

# COMMENTARY

## 1. Numbers of children looked after in England

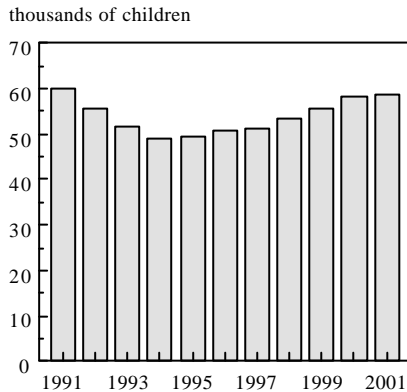
(Tables A, B, 1 – 5, 12 and 14)

### Looked after at 31 March

**1.1** The latest figures show that the **snapshot** total of children looked after in England at 31 March 2001 was 58,900, excluding those accommodated for an agreed series of short term placements. This was 1% higher than the revised estimate for 2000 (58,100). 52 out of every 10,000 children of the resident population of England were looked after at the end of 2000/2001.

**1.2** As can be seen in Table A and Figure 1.1 the long-term decline in the number of looked after children came to an end in 1994, when 49,100 were looked after at 31 March. Since then there has been a 20% rise in the number of children looked after, and a 17% rise in the rate per 10,000 children.

**Figure 1.1 Number of children looked after at 31 March, 1991 to 2001**



### Looked after during the year

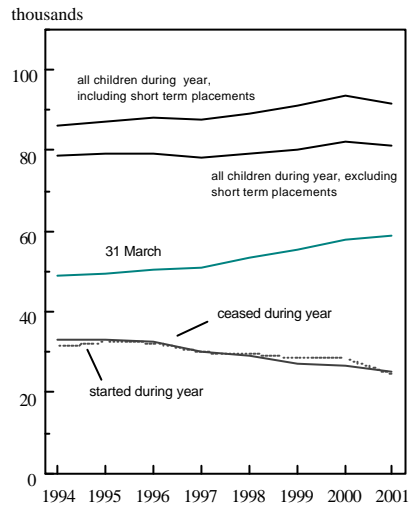
**1.3** The number of children revealed by a **snapshot** is in many ways little more than a reflection of the volume of care provided at that time. This is because the chances of capturing any particular child in a snapshot view depends on the length of time that child is in care. If children are on average being looked after for longer, then more will be seen on any given day. (See Section 7 of the Commentary "Duration and Volume of Care"). A better measure, therefore, of

assessing the growth in the number of children in the care system is to look at the number of children looked after **at any time** during the year.

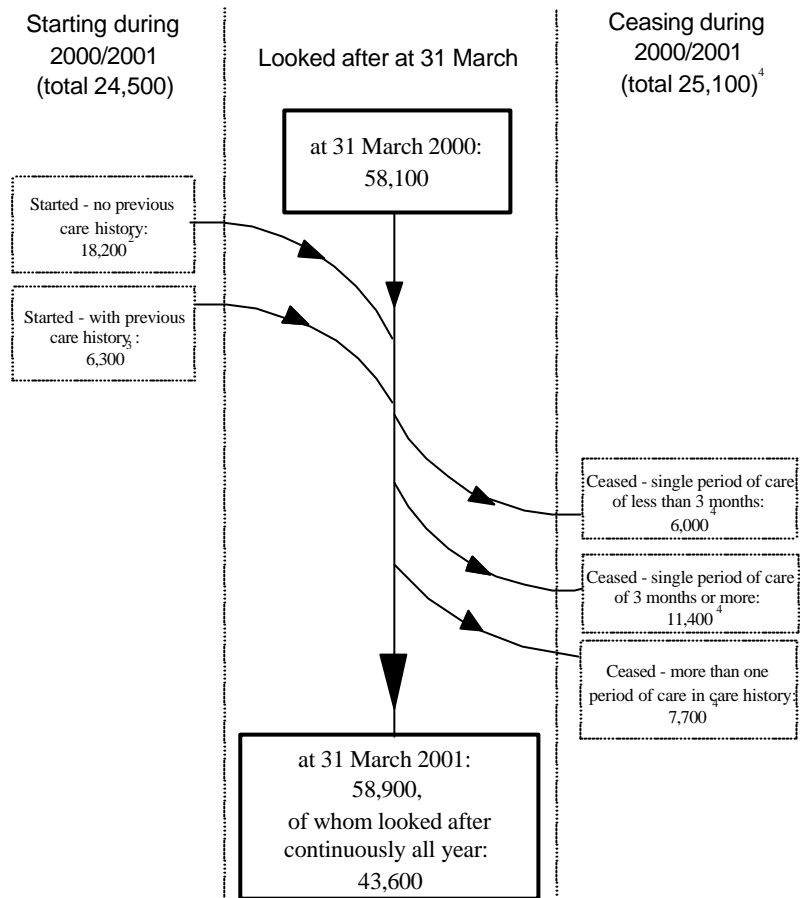
**1.4** The total number of children looked after during the year 2000/2001 is estimated at 91,800, 2% lower than during the previous year, and representing 81 out of every 10,000 children under 18 years (see Table 1 and Figure 1.2). This figure includes children who were looked after at some time during the year under a series of short term placements. When measured in this way the population of looked after children has grown by 7% since 1993/94.

**1.5** Table 1 also shows figures for the numbers looked after during the year excluding children who during that time were looked after only under a series of short term placements (see Section 2). It is estimated that on this basis 81,200 children were looked after at some time during 2000/2001, 1% lower than during the previous year and 3% up on 1993/94 (see Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2 Number of children looked after at 31 March and during the year, and number starting & ceasing to be looked after during the year, 1994 to 2001**



**Figure 1.3 Children starting, ceasing and continuing to be looked after during 2000/2001<sup>1,5</sup>**



Total number of children looked after at any time during the year = 81,200<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Excludes children only looked after under agreed series of short term placements

<sup>2</sup> With current local authority

<sup>3</sup> Including children who were looked after at 31 March 2000 and who ceased and started again

<sup>4</sup> Including children who started again later in 2000/2001 and were looked after at 31 March 2001

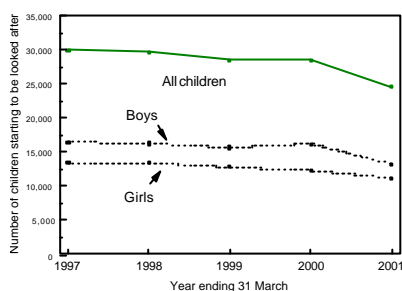
<sup>5</sup> Table does not balance due to discrepancies between the CLA100 returns and SSDA903 submission (See Technical Notes)

## Started to be looked after

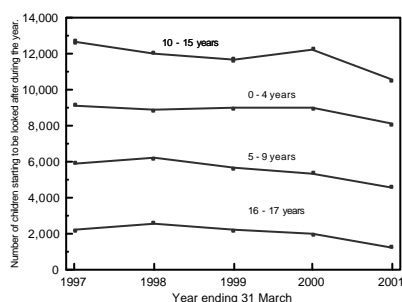
**1.6** The total number of children who **started** to be looked after during the 2000/2001 year was 24,500 excluding children starting an agreed series of short term placements (compared with 28,500 a year earlier). The number of children who started to be looked after in 1995 was 32,500, since when the numbers starting during the year have fallen by 25% (Table 4 and Figure 1.2).

**1.7** The fall across this period in the numbers starting to be looked after has been fairly consistent, although as Figure 1.2 shows, the numbers starting during the year ending 31 March 2000 is somewhat out of line. (This is a revised figure to the one published last year). Figures 1.4 and 1.5 below show that this unexpected increase in children starting in 2000 was more pronounced amongst boys than girls, and more pronounced in the 0-4 and 10-15 age groups.

**Figure 1.4** Number of children starting to be looked after by sex during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001



**Figure 1.5** Number of children starting to be looked after by age during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001



**1.8** A number of factors have been suggested to account for this blip. The age and gender profile

suggests that some of this increase may be due to the result of improved data quality, following the introduction of the AD1 (Adoptions) and OC1 (care leavers) returns, which are collected for all looked after children (rather than just a one-third sample). Some of the increase could also be due to an increase in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children entering the system.

## Ceased to be looked after

**1.9** The total number of children who **ceased** to be looked after during the 2000/2001 year was 25,100 compared with 26,800 a year earlier (down 6%) and with 33,200 in 1995 (down 24%) (Table 4 and Figure 1.2).

## The flow of children in and out of care

**1.10** Figure 1.3 illustrates the relationship between the numbers of children who started and ceased to be looked after during 2000/2001 and those who were looked after at the start and the end of the period. It covers the experience of the 81,200 children who were looked after at some time during the period (but excludes children who were looked after during the year only under agreed series of short term placements).

**1.11** Of those children starting to be looked after during the year 18,200 (75%) had no previous care history with their local council. Most of the remainder had been looked after during a previous year; some were looked after at the start of this period, ceased and started again.

**1.12** Over two thirds of those ceasing to be looked after during the year did so having had only a single period of being looked after; many of these had had less than 3 months in care (also see Table V). Some of the children ceasing started again later in the year, whilst others will be looked after again at a later date.

**1.13** As explained in the Introduction to this publication (see "Four ways of presenting data"), it has been the Department's practice for many years only to count a child as starting once, even though he/she may have started to be looked after more than once during the year. Similarly, if a child ceases to be looked after on more than one occasion, only the last occasion is counted. During 2000/2001, approximately 1,400 more children started more than once, than ceased more than once. This has given rise to the statistical quirk that even though more children ceased than started during the year (25,100 compared

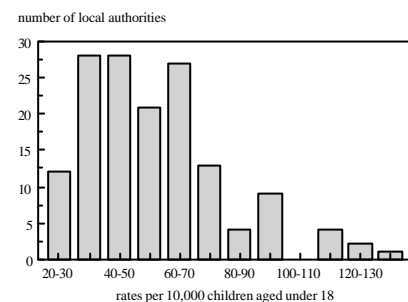
with 24,500 on the basis of each child being counted only once), the number at the year end rose by 800.

### Differences between councils

1.14 The aggregate figures for England conceal considerable variation between local councils as can be seen in Tables 1 to 5, 12 and 14. This variation reflects differences in the needs of the populations which the local councils serve, as well as differences in the responses of the individual Social Service departments in meeting the needs of the children in their area.

1.15 For example, Table 3 provides **snapshot** rates for 31 March 2001, expressed as the number of children looked after per 10,000 children in the local population. Although the average rate for England is 52 the figures for individual councils range from 21 in Leicestershire to 140 (Islington). The distribution is illustrated in Figure 1.6.

**Figure 1.6 Children looked after at 31 March 2001 in each local council**



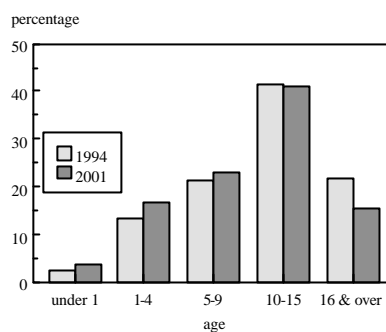
### Age and sex

1.16 The **snapshot** at 31 March 2001 shows that there were more boys looked after (55%) than girls. The proportion of boys has been rising slowly since 1994 (Table B). It is highest amongst the 10 to 15 years olds. In the 2000 mid-year estimates of population, boys accounted for 51% of the population aged under 18.

1.17 The average age of children looked after has been steadily falling for a number of years; but their average age at 31 March 2001 has risen to 10 years 5 months, from its lowest average of 10 years 4 months in 2000. This compares to 11 years 2 months in 1994. At 31 March 2001, there were 25,000 children aged under 10 (43% of all children),

compared with 18,100 (or 39%) seven years ago (figure 1.7)

**Figure 1.7 Children looked after by age at 31 March 1994 and 2001**



1.18 It is noticeable that over the period 1993/94 to 2000/2001, the average age of girls has fallen from 11 yrs 4 months to 10 yrs 3 months, whereas the average age for boys has fallen from 11 yrs 2 months to 10 yrs 7 months in 2001, so that boys are now on average older than the girls.

1.19 These changes are reflected in the changes in the age/sex profile of looked after children (Table (i)).

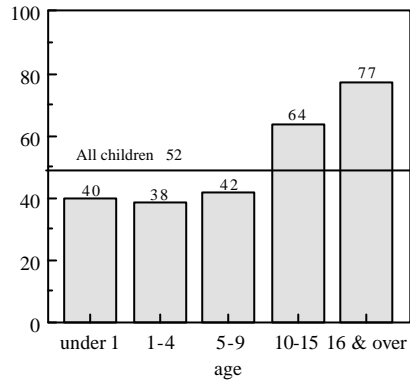
**Table (i) Children looked after at 31 March 1994 and 2001 by age and sex**

| Age of children (yrs) | Numbers of children (000's) |       |      |       | Percentage change from 1994 to 2001 |       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|
|                       | 1994                        |       | 2001 |       | Boys                                | Girls |
|                       | Boys                        | Girls | Boys | Girls |                                     |       |
| 0                     | 0.8                         | 0.7   | 1.2  | 1.1   | 54                                  | 64    |
| 1 - 4                 | 3.3                         | 3.1   | 4.9  | 4.4   | 47                                  | 43    |
| 5 - 9                 | 5.6                         | 4.6   | 7.2  | 6.1   | 30                                  | 33    |
| 10 - 15               | 11.5                        | 9.7   | 14.1 | 10.6  | 22                                  | 9     |
| 16 & over             | 4.9                         | 4.8   | 5.2  | 4.1   | 5                                   | -15   |
| Totals                | 26.2                        | 23.0  | 32.6 | 26.3  | 24                                  | 15    |

1.20 A far greater proportion of older children in the population is looked after than younger children (Figure 1.8). When expressed as a rate per 10,000 children in the relevant age group the proportion of children looked after at 31 March is 40 for children aged under 1 and 38 for children aged between 1 to 4. This compares with 77 for those aged 16 and over. The average rate for all children is 52.

**Figure 1.8 Children looked after at 31 March 2001**

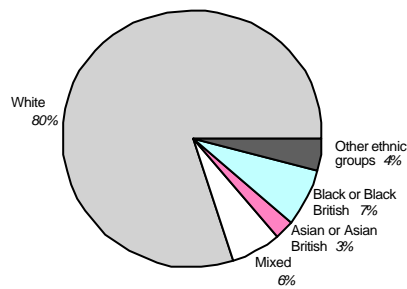
rate per 10,000 children in age group



### Ethnicity

**1.21** The ethnicity of children looked after by local councils was collected for the first time for the year 2000/2001. Figure 1.9 below shows that 80% of all children who started to be looked after during the year ending March 2001 were White; the second highest group was Black & Black British who accounted for 7% of all children starting. Table R shows that the corresponding figures for children who started to be looked after aged 10 and over were 79% and 9% respectively.

**Figure 1.9 Children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2001 by ethnic origin**



## 2. Children who receive short-term breaks

(Tables I and 2)

2.1 Some looked after children are accommodated under an agreed series of short term placements (often called 'family link placements' or 'short breaks') as provided for in *Regulation 13 of the Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations, 1991*. As explained in the Introduction, local councils can record these either in terms of the period covered by an agreement, or as the individual placements themselves. For this reason it is not possible to include the data for children covered by these agreements in most of the tables in this publication. Instead, data for children who are looked after under these arrangements are presented separately at a national level in Table I and by local councils in Table 2.

2.2 A total of 11,800 children received series of short term placements at some time during 2000/2001, down from 12,600 the previous year. Of these, 10,600 were looked after exclusively under short term placements, the remaining 2,000 having also been looked after during the year in placements that were not part of an agreed series.

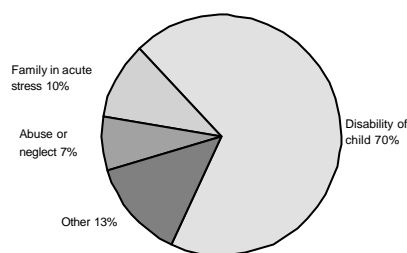
2.3 Table I shows that the number of children looked after in this way has risen steadily from 1996/97 to 1999/2000, but then fell back in 2000/01. In 2000/01 61% of these children were boys, a higher proportion than for other looked after children. Also unlike other looked after children, whose average age has fallen since 1996/97, their average age has risen to 11 years 10 months in 2000/01. 51% were accommodated in foster placements and 40% in residential accommodation.

2.4 Series of short term placements are generally used to provide relief to parents and families. Although sometimes thought of as a means of supporting families caring for disabled children it can be seen from Figure 2.1 and Table I that 30% of the children are recorded as being looked after in this way for reasons other than disability.

### Differences between councils

2.5 Table 2 shows the numbers of children under series of short term placements in each local council. (The figures are based on the analysis of the one third sample of looked after children and are therefore subject to sampling error). There is considerable variation between councils in the number of children looked after in this way when compared with

**Figure 2.1 The last recorded category of need of children looked after during the year ending 31 March 2001 under at least one series of short term placements<sup>1</sup>**

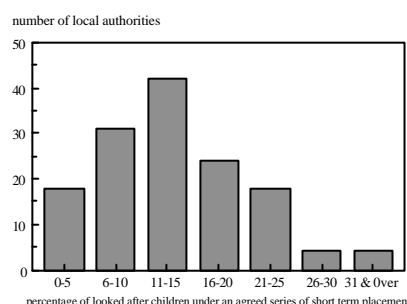


<sup>1</sup>Relates to child's latest episode of care

all looked after children (Figure 2.2). Some councils appear to have provided this service to relatively few children, (and in one case, for no children at all) whilst other apparently similar councils accommodated a quarter or more of their looked after population in this way.

2.6 In considering these findings it is however necessary to bear in mind that councils may differ in the way they record these children; the distinction between these children and others looked after under Section 20 is known to cause difficulties when recording data for the SSDA903 return. In addition, some councils may fail to record these children, incorrectly treating them as not looked after.

**Figure 2.2 Percentage of children looked after at any time during the year ending 31 March 2001 under an agreed series of short term placements**



### 3. Need code analysis

(Table E)

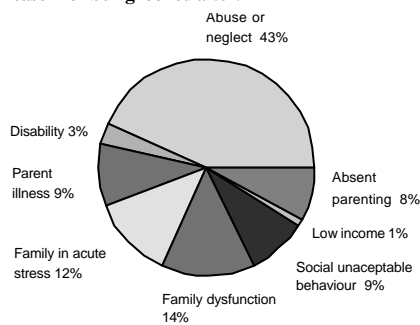
#### Children in Need codes

3.1 2000/01 is the first year of the implementation of the new "Children in Need" codes, which have replaced the former "Reason a child is being looked after" data item on the SSDA903 return. These new codes have been defined so as to identify the main or principal reason the child needed a social service at the start of their latest period of being looked after (for details see Appendix B – item 9), and bring the SSDA903 into line with the Department's biennial "Children in Need" data collection.

#### Children who started to be looked after in 2000/01

3.2 As can be seen in Figure 3.1, the most common need code recorded for children who started to be looked after during the 2000/01 was Abuse or neglect (43%). The other commonly cited codes were Family Dysfunction (14%) and Family in acute distress (12%). Disability accounted for only 3% of cases, which contrasts sharply with those children looked after under a series of short term placements, where Disability was the recorded need code for 70% of the cases. (See Section 2 of Commentary)

**Figure 3.1 Children who started to be looked after during year ending 31 March 2001, by reason for being looked after.**



#### Age analysis

3.3 Table E shows that there is considerable variation in need codes recorded according to the age the child started to be looked after. For children

aged under 5, Abuse and neglect was cited in over 60% of the cases, with Parents' illness or disability being the next most common need. However for children aged 10 and over, whilst Abuse and Neglect still accounted for most cases, it is only recorded for 27% of children, with Family dysfunction (18%) and Socially unacceptable behaviour (17%) being the next most commonly cited. Of the 1,300 children who started to be looked after aged 16 and 17, Socially unacceptable behaviour was by far the most common reason.

#### Children looked after at 31 March 2001

3.4 A breakdown at local council level of the children looked after at 31 March 2001 by category of need is given in Table 18. The most common recorded need for children in care at 31 March is Abuse or neglect, accounting for 61% of cases.

#### Looked after children with disabilities

3.5 As explained in the Introduction, children who are looked after under agreed series of short term placements are excluded from most tables in this publication, including Table E. As mentioned in Section 2 of the Commentary, 70% of these children (8,200) were recorded as being looked after during 2000/01 for reasons relating to the child's disability. For those children *not* looked after in this way (i.e. those children who are included on Table E), only 750 (or 3%) started to be looked after with a primary need of Disability.

3.6 Considering the 91,800 children looked after at any time during the year (Table 1), 11,100 or 12% were recorded as looked after because they were disabled, although it is interesting to note that one or two local councils do not use this need code for any of their looked after children.

3.7 In addition to these 11,100, an unknown number of children who are looked after by local councils will have had disabilities but this will not have been recorded as being the main or principal reason for the child requiring social services. This means they cannot be identified as disabled from the data collected.

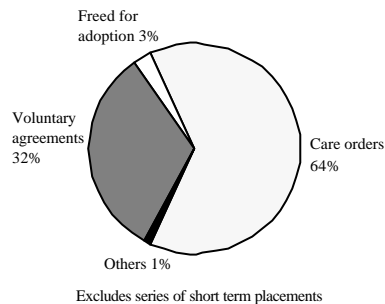
## 4. Legal basis for being looked after

(Tables C, F, L, P, R, 6 and 13)

### Voluntary agreements - single placements under Section 20

4.1 The intention of the Children Act 1989 was to promote the use of accommodation as a family support service and, when a child has to live away from home, to make voluntary arrangements with parents wherever possible. Table C shows that at 31 March 2001 there were 19,100 children looked after by voluntary arrangement under Section 20 of the Act, (*i.e.* excluding children under agreed series of short term placements), representing 32% of all children looked after (Figure 4.1). This compares with a peak of 19,900 (39%) at 31 March 1996.

**Figure 4.1 Children looked after at 31 March 2001 by legal status**



4.2 During 2000/01 69% of children who started to be looked after were accommodated on starting under Section 20 of the Children Act. This proportion has been reasonably constant in recent years, although slightly down from the 74% level of 1996/97 (See Table F).

### Care Orders

4.3 Whilst voluntary agreements have declined in number, the use of care orders has increased. Figures for the **snapshot** at 31 March 2001 show that the majority (37,600 or 64%) of children who were looked after on that date were under care orders, 1,200 more than a year earlier (Table C). *Table (ii)* below shows that up until last year, much of this increase was due to a continuing rise in the use of interim care orders, although this trend appears to have tailed off for 2000/01. This may indicate that courts are now dealing with care order proceedings more quickly. Table F shows that the proportion of

children **starting** to be looked after under an interim care order is still on an upward trend.

**Table (ii) Numbers of children subject to different kinds of care orders at 31 March**

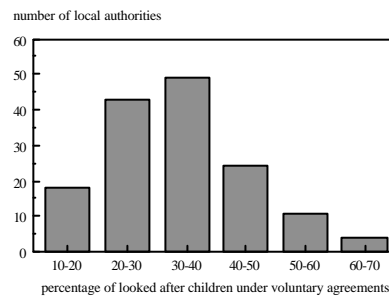
|         | 1998   | 1999   | 2000   | 2001   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Interim | 6,300  | 7,000  | 7,900  | 7,900  |
| Full    | 25,900 | 27,400 | 28,500 | 29,700 |
| Total   | 32,100 | 34,400 | 36,400 | 37,600 |

4.4 This recent increase in the use of care orders and corresponding decline in the use of voluntary agreements may reflect a gradual change in the needs of the population of children looked after by local councils. It is consistent with the high numbers of cases involving abuse or neglect (see section 3 of the Commentary), and may suggest that local councils are becoming more focussed on those cases where intervention is necessary to prevent significant harm to children.

### Differences between councils

4.5 The figures in Table 6 reveal the variation in the legal statuses of children looked after by different local councils. For example, local councils can be seen to vary in the use they make of single voluntary agreements under Section 20 of the Children Act

**Figure 4.2 Percentage of children looked after under single voluntary agreements at 31 March 2001**



(Figure 4.2). In England as a whole, 32% of the children looked after at 31 March 2001 were covered by a single voluntary agreement. At the local council level this percentage ranges from 12% in Tameside to over 64% in 2 outer London boroughs.

### Children looked after compulsorily

4.6 The category labelled “Others” in fig 4.1 includes 560 children being looked after under a compulsory order – 360 under orders made via the Youth Justice system and 200 under orders made for the child’s protection. As can be seen from *table (iii)* below, the number of children on a child protection order rose sharply from 1996/97 until 1998/99, since when there has been a gradual fall. Youth Justice orders peaked in 1997/98

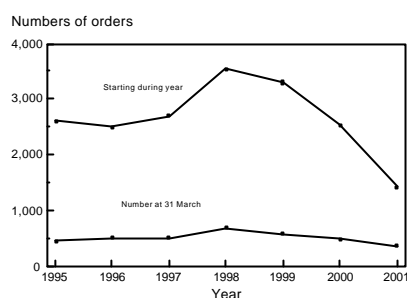
**Table (iii) Numbers of children subject to different kinds of compulsory detention orders at 31 March 1997 to 2001**

|                  | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Youth Justice    | 510  | 690  | 580  | 490  | 360  |
| Child protection | 50   | 190  | 260  | 250  | 200  |
| Total            | 560  | 880  | 840  | 730  | 560  |

4.7 The average duration of an order under the Youth Justice system in 2000/01 was 74 days. Because of the very short durations, looking at the March figures alone seriously underestimates the number of these orders made during the year. In 2000/01, there were 1,400 periods of compulsory Youth Justice legal statuses that started during the year, down from a peak of 3,500 in 1997/98. See Figure 4.3. (Note these figures differ from those

quoted in Table F, which only refers to children starting to be looked after, and therefore do not take into account orders made for children who are already being looked after; or children who started more than once during the year).

**Figure 4.3 Number of Youth Justice detention orders resulting in children being looked after which started during the year, and in force at 31 March, 1994/95 to 2000/2001**



4.8 The average duration of a child protection order in 2000/01 was 5 days and has been constant at 5 days since 1996/97. The estimated number of child protection orders made in 2000/01 was 3,400, having been fairly constant at around 4,100 during the period 1997/98 to 1999/2000. (Note these figures also differ from those quoted in Table F for the reasons stated in the above paragraph)

4.9 Over 80% of child protection orders mark the start of a new period of care, although only about a quarter of the periods end when the Child protection order ceases; in the majority of cases the child remains looked after and moves on to a new legal status.

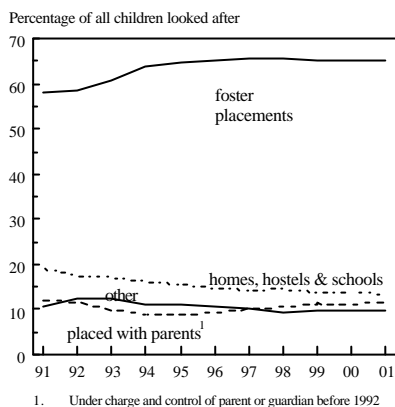
## 5. Placements

(Tables D, M, Q, 7, 7B, 8 and 8B)

### Types of placement

5.1 Figures for the snapshot at 31 March 2001 show that the majority of children looked after were in foster placements (38,400 or 65% of the total). As can be seen from Table D, the number of children in foster placements fell from 34,800 in 1991 to 31,300 in 1994; since then the number has risen steadily. The proportion of looked after children placed in foster placements rose steadily from 58% in 1991 to 65% in 1996, since when it has remained fairly constant (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 Children in care/looked after at 31 March 1991 to 2001 by placement**



5.2 In contrast, over the ten years since 1990 there has been a substantial decrease in the number and proportion of looked after children in children's homes<sup>1</sup>. The number fell from 11,400 at 31 March 1991 to 7,900 at 31 March 2001. The 2001 figure represents less than 13% of children looked after, compared with fewer than 19% of those in care in 1991. It will be noted that there was a slight rise against the trend during the year ending 31 March 2000.

5.3 At 31 March 2001, there were 6,900 children looked after who were placed with parents, representing over 11% of all children looked after. The use of this kind of placement has been increasing

<sup>1</sup> The term "children's homes" is defined here as including local council homes & hostels (including Secure units), voluntary homes, private homes, and any residential school that is dual registered as a children's home. (SSDA903 placement codes H1 – H5)

since 1945/95. Prior to the Children Act, the number under legislation comparable to the Placement with Parents Regulations 1991 had been falling steadily. In 1991 there were 7,300 children under the charge and control of a parent or guardian, representing 12% of all children in care.

### Children placed in foster care outside their council area

5.4 Of the 38,400 children in foster placements at 31 March 2001, 9,100 or 24% were in placements outside the boundaries of their council. (see table M) As can be seen from Table (iv), this percentage has increased slightly in recent years. Part of this increase has resulted from local government reorganisation: the increase in councils unaffected by the boundary changes has been smaller.

**Table (iv) Percentage of children in foster placements at 31 March who were placed outside their local council area**

|   | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| All councils                            | 17.3 | 19.9 | 21.0 | 22.4 | 23.6 |
| Councils unaffected by boundary changes | 23.2 | 24.3 | 25.2 | 26.9 | 27.6 |

5.5 There is considerable regional variation in the use of foster placements outside their council boundaries. Councils in London place, on average, a far greater proportion (53% at 31 March 2001) of their children in foster care outside their boundaries than other councils. However, English local councils areas vary considerably in geographical size and the implications of an out of council area placement in, say, a small London borough may be quite different from a placement outside a large shire county.

### Children placed in foster care with relative or friend

5.6 At 31 March 2001 there were 6,600 children in foster placements in the care of either a relative or a friend, or 17.1% of all children in foster care. As can be seen from table (v) this percentage has increased slowly over recent years.

**Table (v) Percentage of children in foster placements with relative or friend, and other foster placements at 31 March**

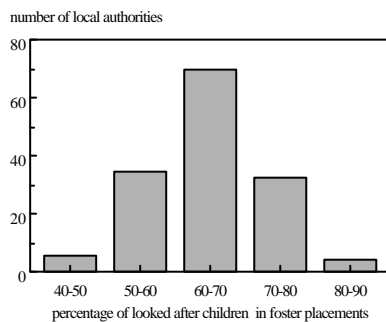
|  | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Foster placement with relative or friend | 14.6 | 15.1 | 15.7 | 16.6 | 17.1 |
| Other foster placements                  | 85.4 | 84.9 | 84.3 | 83.4 | 82.9 |

5.7 The number of children in foster care with a relative or friend has increased by 34% over the period 1997 to 2001 (from 4,900 to 6,500), which compares with a 15% increase in all foster placements over the same period.

### The use of foster care by local councils

5.8 Local councils vary considerably in the use they make of different types of placement for the children they look after (Table 7). At 31 March 2001 65% of children looked after in England were in foster placements. This percentage has remained fairly constant for the last five years. The variation in the use of foster placements by local councils can be seen in Figure 5.2. At one extreme Bracknell Forest had only 40% of its children in foster homes, whilst at the other extreme Bath and N. E Somerset had 88%

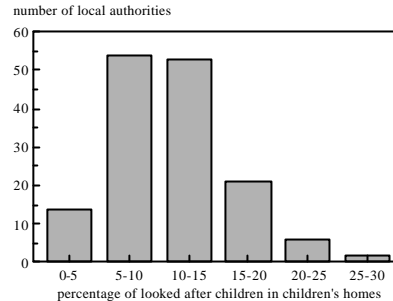
**Figure 5.2 Percentage of looked after children who were in foster placements at 31 March 2001**



### The use of children's homes by local councils

5.9 Similar percentage data for children's homes also reveal variation between councils (Figure 5.3). At 31 March 2001 11% of children looked after in England were placed in children's homes. At local council level this proportion ranges from 2% (Coventry), to 27% (Lambeth).

**Figure 5.3 Percentage of children looked after who were in children's homes at 31 March 2001**

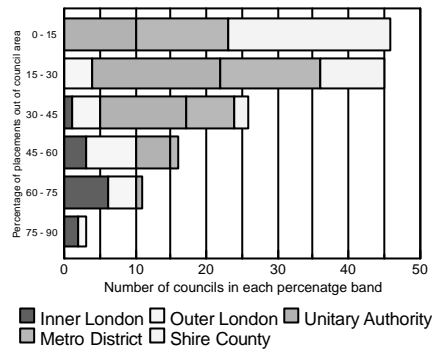


### Placement of children outside their council area

5.10 As stated above (paragraph 5.4) 9,100 children are in foster placements outside the boundaries of their council. In addition, another 2,400 children are placed in children's homes outside their council area. This is equivalent to 39% of all placements in homes that fall within the Children's Homes Regulations. Taking these two groups together, 25% of children, who are in either homes or foster care, are placed outside their council boundaries.

5.11 This national figure of 25% hides a wide range of variation between councils, where the figures range from 4% (Leeds, Cumbria and Lincolnshire) to 84% for Westminster. Figure 5.4 below shows that the highest number of councils fall within the band of 0 to 15%, but just under half of these are shire counties. No shire county has more than 45% of its children in either homes or foster care outside its borders. The situation is quite different for councils in Inner London, where no council has less than 30% of its children outside its boundaries, and about half of all Inner London councils fall within the 60 - 75% range. Metropolitan boroughs, on the other hand, have more children in homes and foster care looked after within their area, than outside it.

**Figure 5.4 Percentage of children looked after in foster care or in children homes governed by the Children's Homes regulations, at 31 March 2001, by type of authority**



**The ages of children in different types of placement**

**5.12** The recent decline in the use of children's homes may reflect the feeling that most children are better off in a family setting than in residential care. This is particularly true for younger children who are therefore more likely to be placed with foster carers

than older children. This can be seen in Table M, and is also examined in Table 8 at local council level for children under 10 years of age. Table 8B shows that in England as a whole only 2% of children under 10 were placed in children's homes at 31 March 2001, and that this figure has been fairly constant for the past three years. However for some councils this percentage was over 10%. The figures in Tables 8 and 8B for 1999 to 2001 are based on an analysis of the one-third sample of looked after children and are therefore subject to sampling error.

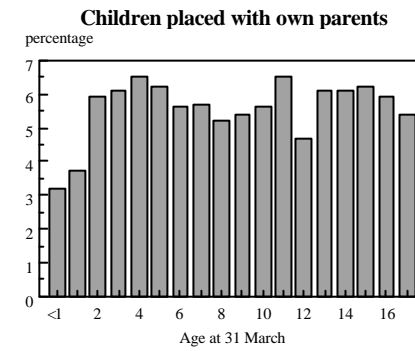
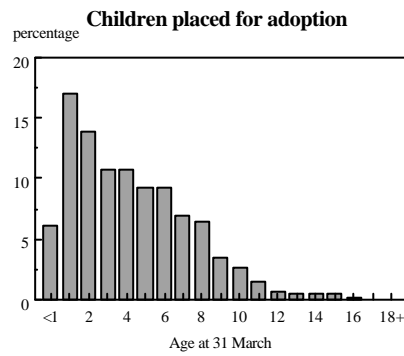
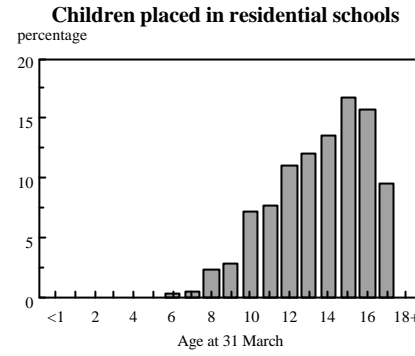
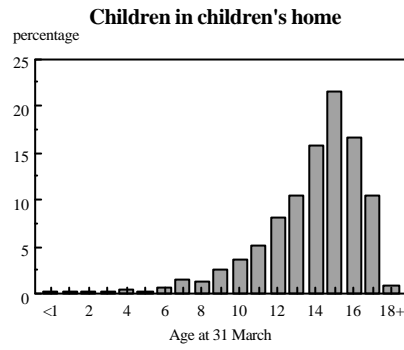
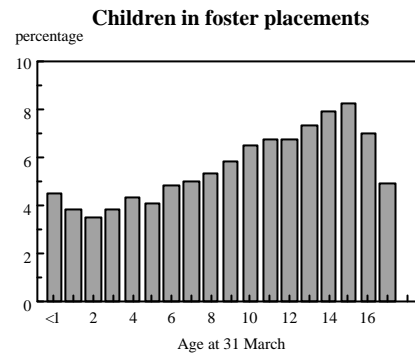
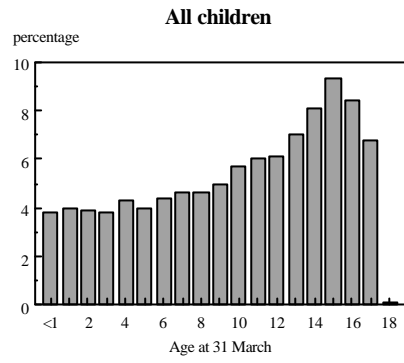
**5.13** The relationship between placement and age is explored in more detail in the charts in Figure 5.5. In each chart the bars represent percentages by age of the total number of children in that type of placement at 31 March 2001.

**5.14** Two thirds of children were placed in foster placements. The age distribution of children in foster placements therefore follows a similar pattern to the overall distribution for all placements, with a peak at age 15.

**5.15** Children's homes mostly cater for teenagers, with a peak at age 15. Similarly most looked after children placed in residential schools were aged 12 or over, although a few were as young as 6.

**5.16** For children placed for adoption the picture is reversed, with most of them under 10 years of age. It is interesting to note that children placed with their parents are relatively evenly distributed across all ages.

**Figure 5.5 Children looked after at 31 March 2001 by age and placement**



## 6. Stability in care

(Tables U, V, 9 and 10)

### Number of placements during the year

6.1 The Department of Health is concerned about the frequent changes in placement that some looked after children experience. To tackle this the Department has established a national target for social services under the National Priorities Guidance (NPG) as follows:

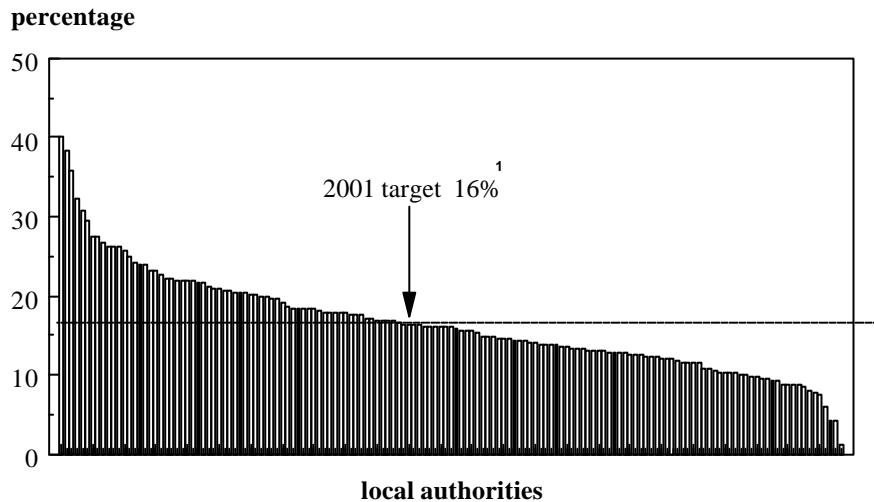
**Reduce to no more than 16% in all authorities, by 2001, the number of children looked after who have three or more placements in one year.**

6.2 A count of the number of different placements a child has had over a given period of time provides a rough measure of the stability of care that that child has experienced. The proportion of children looked

after at 31 March who have had 3 or more placements during the year has been established as a performance indicator (A1) in the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) of social services; it is also a Best Value performance indicator.

6.3 Table 9 shows figures for the **snapshot** of children looked after at 31 March who have had **3 or more placements** during the year, as recorded on the SSDA903. (Agreed series of short term placements under Section 20 of the Children Act are excluded.) These figures include **all** recorded placements during the year, not just those in the child's latest period of care; they also include any placements recorded on the SSDA903 form as 'temporary'. The figures for 2000/01 are based on an analysis of the one-third sample of looked after children and are therefore subject to sampling error.

**Figure 6.1 Children looked after at 31 March 2001 with three or more placements during the year, as a percentage of all children looked after at 31 March 2001, by local authority**



<sup>1</sup> National Priorities Guidance for each authority for the year ending 31 March 2001

**6.4** At 31 March 2001, 16.2% of all children looked after in England had experienced 3 or more placements during the year (compared with 18.5% in 2000 and 19.0% in 1999). This means that the target nationally has been reached. However, within this total, the figures for individual local councils vary widely from 4% (Croydon, Warrington) to 40%, with the figures reported for London, and particularly inner London, being lower than for the rest of the country. As *table (vi)* below shows the percentage of councils achieving 16% or less has increased steadily since 1996, (with the largest increase being between 1998/99 and 1999/2000) but still falls well below the NPG target of 100%. In interpreting these figures it should be borne in mind that they will be distorted by any inconsistencies between councils in the reporting of placements.

**Table (vi) Percentage of authorities with 16% of children or less receiving 3 or more placements during the year.**

| Year ending | % of authorities |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1997        | 35.3             |
| 1998        | 37.7             |
| 1999        | 39.2             |
| 2000        | 47.3             |
| 2001        | 54.5             |

**6.5** The figures for 2000/01 in Table 9 differ, for some councils quite markedly, from those provided for the 2000/01 Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) (published at [www.doh.gov.uk/paf](http://www.doh.gov.uk/paf)). In general the PAF figures were lower than those shown in Table 9. Of the two sets of data, the figures presented in Table 9 are considered to be the more reliable, as they are derived from the SSDA903 data which is a subjective survey of all episodes of care with no bias in the collection towards any particular child or data item. (For further information see Technical Notes).

### ‘Long-term’ placements

**6.6** By analysing the full care histories of looked after children as recorded on the SSDA903 it is possible to focus on children who have been looked after continuously for several years. It is informative to then examine what proportion of these have been provided with a stable, ‘long-term’ placement by their local authority.

**6.7** This approach is illustrated in Table 10. The figures show, for each local authority, the number of children who at 31 March 2001 had been looked

after continuously for at least 4 years. They also show the proportion of these who were in a ‘long-term’ foster placement at 31 March, *i.e.* those who had been in their foster placement for at least 2 years.

**6.8** Table 10 mirrors another of the established PAF indicators (D35), and as with indicator A1 described above, there are differences between this table and the published PAF data. However, even though Table 10 has been based on an analysis of the one-third sample of looked after children, for reasons stated above for A1, it is considered to provide a more consistent basis for comparing councils than the PAF data. (Also see under Technical Notes)

**6.9** Table 10 shows that whilst nationally 45% of these looked after children were found to be in a ‘long-term’ foster placement, the figures for some authorities can be seen to be over 65% whilst a number of others are below 20%.

### Numbers of placements in full care history

**6.10** An alternative approach to examining long-term stability is to consider the total number of placements that looked after children experience during their full care history. As can be seen in Table U, 35% of children who ceased to be looked after during 2000/01 had only a single placement in their care history and over two thirds had 3 or fewer. At the other extreme 1,800 children had had 10 or more placements. It is important to bear in mind that a proportion of these children will be re-admitted and looked after again at a later date (see also Figure 1.3).

**6.11** Over the period 1996/97 to 2000/2001, the average number of placements per child during its care history rose from 3.2 to 3.8 (Also see Section 7 of the Commentary “Duration and volume of care”).

### Multiple periods of care

**6.12** Table V provides a similar analysis in terms of the numbers of separate periods of care experienced by these children. Over two thirds of children ceasing in 2000/01 had only had a single period of care (*i.e.* a continuous period of being looked after) but 13% had had 3 or more separate periods of care. This table excludes children in receipt of agreed series of short term placements, whose planned care by definition consists of many separate periods of care. Table V also shows that a relatively high proportion of those ceasing on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday had had only one period of care; many of these young people had a stable, long-term care history under a care order.

## 7. Duration and volume of care

(Tables J, M, N, S, T, W, K and 15)

### Length of time being looked after

7.1 By "length of time being looked after" we refer to the total length of time that a child has been **continuously** looked after by a local council; this is also referred to in this publication as a "period of care".

7.2 The children who ceased to be looked after during 2000/01 had on average been looked after for 711 days, a 13% increase over the previous year. This average fell consistently from the implementation of the Children's Act in 1991 until 1996, since when there has been a steady increase, as shown in *table (vii)* below.

**Table (vii) Average length of latest period of care (POC) and of placements in latest POC of children who ceased to be looked after during years ending 31 March 1994 to 2001**

| Year Ending 31 March | Average duration of POC (days) | Average number of placements per POC | Average duration of placement (days) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1994                 | 580                            | 1.69                                 | 343                                  |
| 1995                 | 549                            | 1.89                                 | 291                                  |
| 1996                 | 532                            | 1.98                                 | 269                                  |
| 1997                 | 551                            | 2.13                                 | 259                                  |
| 1998                 | 580                            | 2.32                                 | 251                                  |
| 1999                 | 597                            | 2.40                                 | 249                                  |
| 2000                 | 628                            | 2.46                                 | 255                                  |
| 2001                 | 711                            | 2.79                                 | 255                                  |

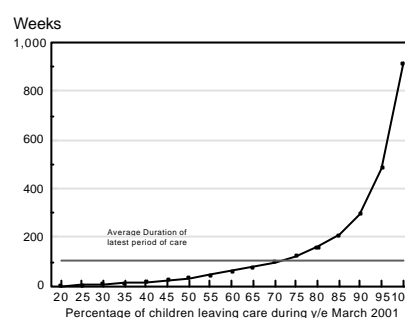
7.3 This increase in the average duration of the latest period of care is the result of a number of different factors:

- the increasing use of care orders, and the decline in the use of voluntary agreements (See Section 4 of the Commentary) - children under a care order remain looked after for much longer on average than children voluntarily accommodated (See below)
- the decline in the number of children looked after under voluntary arrangements for very short periods ie. two weeks or less (See below)
- the increase in the number of children remaining

in care until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (See Section 8 of the Commentary)

7.4 Of the children **ceasing** to be looked after during the 2000/01 year, 55% had been looked after for more than 6 months, and 32% had been looked after for 8 weeks or less (see Table S and Figure 7.1 below). Figure 7.1 in particular demonstrates that the long durations of stay (10 years and more) experienced by those at the top end of the distribution produce an overall average duration of 711 days (102 weeks), even though the majority of children are looked after for six months or less.

**Figure 7.1 Percentage of children ceasing to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2001, by the duration of the last period of care**



7.5 Table S also shows that whilst the number of children ceasing to be looked after has fallen from 1996/97 to 2000/01 by 17%, the greatest fall is amongst those who have either been in care for less than 2 weeks (37%) or between 2 and 8 weeks (38%). This compares with those who had been in care for over six months where numbers actually rose by 8% over the same period. (For those in care for 10 years and over, numbers actually rose by 22%). Table T shows that children looked after for short periods are mostly looked after under voluntary agreements.

7.6 The **snapshot** of children looked after at 31 March provides a different view (Tables M and N). This is because children being looked after for shorter periods are less likely to be captured by this snapshot than those with longer durations of care. At 31 March 2001 5% of children looked after had been looked after for less than 8 weeks. At the other extreme 55% of these children had been looked after for more than 2 years, and 22% for more than 5 years.

## Duration of individual placements

7.7 Table (vii) above also shows that the average length of time children spend in any given placement gradually decreased from 1993/94 until 1998/99, since when there has been a slight increase, even though the average duration of the latest period of care since 1995/96 has been rising sharply. The table illustrates two distinct trends. Up until 1997/98, the average number of placements per period of care rose whilst the average length of placements was falling. However, since then, there has been a continuing rise in the average number of placement per period of care whilst the average duration of a placement has remained fairly constant.

7.8 Table W gives a slightly different view, and looks at all placements which ended during 2000/01. This shows a large proportion of placements are very short - 23% of placements lasted 7 days or less and 42% lasted less than a month. At the other extreme 8% of placements lasted 2 years or more. Most of the placements lasting 5 years or more are foster placements.

## Duration by legal status

7.9 Children under a care order remain looked after for longer than children who are looked after under any other legal status, even though the average length of stay for children under a care order has fallen by 4% over the past five years. Over the same period the average period of care of children looked after under voluntary agreements (Section 20, CA 1989) has risen by 31%. See table (viii) below, and Table T.

**Table (viii) Average length of latest period of care of children ceasing to be looked after during the years ending 31 March 1997 and 2001, by legal status on ceasing**

|                  | Year ending 31 March      |                         |                           |                         | % change 1997-2001 |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|                  | 1997                      |                         | 2001                      |                         |                    |
|                  | % of all children ceasing | Average duration (days) | % of all children ceasing | Average duration (days) |                    |
| All cases        | 100                       | 551                     | 100                       | 711                     | 29                 |
| Full care orders | 14                        | 2,311                   | 19                        | 2,215                   | -4                 |
| Section 20       | 72                        | 265                     | 63                        | 346                     | 31                 |
| Other            | 14                        | 305                     | 18                        | 424                     | 39                 |

## Number of care days provided

7.10 The best way of analysing changing patterns in the volume of care is to consider the total number of days of care provided during the year to looked after children. This involves, for each year ending 31 March, counting every day of care provided within the year.

7.11 Table J shows that the total number of days of care provided for all children (other than those looked after under a series of short term placements) during 2000/01 was just over 21 million, an increase of over 2% from 1999/2000, and up 15% since 1996/97. The latter figure compares with an increase over the same period of just 4% in the number of children looked after at any time during the year (see table 1 and Table (ix) below) and as a result, there has been a steady increase in the average number of care days provided per child within the year.

**Table (ix) Number of children looked after at any time during the year and the number of care days provided during the year (excluding children looked after under a series of short term placements)**

|  | Year ending 31 March |      |      |      |      |
|--|----------------------|------|------|------|------|
|  | 1997                 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
| Children looked after in year (thousands)      | 78.4                 | 78.9 | 80.0 | 82.4 | 81.2 |
| Care days provided (millions)                  | 18.5                 | 19.0 | 19.8 | 20.8 | 21.3 |
| Average care days per child within year (days) | 236                  | 240  | 248  | 253  | 262  |

7.12 The number of care days provided during the year follows a similar trend to the number of children looked after at 31 March. (See Table (x) and Table K). This is to be expected as the longer children remain in care, the greater chance they have of being captured in a **snapshot** picture of one day; hence the 31 March figure provides a measure of the volume of care. (See section 1 of the Commentary) As table (x) below shows, whilst these two parameters are more or less in line, the total number looked after **at any time** during the year has risen at a considerably slower rate. This is a further indication that children are staying in care for longer periods.

**Table (x) Indices (31 March 1996 = 100) of the numbers of children in care at end of year, care days provided and total numbers looked after during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001**

| Years ending 31 March | Number at 31 March | Care days provided | Children looked after during year |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1997                  | 100.0              | 100.0              | 100.0                             |
| 1998                  | 104.2              | 102.3              | 100.7                             |
| 1999                  | 108.4              | 107.0              | 102.1                             |
| 2000                  | 113.5              | 112.2              | 105.1                             |
| 2001                  | 115.1              | 114.7              | 103.6                             |

**7.13** Table J also shows that the number of days of care provided in children's homes has been fairly constant over the period 1996/97 to 2000/01, whereas the number of days of care provided by foster carers has risen by 14%.

**7.14** There has also been a steady rise since 1996/97 in the number of days of care provided to children under care orders, whilst the volume of care given to those under voluntary agreements has declined slightly.

**7.15** Regional figures for the number of care days provided, the number of children looked after at any time during the year, and the average number of care days provided per child are given for 1996/97 and 2000/01 in Table K. All regions have seen increases in the total number of days of care provided and the average number of days provided per child during this period. The North East, West Midlands, South West and Yorkshire and Humberside saw falls in the number of children looked after during the year.

## 8. Care Leavers

(Tables G and 16)

**8.1** Local councils have a duty to 'advise, assist and befriend' young people who have ceased to be looked after at the age of 16 or over (Children Act 1989, Section 24). Increasing the support offered to care leavers, including steps to prevent the inappropriate discharge of young people at the age of 16 and 17 is one of the priority areas under the Department of Health's Quality Protects Programme. In addition two National Priorities Guidance targets have been established to improve the level of employment, training and education of care leavers.

**8.2** Table G provides national figures for young people aged 16 and over who have **ceased** to be looked after in recent years. It is estimated that 6,800 young people left care in this age range during the year ending 31 March 2001; this figure has fallen steadily since 1996/7, although as a proportion of all care leavers, the ratio has remained fairly constant at around 27%.

**8.3** There has however been a noticeable change in the age distribution of care leavers aged 16 and over, over the five year period. From 1995/6 to 1999/2000, the proportion of care leavers aged 16 or 17 was fairly constant at around 59%, but in 2000/2001 this proportion fell back sharply to 53%, with a corresponding increase in the number of children remaining in care until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. (See table G and *table (xi)* below). These figures have been revised since first published last year.

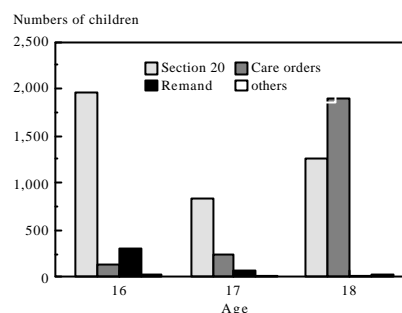
**Table (xi) Percentage of children aged 16 and over ceasing to be looked after during the years ending 31 March 1996 to 2001, by age on ceasing**

|           |  | percentages          |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----------|--|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
|           |  | Year ending 31 March |      |      |      |      |      |
| Age       |  | 1996                 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
| 16 & 17   |  | 58                   | 59   | 60   | 58   | 59   | 53   |
| 18 & over |  | 42                   | 40   | 38   | 41   | 40   | 46   |

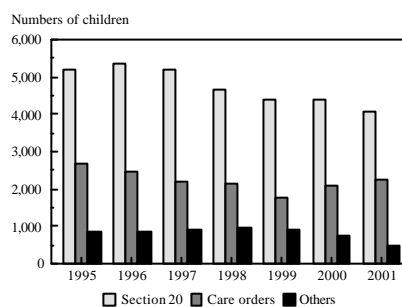
**8.4** Figure 8.1 shows that most of those who leave care having been looked after under a care order do so at the age of 18. Figure 8.2 shows that there was a steady decline in the numbers of this kind of care leaver over the period 1994/95 to 1998/99, although over the past two years, this trend has been reversed. This is consistent with the fact that more children are remaining in care until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday

**8.5** 46% of young people leaving care aged 16 or over had been living in foster placements up until leaving care, and a further 23% in children's homes. Nearly 60% of these care leavers had been looked after continuously for more than 2 years, although the proportion who had been looked after for less than six months was only 18% - down from 25% last year.

**Figure 8.1 Children aged 16 and over who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2001 by legal status and age**



**Figure 8.2 Children aged 16 and over who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 1995 to 2001 by legal status**



### Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

**8.6** This recent legislation places a number of obligations on local councils in respect of children who leave care aged 16 and over, who have spent 3 months or more being looked after since their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. Table G shows that up until the year 1999/2000, approximately 88% of care leavers fell

within this category, although this percentage jumped to 93% in 2000/01. The proportion of care leavers who have been continuously in care from their 14<sup>th</sup> to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, increased from 26% to 32% in 2000/01.

### **Differences between councils**

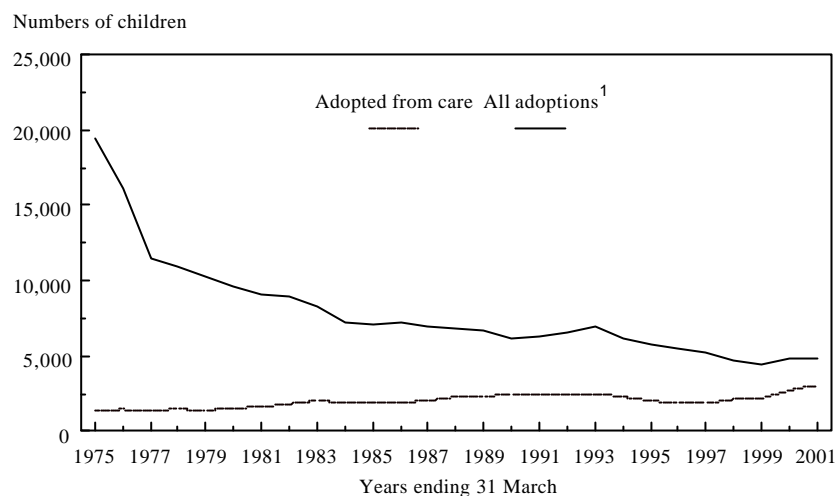
**8.7** Table 16 gives some information about care leavers aged 16 and over who left the care of each local council 2000/01. Councils vary considerably both in terms of the number of care leavers they are responsible for, and in terms of the age of their care leavers, their final placement and their length of time in care, factors which may affect the level of post-care support they need.

**8.8** The figures in Table 16 are based on the SSDA 903 "one-third" sample, and therefore may not agree with data submitted on the CLA 100 return (See Technical Notes). This means that the figures in this table are subject to sampling error and caution should be taken when interpreting figures for individual authorities, particularly where the figures for individual categories are relatively small.

## 9. Adoptions

(Tables H and 17)

**Figure 9.1 Children adopted from care, and all adoptions, years ending 31 March 1975-2001, England**



<sup>1</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics.

### All adoptions

**9.1** More than half of all children adopted in England have been looked after prior to adoption, most of the remainder being adopted by step-parents or relatives.

**9.2** As shown in Figure 9.1 the number of children adopted from care has remained reasonably constant since 1974/75, although there has been a marked increase in the past couple of years. The pattern for all adoption is however quite different, with a significant decrease in the number over this period (although there has again been a small increase in the last two years). In 1974/75 19,400 children were adopted in England, compared with 4,900 children in 1999/2000, a decrease of 75%. This decrease was most dramatic between the years 1974/75 and 1976/77, when the number of children adopted fell 41%. Since then there has been a more gradual decrease in the number of children adopted. It is important to note that the 'all adoption' figures include those children who were adopted from care. In 1974/75, 18,000 children were adopted who had not been in care, this compares with 1,800 children in 2000/01, a fall of 90%.

### Adoption of children looked after

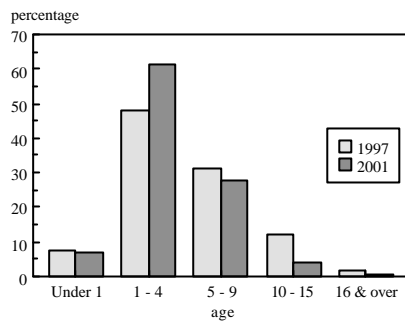
**9.3** Table H shows details of the children who were adopted from care during the years from 1996/7 to 2000/01. The total number of such children has risen from 1,900 in 1995/96 to 3,100 in 2000/01, which as a proportion of all adoptions represents a significant rise from 35% to 63%. This indicates that the upturn in the total number of adoptions in recent years is a direct result of the increase in the number of adoptions from care.

**9.4** Table H shows that the majority of children adopted from care are aged under 1 at the time they started to be looked after. In the year ending 31 March 2001, only 12% of children adopted from care started their final period of care aged 4 years or over. The corresponding percentage five years ago was 20%.

**9.5** The average age of children adopted from care has fallen from 5 years 5 months in 1996/97 to 4 years 2 months in 2000/01. This fall is borne out by Figure 9.2 below which shows that the most common age group for children adopted from care was 1 – 4 years,

which in 2000/01 accounted for 61% of all such adoptions (up from 48% in 1996/97). Only 4% of adoptions from care in 2000/01 were of children aged 10 and over.

**Figure 9.2 Percentage of looked after children who were adopted, during years ending 31 March 1997 and 2001, by age at date of adoption**



**9.6** All looked after children who are subsequently adopted are initially placed for adoption with the prospective adopters before

adoption. This must be a period of at least 13 weeks (except for children adopted by their former foster carers), although in practice it is usually much longer. Not all placements for adoption result in an adoption. Of those placements for adoption that ceased during 2000/01, 92% ended in adoption, 7% were followed by another placement (mostly foster care), and 1% ended with the child ceasing to be looked after but not recorded as having been adopted.

**9.7** For the year 1996/97, the data in Table 17 have been prepared from the SSDA 903 submission. SSDA903 data have not been used for any of the later years. For these years the SSDA903 return covered a one-third sample of looked after children; this does not give sufficiently reliable estimates of the often small numbers of children adopted in each council to be used in this table. The sample is however sufficient for analysis at the national level. The figures for 1998/99 and 1999/2000 in Table 17 are those reported by authorities for indicator C23 of the Performance Assessment Framework, and the figures for 2000/01 have been taken from the new AD1 return.

## 10. Educational achievements of care leavers

(Tables Xi, Xii and 18)

### Introduction

**10.1** In September 1998 the Government initially established objectives for children's social services in England, which were finalised in September 1999<sup>1</sup>. One of these is 'to ensure that children looked after gain the maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care'.

**10.2** Educational attainment is felt to be an important indicator of children's life chances. Research has shown that, on average, looked after children do less well in school than other children and on the basis of research findings the Government established the following two targets:

*Increase to at least 50% by 2000/01 the proportion of children leaving care aged 16 and over with a GCSE or GNVQ qualification; and to 75% by 2002/3.<sup>1</sup>*

*Increase to 15% in 2003/04 the proportion of children leaving care aged 16 and over with at least 5 GCSEs at grade A\* - C.<sup>3</sup>*

and a related indicator (A2) as part of the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF):

*The percentage of young people leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grades A\* - G, or GNVQ.*

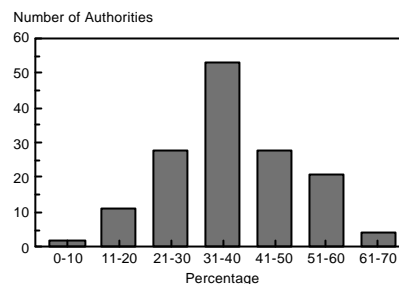
### Care leavers with at least one GCSE or GNVQ

**10.3** Figures provided by local councils are presented in Table 18 and show that 2,400 young people left care having gained at least 1 GCSE or GNVQ<sup>4</sup> in 2000/01 representing 37% of care leavers. This compares with 30% in 1999/2000.

**10.4** Within the England figure of 37% of care leavers achieving 1 or more recognised qualifications, table 18 shows that there is wide variation at local council level, ranging from less than 10% to over 60%. Only 29 councils achieved the Government's

target of 50%, and only two of those councils were in London. At the other end of the distribution, 11 councils in 2000/01 reported less than 20% of care leavers with any GCSEs or GNVQs. Figure 10.1 below shows that most councils fell within the 31 - 40% range.

**Figure 10.1** Percentage of children leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grade A\* - G or 1 GNVQ



**10.5** Around 1,600 (or 24%) of care leavers achieved 5 or more GCSE passes.

### Date of sitting examinations

**10.6** Most school children normally sit their exams during the June of their Year 11 at school. Year 11 is normally defined as the school year, running from 1 September to 31 August, during which the child turns 16. This means that a child with a date of birth between 1 September 83 and 31 August 84 inclusive the child will normally be eligible for Year 11 in the 1999/2000 school year, and will sit their exams in June 2000. Some care leavers will therefore have sat their exams as much as two years (or more) prior to leaving care (e.g. children leaving care on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday), whilst others may have left care within weeks of taking exams.

**10.7** Some children leaving care during the year ending 31 March 2001 aged 16 will not have had an opportunity of sitting their exams before ceasing to be looked after. In the main, these children fall into two groups. There are those whose date of birth falls in the period September 1984 to August 1985, and are therefore not due to sit their exams until June 2001. The second group of children will be those whose date of birth fell in the period September 1983 to August 1984, but who left care during the

<sup>1</sup> This is a NPG target - see The Government's Objectives for Children's Social Services, September 1999; Department of Health

<sup>2</sup> This is PSA Target 7b - see [www.doh.gov.uk/psa/psa.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/psa/psa.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Qualifications approved for schools under S400 of the Education Act 1996 and listed in DfEE circular 2/99

period 1 April 2000 to 31 May 2000 ie. before sitting exams in June 2000.

*10.8 The Performance Assessment Framework indicator A2 has been criticised for including both these groups of children, and table 18 attempts to adjust for this anomaly. For this analysis, children who do not have an opportunity of sitting examinations before leaving has been defined as those whose date of birth is later than 31 August 1984, and those whose date of birth is in the range 1 September 1983 to 31 August 1984 and who left care before 31 May 2000. On this basis, the percentage of care leavers during the year ending 31 March 2001 who achieved at least 1 GCSE or GNVQ rose to 40%, and the number of councils with 50% or more of their care leavers reaching this level to 40.*

### Educational achievements and length of time in care

**10.9** Tables Xi and Xii analyse the number of children achieving one or more recognised qualifications with the length of their last period of care. Table Xi looks at all care leavers, whilst table Xii excludes those children who did not have an opportunity of taking examinations before leaving care, and is therefore the better comparator. This shows that the longer children are in care, the better their educational achievements, although beyond 3 years, the improvements are not as striking. It is only a matter of conjecture as to why children who are looked after for less than three years do better at school the longer they are in care; or why for children looked after for 3 years or more, time spent in care makes little difference. It may give an insight into the type of child who receives long term care, or it may simply reflect better recording of school achievements for those in care for longer.

**10.10** Table Xi also shows that the number of care leavers with 5 or more GCSE passes at grade A\* to C was just 5%, a long way below the Government's target of 15% by the end of 2003/04.

### Educational achievements and changes of placement

**10.11** The importance of stability of care (see Section 6 of the Commentary) is particularly important for looked after children during their years 10 and 11 at school. One reason that has consistently been put forward as to why the educational achievements of looked after children falls below that of the population as a whole, is that

their schooling is often disrupted by placement moves. A change of placement that also entails a change of school will prove particularly disruptive. Linking OC1 records for children who fall within the 'one-third' sample with their care histories as shown on their SSDA903 records allows for this hypothesis to be tested.

**10.12** Table xii below shows the percentage of care leavers with one or more GCSEs or GNVQs tabulated against the number of placements in care during year 10 and year 11 in school. This shows that the fewer the number of placements, the greater the proportion of children gaining a qualification.

**Table (xii) Percentage of children leaving care aged 16 and over during the year ending 31 March 2001, (with an opportunity of taking their examinations before leaving), with one or more GCSEs or GNVQs by number of placements during years 10 and 11 at school**

| Number of placements in year 10 | Number of placements during yr 11 |           |           |           |           | All care leavers during year |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------|
|                                 | Not looked after in yr 11         | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4 or more |                              |
| Not looked after in year 10     | 18                                | 35        | 36        | 29        | 33        | <b>30</b>                    |
| 1                               | -                                 | 54        | 42        | 41        | 37        | <b>50</b>                    |
| 2                               | 0                                 | 49        | 34        | 36        | 30        | <b>42</b>                    |
| 3                               | -                                 | 35        | 25        | 39        | 21        | <b>31</b>                    |
| 4 or more                       | 0                                 | 38        | 21        | 41        | 18        | <b>29</b>                    |
| All care leavers during year    | <b>17</b>                         | <b>48</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>40</b>                    |

**10.13** In this analysis, the number of placements a child may have in any year may be in more than one period of care. Therefore whilst one placement during any year will mean that the child has not moved, one placement in year 10 and one placement in year 11 may indicate one stable placement or it may refer to two placements in two different periods of care.

**10.14** Table xiii repeats the analysis in respect of children gaining 5 or more passes at GCSE. This shows that 26% of children (excluding those who did not have an opportunity of sitting examinations before leaving) gained 5 or more passes; for those with only one placement in year 10 and one placement in year 11, the percentage rose to 42%. For those children with four or more placements in both years, the percentage fell to 6%.

**Table (xiii) Percentage of children leaving care aged 16 and over during the year ending 31 March 2001, (with an opportunity of taking their examinations before leaving), with five or more GCSEs passes at grade A\*-G, by number of placements during years 10 and 11 at school**

| Number of placements in year 10 | Number of placements during yr 11 |           |           |           |           | All care leavers during year |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------|
|                                 | Not looked after in yr 11         | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4 or more |                              |
| Not looked after in year 10     | 5                                 | 19        | 21        | 18        | 21        | <b>16</b>                    |
| 1                               | -                                 | 42        | 28        | 27        | 25        | <b>38</b>                    |
| 2                               | 0                                 | 29        | 17        | 21        | 13        | <b>24</b>                    |
| 3                               | -                                 | 17        | 19        | 27        | 10        | <b>18</b>                    |
| 4 or more                       | 0                                 | 24        | 3         | 24        | 6         | <b>14</b>                    |
| All care leavers during year    | <b>4</b>                          | <b>34</b> | <b>21</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>26</b>                    |