



Department
for Education

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Ed Humpherson
Office for Statistics Regulation
1 Drummond Gate
London
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Request to End the Temporary Suspension of National Statistics Designation for Characteristics of Children in Need Statistics

Dear Ed,

I am writing following recent discussions between my staff and yours regarding ending the temporary suspension of the National Statistics designation for Characteristics of Children in Need Statistics.

The Department has collected and published data on the characteristics of children in need for a number of years. This information is collected from local authorities and is published on an annual basis on the department's website. In 2017 we found an issue with the way that the current process handles cases where a referral is made to a local authority in a previous census year, and the decision on if the case requires further action is made in the current census year. This process leads to an over-count of children in need, which is not fully consistent over time.

During the past 12 months, we have investigated this issue closely and revised the statistical methodology. The definition of what is counted as a child in need remains unchanged, and the number of episodes of need at the 31 March is largely unaffected by the changes. The changes have impacted on the "episodes ending in year" and "episodes at any point in year" metrics - and in particular for more recent years. The number of episodes open at "any point" in the year series previously reported slight year on year decreases since 2014-15. In the revised time series these decreases are larger than previously reported. For episodes "ending" during the year the trend between 2013-14 and 2014-15 has reversed from an increase of 1.7%, to a decrease, of 2.4%.

We have updated our "data quality and uses" document to set out details of the changes that have been made and the associated impacts on the time series. We have provided a revised time series for users to access. We will include a clear statement in our forthcoming (October 2018) publication of these statistics which summarises the issue and provides a link to more detailed methodology documentation. This wording has been shared and discussed with your team.

It is my assessment that statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and I am formally seeking to re-instate the National Statistics designation.

I am copying this letter to Mike Jones, Deputy Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department for Education, whose team have led the work to improve these statistics.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ND McIvor', with a long, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Neil McIvor, Chief Data Officer and Head of Profession for Statistics, Department for Education