**Cafcass Section 31 Application Durations**

The purpose of this document is to explain why Courts and Local Authorities (LA) may produce Section 31 application duration figures that differ to Cafcass. It is not expected that durations reported by different organisation will match exactly, but they should be within a reasonable distance of each other.

Cafcass reports data from our Case Management System which is an as-live system; data reconciles regularly and in response to user input.

**Cafcass reports based on the following criteria and processes**:

* Each unique Section 31 (Care and Supervision) application that concludes in the time period being reported has a duration (not each child or each case).
* There may be multiple applications on a case and all concluded section 31 applications are used in the average duration calculation according to the quarter they concluded in.
* Consolidated applications (new applications made during proceedings) are excluded from the counts and durations.
* LA is picked up from the application information entered on Cafcass’ system, therefore proceedings that are transferred to another LA will still be counted as the LA that submitted them. When reporting by the LA field the applications selected are based solely on the LA field, regardless of the DFJ.
* Court and the associated DFJ (Designated Family Judge) area are picked up from the court entered on the application, where this has not been provided, Cafcass will use the last entered hearing on the case.
* When reporting by these fields the applications selected are based solely on these fields, regardless of the LA.
* The duration is calculated from application issue to application completed date, where an application completed date is not available; the calculation will look at the case closure date.
  + The completion date is entered independently of hearings or legal outputs.
* The calculation is made by counting the calendar days between these two dates and dividing by 7 (the number of calendar days in the week).
* Data is reported on an eight-week lag from the quarter concluding to allow time for administrative closures, and to prevent wider variances in future runs of the data.
* Cafcass provide a heat map of the latest quarter and Excel documents with the historical durations for the previous 9 quarters.

**Known differences due to method and systems**:

* MOJ/ HMCTS use child-based duration data to allow for different outcomes for different children at different times
* LAs often report based on families. Where applications are consolidated the duration for all children is then reported together
* Possible differences in duration calculations e.g., workings days.
* Naturally there is the possibility of human error in entering information into any of the databases used to monitor these durations.

If you have a query based on the duration Cafcass is reporting that you do not think is accounted for by one of the above differences, please first check your figures for accuracy and then ask that Cafcass do the same, where possible, providing examples.

If this does not resolve differences when the next quarter’s information is released, please request a more detailed look at both data sets being compared.