in the number of children approved for adoption.

In total, 22% (43) of the 194 children waiting to be matched had been waiting for over one year, down slightly from 25% (54 of 217 children) the previous year.

Of the 194 children waiting to be matched 35% (67) were part of a sibling group. This is lowest number and rate in the past four-year period, although small numbers can create large fluctuation.

⁸ This is in line with the number of children (190) referred to Scotland's Adoption Register in 2017-18 (the intended outcome of a referral is for the child to be matched with adopters) <http://scotlands-adoption-register.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/sar-Annual-Report-2017-2018-1.pdf>.

Table 33. Numbers of children and young people approved for adoption waiting to be matched with approved adopters at 31 December, the number that were part of a sibling group that services were trying to keep together, and the number that had been waiting for over one year

	2018	2017	2016	2015	
Total number of children approved and waiting	194	217	228	210	
Waiting and are part of a sibling group	number	67	94	90	86
	per 100 children waiting	35	43	39	41
Total number of sibling groups waiting	33	48	45	42	
Waiting for over one year	number	43	54	57	41
	per 100 children waiting	22	25	25	20

1 'Approved' means that the child has an approved plan for permanence which 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.

We asked local authority services about the ages of the children and young people who were waiting to be matched. The figures for 2018 were quite different to the previous years.

The table below shows that 23 local authority adoption services (85% of all services with children waiting to be matched) had children younger than two years old waiting to be matched, compared to 16-17 services (50-53%) in previous years.

Whereas in previous years no local authorities had children and young people age 11 or older waiting to be matched with an adoptive family, at 31 December 2018 there were five such services.

Table 34. Number and percentage of services with children and young people waiting to be matched with approved adopters at 31 December, split by the age category of the children

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Less than two years old	number	23	17	16	16
	%	85%	53%	50%	50%
Two or over but under six years old	number	22	24	24	24
	%	81%	75%	75%	75%
Six or over but under 11 years old	number	14	14	13	9
	%	52%	44%	41%	28%
Eleven years old or over	number	5	0	0	0
	%	19%	0%	0%	0%

1 'Matched' refers to the making of a recommendation by the adoption panel.

Adoptions that break-down

In 2018, 12 adoptions broke down (disrupted) before the adoption order was granted. These break-downs took place in placements where the child and the adoptive family were approved by the same local authority service. There were a small number of interagency adoptions that broke down (fewer than five involving local authority households and fewer than five involving households provided by independent adoption services).

A small number of adoptions involving households provided by local authority services broke down after the adoption order was granted.

Table 35. Adoption break-downs between 1 January and 31 December, by timing of placement and type of placement

		2018	2017	2016	2015
Before adoption order was granted	in households approved by placing local authority	12	16	17	14
	in local authority, purchased households	<5	0	<5	<5
	in independent, purchased households	<5	<5	<5	<5
After the adoption order was granted	in households approved by placing local authority	<5	<5	7	5
	in local authority, purchased households	<5	<5	<5	<5
	in independent, purchased households	0	0	0	0
Total	in households approved by placing local authority	12	16	24	19
	in local authority, purchased households	<5	0	<5	<5
	in independent, purchased households	0	0	0	0

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

Other services

Post-adoption support

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.

Local authority adoption services reported that in 2018 they provided post-adoption support to 1,824 households, down 12% from 2,069 in 2017. Independent services provided post-adoption support to more households in 2018 (766) than in 2017 (648).

Services outside Scotland

There were 37 children from elsewhere in the UK placed in approved households in Scotland in 2018 (mainly by independent fostering services), and 10 children were placed elsewhere in the UK by Scottish local authorities. Because the numbers are small, and by the nature of the situations they refer to, they are prone to fluctuate from one year to the next.

Table 36. Number of children and young people placed to and from elsewhere in the UK, between 1 January and 31 December

	2018	2017	2016	2015
Placed in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK	37	13	6	7
Placed elsewhere in the UK by Scottish local authorities	10	31	28	33

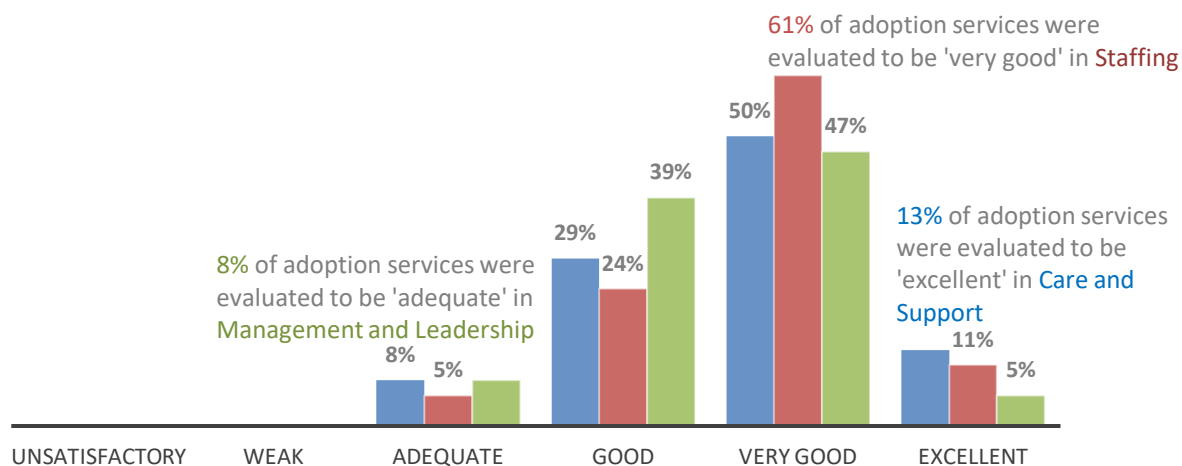
Adoption service evaluation

Adoption services are graded by our inspectors, using a six-point scale, across three quality themes – Care and Support, Staffing, and Management and Leadership. Information on the evaluation criteria can be found in the document: [How we inspect](#).

The following grading information is correct for adoption services as of 31 March 2019.

Figure 9. The most common evaluation of Adoption services was 'very good'

Evaluation of Adoption services resulting from inspection, by quality theme, Scotland, 31 March 2019



Overall, the quality of adoption services was very high. At 31 March 2019, all the adoption services registered with the Care Inspectorate had been inspected and 95% of these services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes. Furthermore, 39% were evaluated as 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes.

Two services were evaluated as 'adequate' or lower across all quality themes, one of which had previously been rated 'good' in all themes.

Table 37. Overview of adoption service grades at 31 March 2019, split by sector

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Grades of very good and excellent for all quality themes	13	41%	2	33%	15	39%
Grades of good or better for all quality themes	31	97%	5	83%	36	95%
Grades of adequate or lower for at least one quality theme	1	3%	1	17%	2	5%
Grades of adequate or lower for all quality themes	1	3%	1	17%	2	5%

A breakdown of grades for each quality theme is provided in the tables below.

The grading profile of adoption services for the quality theme Care and Support is positive, with the 19 of the 38 services (50%) evaluated 'very good' and five evaluated 'excellent'. None were rated 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'. Likewise, for the quality theme Staffing, 23 services (61%) were evaluated 'very good' and none were rated 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'. Almost half of the adoption services were evaluated 'very good' for Management and Leadership, and none were rated 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Table 38. Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Care and Support, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	2	6%	1	17%	3	8%
Good	11	34%	0	0%	11	29%
Very Good	17	53%	2	33%	19	50%
Excellent	2	6%	3	50%	5	13%

Table 39. Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Staffing, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	1	3%	1	17%	2	5%
Good	9	28%	0	0%	9	24%
Very Good	21	66%	2	33%	23	61%
Excellent	1	3%	3	50%	4	11%

Table 40. Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Management and Leadership, at 31 March 2019

	Local authority		Independent		All	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Unsatisfactory	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Weak	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Adequate	2	6%	1	17%	3	8%
Good	13	41%	2	33%	15	39%
Very Good	16	50%	2	33%	18	47%
Excellent	1	3%	1	17%	2	5%

Summary of adoption

At 31 December 2018, there were 38 registered adoption services in Scotland, 32 local authority services and six independent services.

All but one of these services recruit and approve households for adoption and in 2018, 280 new households were approved across Scotland – a total which has fallen each year since 2015. The decrease over time is directed, more recently, by local authority services, and while local authority services still approve more households each year than independent services, the gap has gradually narrowed.

In 2018, 286 children were legally adopted, down (after increasing for two years) 13% from 328 in 2017.

At the 31 December 2018, 194 children approved for adoption (in 2018 or earlier) were waiting to be matched with approved adopters. Of these children, 22% (43) had been waiting for over one year, down slightly from 25% the previous year; and 35% (67) were part of a sibling group.

Fourteen services reported that in some cases it took 12 months or more to match a child with a family, citing reasons such as difficulty finding matches for larger sibling groups or children with complex needs.

Of the 35 adoption services that approved new households, 26 approved households that would take sibling groups (equalling a total of 78 households). Approval was mainly for two siblings, with only five new households approved for three siblings and none approved for four or more siblings.

Overall, the quality of adoption services was very high. At 31 March 2019, all the adoption services registered with the Care Inspectorate had been inspected and 95% of these services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes. Furthermore, 39% were

evaluated as 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes. Only 5% had an evaluation of 'adequate' or lower in at least one quality theme. Two services were evaluated as 'adequate' across all quality themes, but no services had evaluations of 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Headquarters

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY
Tel: 01382 207100
Fax: 01382 207289

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Care Inspectorate Enquiries: 0345 600 9527

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