



# Fostering and adoption 2019–20

A statistical bulletin

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HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

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## Key points

### Foster care in Scotland

- **There were 59 fostering services operating in Scotland**
  - At 31 December 2019 there were 32 local authority fostering services and 27 independent fostering services registered with us.
- **Fostering services continued to perform well and achieve positive evaluations, although comparing with the previous year there has been a slight decline in quality**
  - At 31 March 2020, 85% of fostering services were evaluated as “good” or better across all quality themes and 15% were evaluated as “adequate” or lower in at least one quality theme.
- **The number of foster care households in Scotland continued to decrease**
  - There were 3,620 approved foster care households at 31 December 2019, a total which has gradually decreased from 3,970 in 2016.
  - In 2019, local authority services approved fewer new households than the previous year (197 compared to 210) as did independent services (115 compared to 160).
- **The overall number of children and young people in foster care has decreased**
  - The number of children and young people using fostering services has gradually decreased from 5,423 in 2016 to 4,910 in 2019.
- **There were slightly fewer children waiting on a placement**
  - At 31 December 2019, 188 children were identified as needing a placement secured by a Permanence Order that were not in or not moving towards such a placement, down from 232 in 2018. And 17 children were living at home or with kinship carers and waiting for a foster care placement, down from 26 in 2018.
- **Across Scotland there were more permanent placements that ended on an unplanned basis**
  - 395 placements ended on an unplanned basis in 2019, of which 76 were permanent placements, the highest number in the four years from 2016 to 2019.
- **Placing siblings together remains very challenging**
  - In 2019, 939 sibling groups were placed in foster care households, of which 200 (21%) were separated upon placement, down slightly from 24% in 2018.

## Adoption in Scotland

- **There were 38 adoption services operating in Scotland**
  - At 31 December 2019 there were 32 local authority adoption services and six independent adoption services.
- **Adoption services continued to perform well and achieve positive evaluations**
  - At 31 March 2020, 87% of adoption services were evaluated as “good” or better across all quality themes and 13% were evaluated as “adequate” or lower in at least one quality theme.
- **Fewer adoptive households were approved**
  - There were 259 new adoptive households approved in 2019, down from 280 in 2018. Local authority services approved fewer than the previous year (162 compared to 186) while independent services approved slightly more (97 compared to 94).
- **Just over a quarter of the new households were approved to adopt sibling groups**
  - Of the new adoptive households, 29% were approved to adopt sibling groups of two and 2% were approved for sibling groups of three.
  - There were no new households approved to adopt sibling groups of four or more.
- **There were fewer children waiting to be matched to an adoptive household compared to the previous year**
  - 153 children and young people were approved for adoption and waiting to be matched to an adoptive household. Of these, 31% were part of a sibling group and 25% had been waiting for over one year.
- **Where adoptions broke down, the majority were before the adoption order was granted**
  - During 2019, 21 adoptions broke down before the adoption order was granted and 14 broke down after the order was granted.
- **The number of children legally adopted decreased**
  - In 2019, 233 children and young people were legally adopted, down from 286 in 2018.

## Introduction

This report sets out data collected by us from service providers in their 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 annual returns. It also includes service evaluation (grading) information, correct at 31 March 2020.

The most recent annual return data covers the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019.

At 31 December 2019, there were just under 12,700 care services registered with us, including 38 adoption and 59 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 in alternative family placements that address their best interests throughout childhood. Where permanency is required, planning for a placement should not be delayed. This is 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. They 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 our annual returns. This work has enabled us to collate a meaningful summary of adoption and fostering statistics across Scotland. This is the fourth in the series of Adoption and Fostering statistical bulletins; all of which can be accessed [here](#).

A national review of foster care was completed in 2013. One of the outcomes from this was the establishment of national placement descriptors to be used consistently by all fostering services to standardise the description of the types of fostering placements they make. These were published in 2015 with the expectation that all fostering placements are classified and recorded according to them. We first incorporated the descriptors into the annual return in 2017, and this is the third time we have reported on them. Visit [here](#) for a full glossary.

We added some further questions in 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.<sup>1</sup> We have continued 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, 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 registered fostered services submitted a 2019 annual return. We have excluded the adoption service Birthlink<sup>2</sup> from the adoption statistics that follow (except the evaluation statistics). This means that some of the 2016 figures published in 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 Society<sup>3</sup>, from all the foster care figures apart from the evaluation statistics. This means that some of the 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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 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](#).

The data published in this report is consistent with figures published in the Scottish Government's [Children's Social Work Statistics 2018-19](#). 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 2016 counts and not included thereafter.

## Section 1: Foster care

### Fostering services

At 31 December 2019, there were 59 fostering services in Scotland registered with us, 32 local authority services and 27 voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in the statistics that follow). There were no new registrations in 2019. One service, Aberdour Fostering North, cancelled their registration - their approved households moving to Aberlour Fostering.

All 59 of the registered services provided information in their 2019 annual return.

The data presented in this report relates to the annual returns covering the period 2016-2019 and service evaluation data at 31 March 2020. Where a service did not provide annual return information for a given year, we impute data from the preceding year.

Two of the 27 voluntary/not-for-profit services have been excluded from the statistics that follow (except the fostering service evaluation statistics) because they do not provide a full fostering service (see footnote 3 on page 6) and therefore many of the aspects looked at in this report do not apply to them.

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

The total number of approved foster care households has decreased each year since 2016.

Figure 1.1 **Total** number of approved foster care households, Scotland, at 31 December 2016 - 2019, with sector split



At 31 December 2019, the 57 fostering services in Scotland had a combined total of 3,620 approved foster care households<sup>4</sup> (down 138 (4%) from 3,758 in 2018, and for the third consecutive year).

The 5% decrease in the number of independently approved foster care households between the years 2018 and 2019 is because most of the larger independent fostering services recorded a lower number of approved households in 2019 compared to 2018.

In the local authority sector, the overall decrease is driven by a small minority of services with far fewer households than the previous year. Others recorded only a small decrease in the number of approved households, and a few recorded a rise.

As in previous years, 68% of households were approved by local authority services and 32% were approved by independent services.

<sup>4</sup> 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](#))

Figure 1.2 Number of approved foster care households<sup>1</sup>, at 31 December, split by sector

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Local authority	2473	2,555	2,618	2,765
Independent	1147	1,203	1,205	1,205
<b>Total</b>	<b>3620</b>	<b>3,758</b>	<b>3,823</b>	<b>3,970</b>

1 Excludes those approved exclusively for short breaks.

2 The 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 the ones presented here 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 2017. This change to the data collection may account for some of the difference between the number of foster care households in 2016 and the number thereafter.

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

The most common type of placement approval (Figure 1.3) was 'all placement types', particularly in independent services where 77% of households had this type of blanket approval compared to 47% in local authority services. Whilst in most services this type of approval was common, not all services approved households that can provide all placement types.

Figure 1.3 Number of approved foster care households<sup>1</sup> at 31 December, split by sector and placement type<sup>2</sup>

		2019			2018			2017		
		Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
Number of approved care households <sup>1</sup>		2,473	1,147	3,620	2,555	1,203	3,758	2,618	1,205	3,823
Approval to provide all types of placements	no.	1,160	883	2,043	1,110	908	2,018	883	750	1,633
	%	47%	77%	56%	43%	75%	54%	34%	62%	43%
Permanent placements only	no.	355	135	490	384	154	538	377	202	579
	%	14%	12%	14%	15%	13%	14%	14%	17%	15%
Long Term placements only	no.	255	90	345	284	86	370	333	142	475
	%	10%	8%	10%	11%	7%	10%	13%	12%	12%
Interim placements only	no.	700	39	739	777	55	832	1,017	100	1,117
	%	28%	3%	20%	30%	5%	22%	39%	8%	29%
Emergency placements only	no.	3	0	3	0	<5	0	8	11	19
	%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	<1%	0.0%	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 Carers were categorised differently prior to the 2017 annual return.

4 Values with fewer than five observations have been replaced with "<5" and excluded from totals.

At 31 December 2019 (Figure 1.4), there were 466 households approved to provide short breaks only (down 5% from 489 in 2018).

Figure 1.4. 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
2019	Local authority	320	26
	Independent	146	21
	<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>47</b>
2018	Local authority	347	29
	Independent	142	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>47</b>
2017	Local authority	285	26
	Independent	138	17
	<b>Total</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>43</b>

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

Of the 3,620 approved households (Figure 1.5), 708 (20%) 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 (38%) than local authority households (11%).

Figure 1.5 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
2019	Local authority	269	11%
	Independent	439	38%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>20%</b>
2018	Local authority	300	12%
	Independent	602	50%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>24%</b>
2017	Local authority	342	13%
	Independent	544	45%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>23%</b>
2016	Local authority	269	10%
	Independent	643	53%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>23%</b>

## Private fostering

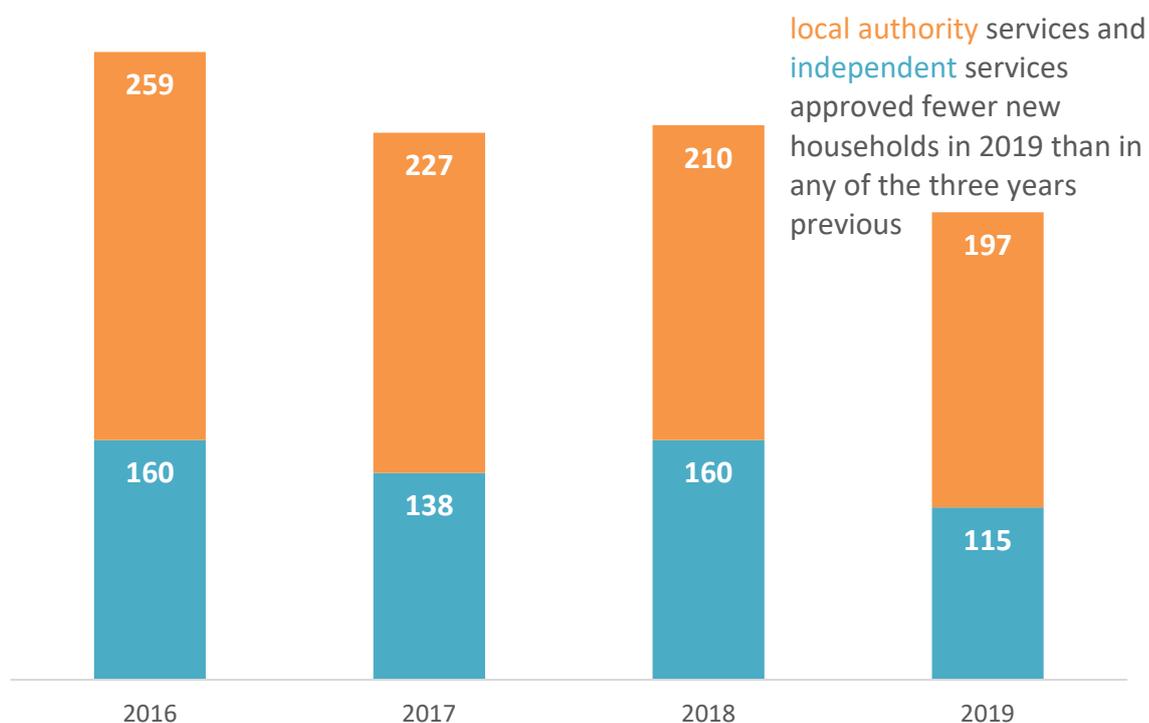
Private fostering is an arrangement where a parent makes an agreement with someone who is not a close relative of the child, to care for that child for more than 28 days. These arrangements are not facilitated by the local authority or a registered service. It is very possible that private foster carers 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 2019, and six in 2018.

## Recruitment and de-registration

In 2019, 312 new foster care households were approved.

Figure 1.6. New foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2016 – 2019, with sector split



Throughout 2019, there were 312 new foster care households approved – 63% were approved by local authority services and 37% approved by independent services. Both sectors approved fewer new carers in 2019 compared to any of the three preceding years and nine fostering services approved zero new carers in 2019.

[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 over half (52%) of new foster carer assessments were completed within six months. Forty-two percent were completed between six months and a year. A small amount (19 assessments or 6%) took a year or more to complete.

The sector level distribution shown in Figure 1.7, in terms of length of time to assess new households, is not mirrored across all services. Some approved all of their new households within the recommended six months, whilst some services didn't complete any or completed only a very small proportion of assessments within six months.

Independent services approved fewer new carer households in 2019 compared to 2018, but a much larger proportion were completed within six months (68% compared to 44% the previous year).

Figure 1.7 Number of new foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector and length of assessment completion

Year	Sector	Up to six months		Between six & 12 months		12 months or more		Total new carer households
		no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
2019	Local authority	85	43%	93	47%	19	10%	197
	Independent	78	68%	37	32%	<5	<5%	115
	Total	163	52%	130	42%	19	10%	312
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

Notes:

The measure of assessment completion time does not include households that were not approved.

The number of new households that are approved may include a small amount of double-counting at the national level, owing to the rare situation where households have dual or derivate approval<sup>5</sup> (are registered with more than one fostering service).

Recruiting households that would foster sibling groups (Figure 1.8) was a challenge for 34 fostering services (58% of all services). As in previous years, this was particularly the case for local authority services, with 78% of services finding it difficult compared to 33% of independent services.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

The number of services that have difficulties recruiting households that will take sibling groups has increased slightly each year since 2016, in both sectors. As in previous years, the main reason described by services was accommodation constraints.

Figure 1.8 Number of services that have difficulties recruiting households that will take sibling groups, split by sector

Year	Sector	Number	% of all services
2019	Local authority	25	78%
	Independent	9	33%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>58%</b>
2018	Local authority	22	69%
	Independent	8	31%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>52%</b>
2017	Local authority	20	63%
	Independent	6	23%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>45%</b>
2016	Local authority	19	59%
	Independent	5	19%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>41%</b>

Throughout 2019, 434 foster carer households de-registered from fostering services (Figure 1.9).

Subtracting this figure from the 312 new households that were approved suggests there was a net decrease of 122 foster care households across Scotland in 2019 (almost equal to the 118 decrease in the recorded total number of approved households).

At an individual service level, where double counting is removed, the data suggests that 31 fostering services – Just over half (53%) of all services that recruit and approve foster carers – experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2019.

Figure 1.9 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

Year	Sector	Number of households that de-registered	Services that experienced a net loss in foster care households over the year	
			No.	% of all services
2019	Local authority	265	17	53%
	Independent	169	14	52%
	Total	434	31	53%
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		

<sup>1</sup> 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 2019 up to 30 June (Figure 1.10), fostering services across Scotland received approximately 5,192 enquiries from potential foster carers. Of these, 5% led to applications, 40% of which were approved. Whilst the number of enquiries is vastly higher than the previous year it should be noted that these figures are estimated by fostering services.

Local authority services received more applications than independent services and approved approximately one out of every three applications. Independent services approved around one in two.

Figure 1.10. 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

Year	Sector	Enquiries	Applications	Approvals	% of enquiries to applications	% of applications approved
2019	Local authority	954	170	64	18%	38%
	Independent	4,238	110	49	3%	45%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,192</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>40%</b>
2018	Local authority	982	158	57	16%	36%
	Independent	2,524	110	50	4%	45%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,506</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>40%</b>
2017	Local authority	1,038	173	73	17%	42%
	Independent	3,094	131	55	4%	42%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,132</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>42%</b>
2016	Local authority	937	146	41	16%	28%
	Independent	2,859	133	64	5%	48%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,796</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>38%</b>

## Care experienced children and young people

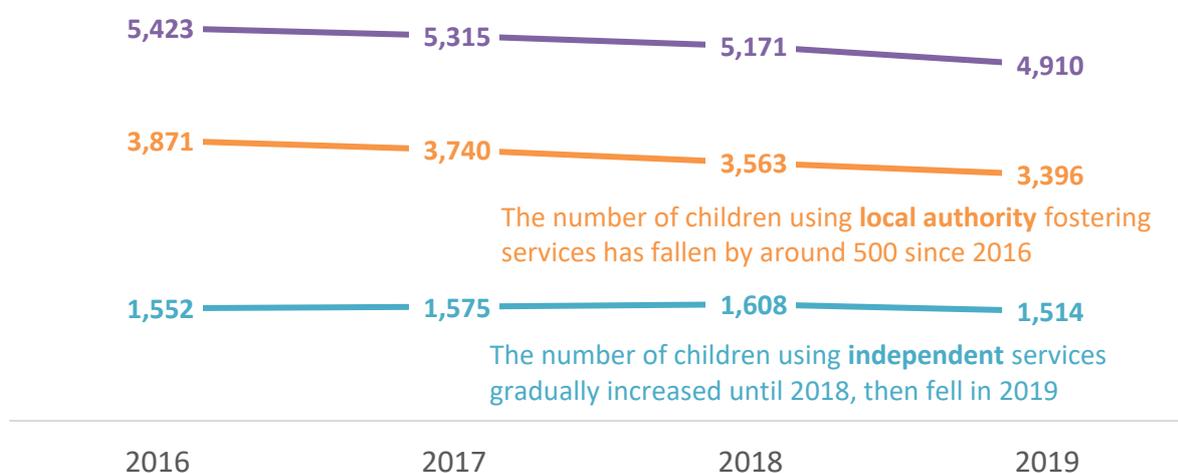
The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to provide fostering and adoption services. They are responsible for assessing and planning for children who, as an outcome of this assessment, require alternative care either through voluntary 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 to review the arrangement 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 2019 annual return, services were asked to record the number of children and young people using their service, categorised by the national placement descriptors. The five services that were not yet categorising placements appear to have used a best-fit approach to record the number of children and young people in each placement type.

The total number of children and young people using fostering services has decreased each year since 2016.

Figure 1.11 **Total** number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, Scotland, 2016 – 2019, with sector split



According to the data gathered in our annual return, 4,910 children were using fostering services (in a placement with an approved foster care household) at 31 December 2019 (continuing the overall downward trend). Of these 4,910 children, 69% (3,396) were placed in local authority approved households and 31% (1,514) were placed in households approved by independent services.

Since 2016 there was a year-on-year rise in the number of children using independent fostering services. However, this year the number has decreased. The overall decrease in the independent sector was driven by a small number of services, with some independent services reporting an increase in the number of children placed. This is also true for the local authority sector.

The trend is consistent with figures published in the [Scottish Government's Children's Social Work Statistics 2018-19](#), which also show a decrease over time in the number of children in a foster care setting.

Figure 1.12 Total number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Local authority	3,396	3,563	3,740	3,871
Independent	1,514	1,608	1,575	1,552
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,910</b>	<b>5,171</b>	<b>5,315</b>	<b>5,423</b>

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.

The distribution of placement type is similar across the two sectors. Compared to local authority services, independent services had a slightly larger proportion of children in long-term placements and a slightly lower proportion in permanent placements at 31 December.

Overall, and in both sectors (Figure 1.13), the most common placement type was an interim foster care placement. Of the total number of children in foster care, 42% (2,057) were in this type of placement.

Figure 1.13 Children and young people using fostering services<sup>1</sup> at 31 December, split by sector and placement type<sup>2</sup>

Year	Sector	Permanent placement			Long Term placement			Interim placement			Emergency placement		
		No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total
2019	Local authority	1242	37%	25%	562	17%	11%	1,467	43%	30%	125	4%	3%
	Independent	471	31%	10%	431	28%	9%	590	39%	12%	22	1%	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,713</b>		<b>35%</b>	<b>993</b>		<b>20%</b>	<b>2,057</b>		<b>42%</b>	<b>147</b>		<b>3%</b>
2018	Local authority	1054	30%	20%	801	22%	15%	1,600	45%	31%	108	3%	2%
	Independent	472	29%	9%	351	22%	7%	777	48%	15%	8	0.5%	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,526</b>		<b>30%</b>	<b>1,152</b>		<b>22%</b>	<b>2,377</b>		<b>46%</b>	<b>116</b>		<b>2%</b>
2017	Local authority	981	26%	18%	920	25%	17%	1,769	47%	33%	70	2%	1%
	Independent	474	30%	9%	475	30%	9%	610	39%	11%	16	1%	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,455</b>		<b>27%</b>	<b>1,395</b>		<b>26%</b>	<b>2,379</b>		<b>45%</b>	<b>86</b>		<b>2%</b>

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, information on which can be found in the introduction page.

3 Prior to 2017 placements were categorised differently, so cannot be compared.

## Children and young people awaiting permanent placement

At 31 December 2019, there were 188 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 (Figure 1.14).

This only includes children that were in local authority approved carer households. Although the number has declined from 232 in 2018, relatively speaking the proportion of the children using fostering services and not in a permanent placement is around the same as in previous years (9%).

At the same time there were 17 children, across seven local authority services, living at home or with kinship carers and waiting on a foster care placement to become available. This is lower than last year when there were 29 children waiting across eight services.

Figure 1.14 Number of children and young people using local authority fostering services at 31 December needing a permanent placement and the number that were waiting for a foster care placement to become available

Year	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
2019	188	20	17	7
2018	232	18	29	8
2017	224	20	23	7
2016	209	18	25	6

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 395 placements involving 355 children and young people ended on an unplanned<sup>6</sup> basis throughout 2019, up slightly from 372 placements in 2018.

Of the placements that ended, 76 (19%) were permanent placements.

Figure 1.15 Number of foster placements that ended on an unplanned basis, between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector

Measure	Year	Local authority placements	Household provided by placing authority	Household approved by another local authority, purchased by placing authority	Independent placements	Total
Number of placements that ended	2019	248	206	42	147	395
	2018	235	199	36	137	372
	2017	232	203	29	123	355
	2016	255	232	23	132	387
Number of permanent placements that ended	2019	52	43	9	24	76
	2018	52	47	5	17	69
	2017	43	43	<5	28	71
	2016	47	42	5	23	70
Number of services with placements ending	2019	28	27	10	15	43
	2018	31	30	10	20	51
	2017	28	27	10	19	47
	2016	27	26	7	17	44
Number of children that experienced a placement end	2019	211	174	37	144	355

Note: the 2018 value for 'Total' and 'Local authority placements' has been revised in this table and will therefore not match the figure published in the 2018-19 report.

## Local authority commissioned placements

Throughout 2019, 483 children were placed in a foster care placement purchased by a local authority (around the same number as the previous year) (Figure 1.16).

Just over three quarters (78%) of the places were purchased through the national contract; 3% were exclusively short breaks.

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

Figure 1.16 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 <sup>1</sup>	Number of placements purchased through the national contract (and percentage of placed)	Number of placements that were exclusively short breaks
2019	483	379 (78%)	16 (3%)
2018	490	339 (69%)	17 (3%)
2017	569	317 (56%)	9 (2%)
2016	864	382 (44%)	21(2%)

1 Includes placements that were exclusively short break situations, as well as temporary placements, permanent placements, and any other type of placement.

## 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. 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 2019, 12 fostering services reported that they had placed children with refugee or asylum-seeking status. Ten were local authority and two were independent fostering services (Figure 1.17).

Twenty-three children with asylum seeking and refugee status were using local authority fostering services at 31 December 2019 (Figure 1.18).

Figure 1.17 Breakdown of whether services had placed children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status at 31 December, split by sector

Year	Sector	Had placed	Had not placed
2019	Local authority	10 (31%)	22 (69%)
	Independent	2 (7%)	23 (85%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12 (20%)</b>	<b>45 (76%)</b>
2018	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	3 (12%)	23 (88%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (17%)</b>	<b>48 (83%)</b>
2017	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	3 (11%)	25 (89%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (17%)</b>	<b>50 (83%)</b>
2016	Local authority	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
	Independent	2 (7%)	25 (93%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9 (16%)</b>	<b>50 (85%)</b>

Figure 1.18 Number of children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Local authority	23	17	14	16
Independent	<5	<5	<5	<5
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>

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

### Fostering service capacity

Between 1 January and 31 December 2019, the number of children coming into foster care exceeded the number of new foster care households in 31 of the 32 local authority services.

Figure 1.19 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

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Total number of services:	31	30	29	25
Percentage of local authority services	97%	94%	91%	78%

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.

Figure 1.20 shows that throughout 2019 households exceeded their approval range on 711 occasions across 32 local authority fostering services and 14 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 enable existing placements to continue beyond age approval; to make the most appropriate match between child/young person and their foster carer.

Figure 1.20 Number of occasions and number of services where children and young people placed in foster care households resulted in the household going outwith their approval range, split by sector

		Number of occasions	Number of services
2019	Local authority	595	32
	Independent	116	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>46</b>
2018	Local authority	681	30
	Independent	104	11
	<b>Total</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>41</b>
2017	Local authority	619	32
	Independent	130	11
	<b>Total</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>43</b>
2016	Local authority	635	31
	Independent	89	10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>41</b>

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

The Scottish Government laid in Parliament an amendment to The Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations to introduce a maximum foster care placement limit of three unrelated children, with exemptions for sibling groups and emergency placements. The amendment Regulations came into force on 29 December 2014.

To ensure compliance with this standard, the Final Report of the Scottish Government's Foster Carer Review recommends that all exemptions from the maximum limit that are granted by fostering panels, and all emergency placements made above the maximum limited, be recorded in the annual return submitted to us. The information was first gathered in the December 2018 annual return (Figure 1.21).

Across 16 fostering services there were 59 placements above the maximum limit of three unrelated children in 2019.

Most of these (52) happened on an emergency basis (approved by the agency decision maker), and 21 happened through a decision made by the Panel.

Figure 1.21 Number of placements made above the maximum limit of three unrelated children, and the number of services where this occurred.

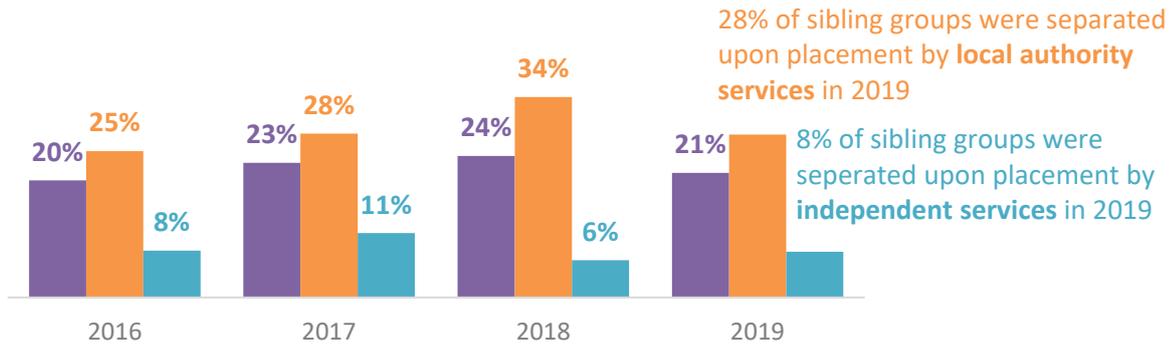
	Number of services	Number of placements above max limit	Decision made by the Panel	Happened on an emergency basis
2019	16	59	21	52
2018	18	76	28	71

1 This data was not collected prior to 2018

## Sibling group separation

At 31 December 2019, there were 939 sibling groups in foster care, 200 (21%) were separated upon placement. This is down slightly from 24% in 2018.

Figure 1.22 The proportion of sibling groups at 31 December that were separated upon placement, Scotland, 2016-2019, with sector split



Twenty-eight percent (176) of the 632 sibling groups using local authority fostering services were separated upon placement and 8% (24) of the 307 sibling groups using independent fostering services were separated (Figure 1.23).

Local authority fostering services commission independent fostering services to place siblings if the independent service can place them together. This is why independent services have reported a consistently lower percentage of siblings being placed separately, and mostly cited 'following assessment' as the reason, whilst local authority services also cited 'lack of resource' and 'emergency situation' as reasons (Figure 1.24).

Figure 1.23 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
2019	Local authority	632	176	28%
	Independent	307	24	8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>21%</b>
2018	Local authority	666	228	34%
	Independent	376	24	6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,042</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>24%</b>
2017	Local authority	703	199	28%
	Independent	309	33	11%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,012</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>23%</b>
2016	Local authority	755	189	25%
	Independent	282	22	8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,037</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>20%</b>

1 The 2016 figures presented here for Independent and total services have been revised to exclude Scottish Adoption (fostering service) and St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society and therefore do not match the figures published in the Fostering and Adoption 2016/17 statistical bulletin.

Figure 1.24 Reasons for separating sibling groups, broken down by the number of services that selected each option

		Following assessment	Lack of resource	Emergency situation	Other
2019	Local authority	19	22	10	8
	Independent	8	<5	<5	<5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
2018	Local authority	18	23	13	8
	Independent	8	<5	<5	<5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>
2017	Local authority	23	24	17	6
	Independent	8	<5	5	<5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>
2016	Local authority	22	22	17	5
	Independent	9	<5	<5	<5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>

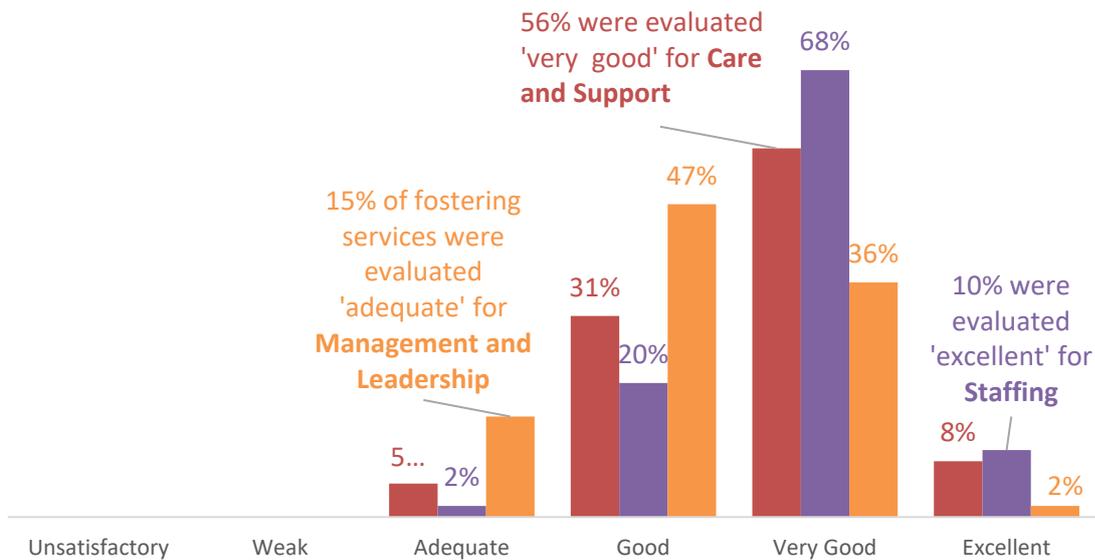
1 Services were able to select as many reasons as were applicable.

## 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 2020.

Overall, the quality of fostering services was high, with ‘very good’ being the most common evaluation for the quality theme Care and Support and the quality theme Staffing.

Figure 1.25 Evaluation of Fostering services resulting from inspection, by quality theme, Scotland, 31 March 2020



At 31 March 2020, 85% of fostering services had evaluations of ‘good’ or better across all quality themes. Furthermore, 31% were evaluated ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ across all quality themes (down from 46% the year before). No services were evaluated as ‘adequate’ or lower across all quality themes but 15% were evaluated adequate in at least one quality theme (compared to 10% the previous year).

Figure 1.26 Overview of fostering service grades at 31 March 2020, 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	7	22%	11	41%	18	31%
Grades of good or better for all quality themes	25	78%	25	93%	50	85%
Grades of adequate or lower for at least one quality theme	7	22%	2	7%	9	15%
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 (Figure 1.27), with many services (33 of 59) being evaluated as 'very good'. Five services in the independent sector were evaluated as 'excellent'. Three local authority services were rated 'adequate' for Care and Support. (Comparing to these services' previous grades for Care and Support, two were down from 'very good' and one stayed the same).

For staffing, (Figure 1.28) six independent services were evaluated as 'excellent'. The majority were rated 'very good'.

Two independent services and seven local authority services were rated 'adequate' for management and leadership (Figure 1.29). Some were down from 'good' or 'very good' at the same period the previous year, and some stayed the same. The rest were evaluated as 'good' or 'very good', with one independent service rated 'excellent'.

Figure 1.27 Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Care and Support, at 31 March 2020

	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	3	9%	0	0%	3	5%
Good	15	47%	3	11%	18	31%
Very Good	14	44%	19	70%	33	56%
Excellent	0	0%	5	19%	5	8%

Figure 1.28 Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Staffing, at 31 March 2020

	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%	0	0%	1	2%
Good	9	28%	3	11%	12	20%
Very Good	22	69%	18	67%	40	68%
Excellent	0	0%	6	22%	6	10%

Figure 1.29 Breakdown of grades given to Fostering services for quality theme Management and Leadership, at 31 March 2020

	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	7	22%	2	7%	9	15%
Good	14	44%	14	52%	28	47%
Very Good	11	34%	10	37%	21	36%
Excellent	0	0%	1	4%	1	2%

## Summary of foster care

At 31 December 2019, there were 59 fostering services registered with us in Scotland, that recruit and approve foster care households; 32 were local authority services and 27 were independent services.

These fostering services had a combined total of 3,620 approved foster care households at 31 December 2019. This total has decreased each year since 2016 because fewer new households were being approved and more were deregistering. This year, 31 fostering services (53% of all services that recruit and approve foster carers) experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2019.

As in previous years, recruiting households in 2019 that would foster sibling groups was a challenge for many fostering services, particularly local authority services, with 78% finding it difficult compared to 33% of independent services. The main reason described by services was accommodation constraints. The number of sibling groups using the Scottish fostering system was lower in 2019 than any of the three years previous, as was the number (200) and proportion separated upon placement (21%).

Fostering services approve and place children and young people in foster care placements. At 31 December 2019, 4,910 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 2016, and alongside this we have seen a steady decrease in the overall number of children placed in local authority approved households and a gradual increase in the overall number of children using independent services. However, between 2018 and 2019 both sectors recorded an overall decrease in the number of children using their fostering services.

At 31 December 2019, there were 188 children and young people identified by local authority fostering services as needing a placement secured by a Permanence Order that were not in or not moving towards such a placement. That is 6% of the children using local authority fostering services – around the same proportion as the previous years.

Throughout 2019, 395 placements of children ended on an unplanned basis, across 43 fostering services, concerning 355 children. This is slightly higher than any of the three years previous. Of the placements that ended, 76 (19%) were permanent placements, also up slightly on the three previous years.

Fostering services place children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status. The numbers are generally very low, although this year more children with this status (at least 23) were using fostering services than in any of the three years previous.

Overall, the quality of fostering services was high. At 31 March 2020, 85% of fostering services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes (down from 90% the year before). Furthermore, 31% were evaluated 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes (down from 46% the year before). No services were evaluated as 'adequate' or lower across all quality themes but 15% were evaluated adequate in at least one quality theme.

## Section 2: Adoption

### Adoption services

At 31 December 2019, there were 38 registered adoption services in Scotland; 32 were local authority services and six were voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in this report).

All 38 registered services submitted a 2019 annual return.

One independent service (Birthlink) operates as a support service for those who have been affected by adoption with a Scottish connection and doesn't offer a full adoption service. Therefore, this service has been excluded from the statistics that follow (except the evaluation statistics).

The 2019 data in this report is therefore based on the data submitted by 37 adoption services in their 2019 annual return, together with evaluation data as at 31 March 2020 for 38 adoption services. This bulletin also includes data from annual returns covering the period 2016-2018 and where a service did not submit an annual return for a given year, we impute data from the preceding year.

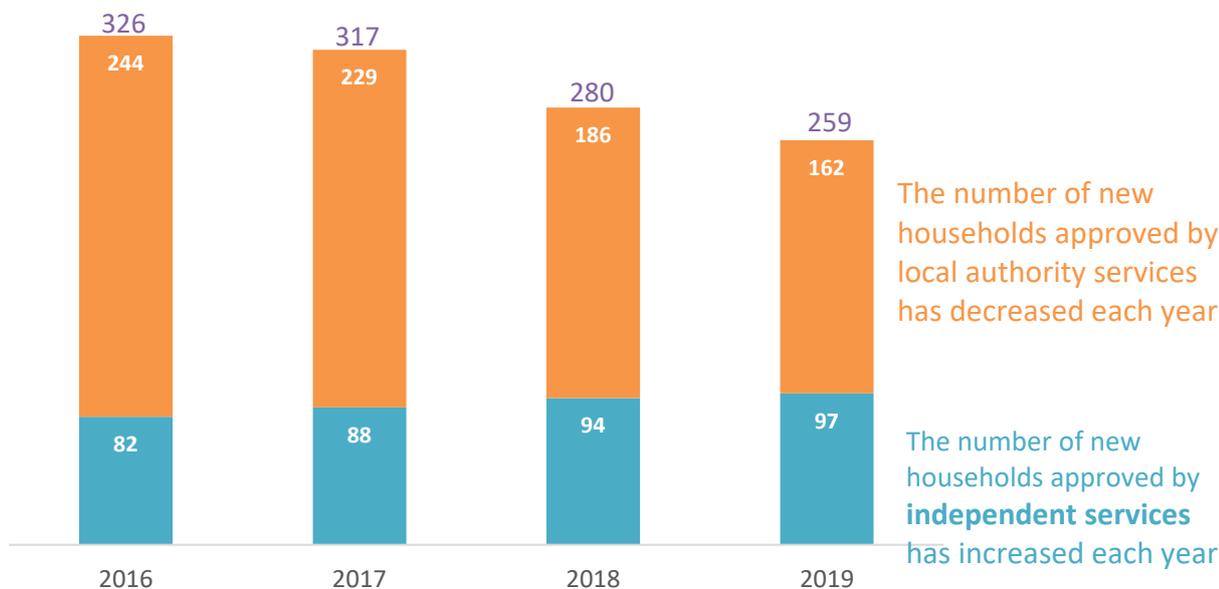
This report covers four different aspects of adoption services:

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

## New approved households

There is a downward trend in the total number of new households being approved each year.

Figure 2.1 The **total** number of new households approved between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2016-2019, with sector split



In 2019, 259 new households were approved for adoption across 35 adoption services (Figure 2.1). Some services approved more adoptive households this year compared to last, but many services approved fewer, resulting in the continued downward trend that can be seen.

## Timescales to approval

The table below presents the variation in approval completion time of new adoptive households (from the point of application to approval by the adoption panel). The numbers represent the number of services, for example, 7 services approved all of their new households within 6 months. Most services approved at least some of their new households within six months, but many also had some households that took over 12 months to approve.

Figure 2.2 Number of services, by minimum and maximum approval completion time, 2019

		Maximum time to approve		
		Within 6 months	6 to 11 months	12 months or over
Minimum time to approve	Within 6 months	7	10	12
	6 to 11 months		2	1
	12 months or over			3

## Age group approval

Most of the new households (73%) were approved to adopt children aged two to five years old, 40% were approved to adopt infants under two years old, and one in every 11 were approved for older children (aged six plus). The number and proportion of households approved to adopt older children has decreased in each of the last two years (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Number and proportion of new approved households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by age range approval

Year	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	
2019	259	104	40%	189	73%	28	11%
2018	280	148	53%	173	62%	35	13%
2017	317	145	46%	198	62%	50	16%
2016	326	170	52%	201	62%	39	12%

## Sibling group approval

At least three in every ten of the new households that were approved in 2019 were approved for sibling groups, mainly of two children. Five new households were approved to adopt sibling groups of three children. No households were approved for sibling groups of more than three children. This is in line with previous years.

Figure 2.4 Number and proportion of new approved households between 1 January and 31 December, split by sibling group approval

		sibling group of two children / young people		sibling group of three children / young people		sibling group of more than three children / young people	
		No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households
		2019	Local authority	48	30%	<5	<1%
	Independent	27	28%	<5	<1%	0	0%
	Total	75	29%	5	2%	0	0%
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	<1%	0	0%
	Independent	30	34%	<5	<1%	0	0%
	Total	89	28%	<5	<1%	0	0%
2016	Local authority	50	20%	<5	<1%	0	0%
	Independent	28	34%	<5	<1%	0	0%
	Total	78	24%	<5	<1%	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 2019, 181 approved households, across 27 of the 32 local authority services and in all five of the independent services, were waiting for children to be placed.

Figure 2.5 Number of approved households, at 31 December, that were waiting for children or young people to be placed, split by sector

		number of households	number of services
2019	Local authority	111	27
	Independent	70	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>32</b>
2018	Local authority	138	26
	Independent	49	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>31</b>
2017	Local authority	159	29
	Independent	56	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>34</b>
2016	Local authority	155	
	Independent	50	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	

1 Excludes those approved exclusively for inter-country adoptions.

## Recruitment

An estimated 819 enquiries from potential adopters were received across 36 adoption services between 1 January and 30 June 2019 (Figure 2.6). Of these, 20% progressed to applications to become an approved household of which 46% were approved. Overall, and in both sectors, a higher proportion of applications were approved in 2019 compared to 2018 and 2017, although not quite as many as in 2016.

Figure 2.6 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
2019	Local authority	388	95	28	24%	29%	31
	Independent	431	70	48	16%	69%	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>36</b>
2018	Local authority	421	104	16	25%	15%	31
	Independent	361	71	40	20%	56%	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>36</b>
2017	Local authority	372	89	23	24%	26%	27
	Independent	399	52	29	13%	56%	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>30</b>
2016	Local authority	520	119	46	23%	39%	Data not Available
	Independent	465	47	37	10%	79%	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>50%</b>	

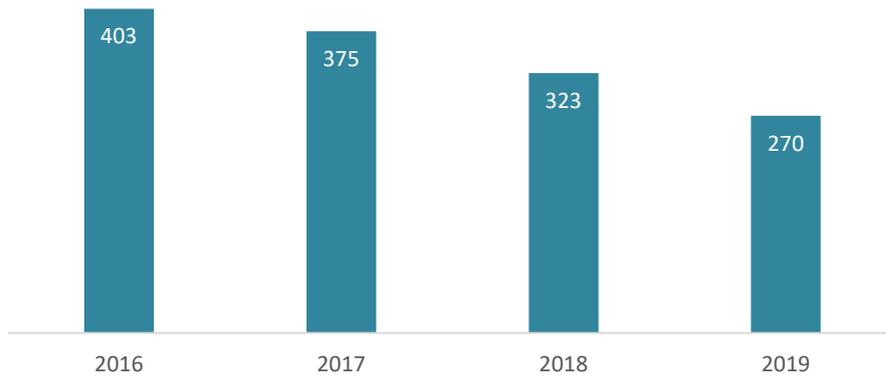
## Children and young people

### 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 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.

The number of children and young people approved for adoption each year continues to decrease (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7 Children and young people approved for adoption by local authority services between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2016-2019



In 2019, there were 270 children approved for adoption (across 32 local authority adoption services), down 16% from 323 in 2018 and for the third year in a row. Half of the children were younger than two years old when they were approved for adoption, and just under half (44%) were aged two to five years old. A small proportion (7%) were age six years old or more.

Figure 2.8 Number of children and young people approved for adoption<sup>1</sup> by local authority services, between 1 January and 31 December, broken down by the age of the child at the time of approval

		2019	2018	2017	2016
Total number of children approved for adoption		270	323	375	403
Age less than two years old	number	136	171	166	207
	% of total	50%	53%	44%	51%
Age two years old or more but less than six	number	119	135	175	167
	% of total	44%	42%	47%	41%
Age six years old or more	number	15	14	30	29
	% of total	6%	4%	8%	7%

- 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 The 'age six years old or more' group was split into age 6-10 and 11+ in previous publications, however the number in the 11+ category was small (<5) therefore this year we have grouped the two age categories into one in order to present an exact figure for 2019.

## 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 process<sup>7</sup>.

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.

In the annual return we ask local authority adoption services about their assessment completion time. This is from the point of the looked after children review agreeing the need for permanence to approval at the adoption panel.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Figure 2.9 below presents the variation in assessment completion time. The numbers represent the number of services. For example, one service completed all assessments within three months, many completed some assessments within three months but also had some which took six months or longer.

Figure 2.9 Number of services, by minimum and maximum assessment completion time, 2019

		Maximum time to assess		
		Within 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 months or over
Minimum time to assess	Within 3 months	1	2	12
	3 to 5 months		2	7
	6 months or over			6

## Children and young people approved and placed with families

In 2019, 242 children were placed with their new adoptive family across 30 local authorities (Figure 2.10).

This includes children approved for adoption in 2019 or in the previous year/years. The number of children placed is down for the third consecutive year, and by 5% from 255 in 2018. As in the previous year, two-thirds of the placements were interagency.

Figure 2.10 Number of children placed with prospective adoptive families, between 1 January and 31 December

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Total	242	255	352	362
Proportion placed in households approved by another local authority	21%	22%		
Proportion placed in households approved by independent agencies	45%	44%		Data not available

## Timescales to match

The Adoption and Permanence Panel find a 'match' for the child in terms of who their long-term carer should be. In the annual return we ask local authority adoption services about the time it took to match children with adoptive families, from the point of registration at panel to matching at panel.

Figure 2.11 presents the variation in matching time. The numbers represent the number of services and exclude services that carry out registration and matching at the same time.

For example, of the 20 services that placed children with a family and do not carry out registration and matching at the same time, only one made all matches within three months.

Many made some matches within three months but also had cases that took three months or longer.

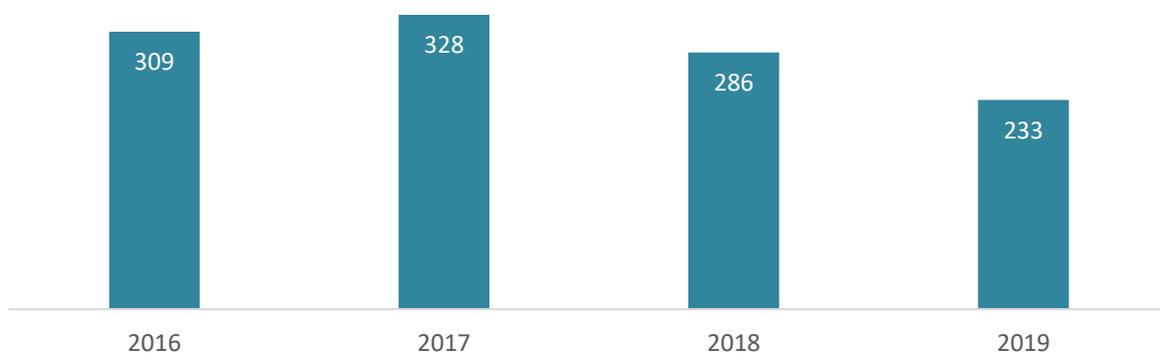
Figure 2.11 Number of services, by minimum and maximum time to match children with adoptive families, 2019

		Maximum time to match			
		Within 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	12 months or over
Minimum time to match	Within 3 months	1	4	2	5
	3 to 5 months				2
	6 to 11 months			2	2
	12 months or over				2

## Children and young people adopted

The number of children and young people legally adopted during the calendar year fell for the second consecutive year.

Figure 2.12 Children and young people adopted (by court order) between 1 January and 31 December, Scotland, 2016-2019



Throughout 2019, 233 children were legally adopted, down 19% from 286 in 2018.

The Scottish Government reported in Children's Social Work Statistics 2018-19 that between 1 August 2018 and 31 July 2019, 263 children ceased to be 'looked after' by the local authority because they were adopted (down from 321 the previous reporting year).

Both sources show a pattern of an increase in 2017 in the number of children being adopted, followed by a drop in each of the two most recent years.

## Timescales to adopt

In the annual return we ask local authority adoption services about the time it took to grant full adoption orders after placing a child with their adoptive family.

Figure 2.13 below presents the variation in the time taken to grant full adoption. The numbers represent the number of services. For example, of the 30 services that completed adoptions, there were none that granted all orders within six months. Most services had cases where it took 12 months or more to grant the full adoption order.

Figure 2.13 Number of services, by minimum and maximum time to grant full adoption order, 2019

		Maximum time to grant adoption order		
		Within 6 months	6 to 11 months	12 months or over
Minimum time to grant adoption order	Within 6 months		1	12
	6 to 11 months		2	10
	12 months or over			3

## Children and young people awaiting placement

At 31 December 2019, there were 153 children and young people across 23 local authority services that had been approved for adoption and were waiting to be matched with approved adopters (Figure 2.14).

This is consistent with the number of children on Scotland's adoption register at 31 December 2019<sup>8</sup> - 152.

The number waiting to be matched was down 21% from 194 in 2018 which is in line with the fall in the number of children approved for adoption.

Of the children waiting to be matched, 47 (31%) were part of a sibling group that services were trying to keep together. This also reflects the statistics published in the Scotland's Adoption Register Annual Report 2018-19 in which 52 (30%) of referrals were siblings to be placed together.

In total, 39 (25%) of the children waiting to be matched had been waiting for over one year, up from 22% the previous year.

<sup>8</sup> The intended outcome of placing children on the [Scottish Adoption Register](#) is to match them with adoptive households

Figure 2.14 Number 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, and the number that had been waiting for over one year

		2019	2018	2017	2016
Total number of children approved and waiting		153	194	217	228
Waiting and are part of a sibling group	number	47	67	94	90
	per 100 children waiting	31	35	43	39
Total number of sibling groups waiting		24	33	48	45
Waiting for over one year	number	39	43	54	57
	per 100 children waiting	25	22	25	25

- 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.

Figure 2.15 shows that 17 local authority adoption services (74% of all services with children waiting to be matched) had children younger than two years old waiting to be matched; 20 (87%) had children age two to five years old waiting to be matched. No services had children 11 years or older waiting to be matched.

Figure 2.15 Number and percentage of local authority services with children and young people waiting to be matched with approved adopters at 31 December, split by the age category of the children

		2019	2018	2017	2016
Less than two years old	number	17	23	17	16
	%	74%	85%	53%	50%
Two or over but under six years old	number	20	22	24	24
	%	87%	81%	75%	75%
Six or over but under 11 years old	number	8	14	14	13
	%	35%	52%	44%	41%
Eleven years old or over	number	0	5	0	0
	%	0%	19%	0%	0%

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

## Adoptions that break down

In 2019, 35 adoptions broke down (disrupted).

Of these breakdowns, the majority (21) happened before the adoption order was granted, with 14 occurring after. Whilst many of the breakdowns took place in households approved by the placing authority, there were also several interagency adoptions that broke down. There were no breakdowns post adoption order being granted recorded by independent services.

Figure 2.16 Adoption breakdowns between 1 January and 31 December, by timing of placement and type of placement

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Before adoption order was granted	21	12	16	17
After the adoption order was granted	14	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>

1 In previous publications the figures were broken down by type of placement, however the numbers were small (<5) therefore this year we have grouped them to present an exact figure for 2019. For 2018 and earlier the totals are underestimated due to the applied disclosure control.

## 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.

All local authority adoption services provided post-adoption support to adoptive households in 2019, ranging from supporting fewer than five to supporting 150 households. In total 1,885 households received post-adoption support from local authority adoption services, 3% more than in 2018. Independent services also provided post-adoption support to their adoptive households, 740 in total.

### Services outside Scotland

Very few of Scotland's local authority adoption services and none of the independent services placed children from elsewhere in the UK and very few placed children with adoptive households outwith Scotland. In total, there were fewer than five children in each of these situations. Because the numbers are small by the nature of the situations they refer to, they are prone to fluctuate from one year to the next. However, it should be noted that the number of children placed in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK was down considerably from the previous year (Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17 Number of children and young people placed to and from elsewhere in the UK, between 1 January and 31 December

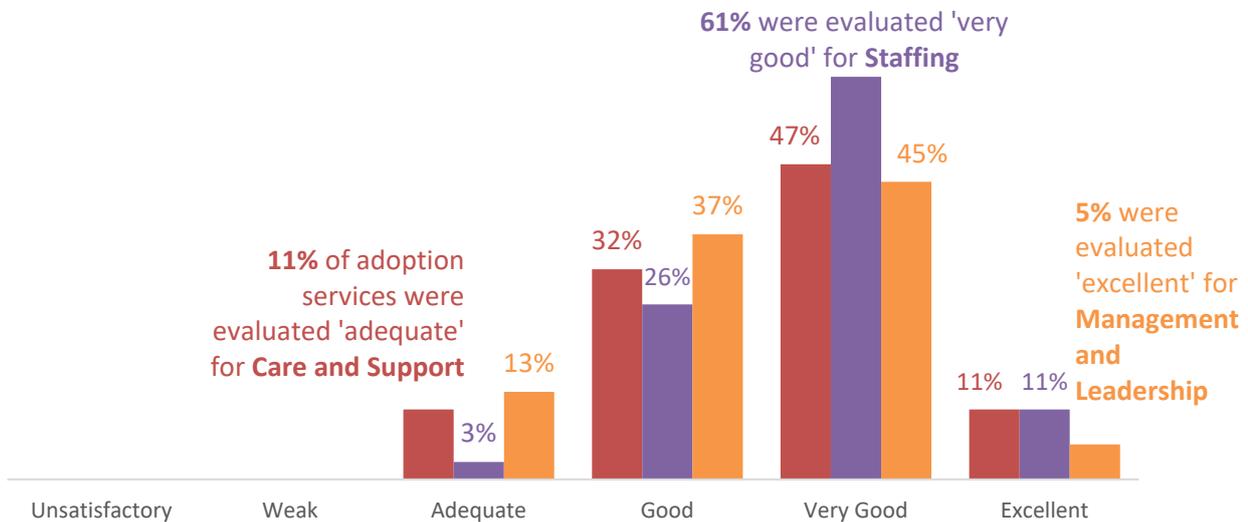
	2019	2018	2017	2016
Placed in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK	<5	37	13	6
Placed elsewhere in the UK by Scottish local authorities	<5	10	31	28

## 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 2020.

Overall, the quality of adoption services was high, with ‘very good’ being the most common evaluation (Figure 2.18).

Figure 2.18 Evaluation of Adoption services resulting from inspection, by quality theme, Scotland, 31 March 2020



At 31 March 2020, 87% of the adoption services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes (Figure 2.19). Furthermore, 45% were evaluated as 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes. One service was evaluated as 'adequate' across all quality themes.

Figure 2.19 Overview of adoption service grades at 31 March 2020, 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%	4	67%	17	45%
Grades of good or better for all quality themes	28	88%	5	83%	33	87%
Grades of adequate or lower for at least one quality theme	4	13%	1	17%	5	13%
Grades of adequate or lower for all quality themes	0	0%	1	17%	1	3%

A breakdown of grades for each quality theme is provided in Figures 2.20 to 2.22.

The grading profile of adoption services for the quality theme Care and Support is positive, with the 18 of the 38 services (47%) evaluated 'very good' and four 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'. Half of the adoption services were evaluated 'very good' or 'excellent' for Management and Leadership, and none were rated 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Figure 2.20 Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Care and Support, at 31 March 2020

	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	3	9%	1	17%	4	11%
Good	12	38%	0	0%	12	32%
Very Good	16	50%	2	33%	18	47%
Excellent	1	3%	3	50%	4	11%

Figure 2.21 Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Staffing, at 31 March 2020

	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	0	0%	1	17%	1	3%
Good	10	31%	0	0%	10	26%
Very Good	21	66%	2	33%	23	61%
Excellent	1	3%	3	50%	4	11%

Figure 2.22 Breakdown of grades given to Adoption services for quality theme Management and Leadership, at 31 March 2020

	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%	1	17%	5	13%
Good	13	41%	1	17%	14	37%
Very Good	14	44%	3	50%	17	45%
Excellent	1	3%	1	17%	2	5%

## Summary of adoption

At 31 December 2019, 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 2019, 259 new households were approved across Scotland. Some services approved more adoptive households this year compared to last, but more services approved fewer, continuing the downward trend of the previous two years. The length of the assessment of adoptive households varies, with some new households being approved within the six months and some taking a year or more to complete.

Like previous years, few were approved to adopt older children (age six and over) or sibling groups of three or more and none were approved for four or more siblings. However, 75 new adoptive households were recruited with approval to adopt sibling groups of two.

In 2019, 270 children were approved for adoption, 242 children were placed with their new adoptive family, and 233 children were legally adopted. All of these numbers are down from the previous year.

At the 31 December 2019, 153 children were waiting to be matched with approved adopters. Of these children, 25% (39) had been waiting for over one year and 31% (47) were part of a sibling group that services were trying to keep together.

Overall, the quality of adoption services was very high. At 31 March 2020, 87% of adoption services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes. Furthermore, 45% were evaluated as 'very good' or 'excellent' across all quality themes. Only 13% had an evaluation of 'adequate' or lower in at least one quality theme. One service was 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

Website: [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)  
Email: [enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot)  
Enquiries: 0345 600 9527



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