

# The Public Law Applications to Orders (PLATO) tool

## Background and introduction

Amy Summerfield, a social researcher, and Sam Lindsay, a data scientist – both from Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Analytical Services – presented the Public Law Applications to Orders (PLATO) tool. PLATO is the first output arising from a data-share between MoJ, the Department for Education (DfE) and Cafcass. Data linking across the MoJ/HMCTS court administrative system FamilyMan, Cafcass' electronic Case Management System, and DfE's National Pupil Database has resulted in a comprehensive database of child-level data for around 600,000 children who entered the family justice system between 2010 and 2016.

PLATO was developed to contribute to the evidence base on the trends and patterns of public law demand and regional variation. Work to understand demand and variation – both across government and through academic research – has identified a complex mix of drivers, linked to wider demographic, economic and social factors. It has also suggested there is some regional variation associated with behaviours and decisions taken at a local level by local authorities (who submit applications to court) and the judiciary (who make decisions on where a child should live, and who should have parental responsibility). There was, however, limited evidence on the nature of this variation. PLATO provides the first analysis of the specific pattern of applications to orders made nationally and by regional, Designated Family Judge (DFJ) and local authority area.

The presentation focused on two DFJ areas – East London and Manchester – as an example of how PLATO can highlight regional differences in demand and outcomes. It is important to note that the tool itself does not provide a narrative on why there may be variation, nor the implications of it, but rather it provides an evidential basis on which to explore further hypotheses. There will be a number of local and contextual factors driving differences, and therefore, interpretation of the data should be encouraged within local areas.

## Demonstration of the PLATO tool

PLATO is based on analysis of approximately 120,00 children who entered the public law system between 2010 and 2016, and uses linked data between MoJ and Cafcass only. The [tool](#) was published in March 2018, alongside a [report](#) that outlines the background to the data-share, the potential for analysis and some next steps.

The **summary** tab presents an overview of cases by application and order combination over time, by region. For example, the tool shows that overall, 49% of all public law applications between 2010 and 2016 resulted in a care order. The tab demonstrates the upward trend in care applications since 2010, particularly since 2014, and the variable rate of increase across regions.

The **applications** tab illustrates the prevalence and variation of public law applications regionally, and by DFJ and local authority area. As an example, if you select 'care' as an application type, and 'region' as the geographical breakdown, the tool illustrates the stark difference in national demand between the north and south. At a DFJ level, the tool illustrates much more nuance in demand. Drilling further to local authority level indicates that the level of demand is variable from constituent local authorities, with some areas having disproportionately higher likelihood of children being subject to care proceedings given the level expected for their child population.

The **orders** tab illustrates the pattern of applications to orders made across DFJ and local authority areas. As an example, if you select 'care' as both application and order type, the tool indicates that 56% of care applications lead to a care order nationally. The use of different public law orders ranges across the country, including at local authority area. For example, 57% care applications lead to a care order in Manchester, compared with 37% in East London. The opposite pattern can be seen in the use of supervision orders.