

## **National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Adoption, November 2012**

### **Update from Children and Adult Placement Branch and the National Adoption Service Central Team**

#### **Recommendation 1 – National Adoption Service**

The direct service delivery role of the National Adoption Service should be significantly strengthened from that currently set out in the Social Services (Wales) Bill consultation document. The service should have a central delivery role and employ staff to work on a range of adoption. It should not be owned by local authorities as set out in current proposals. The lead role within the Service should be a senior independent role, reporting to a multi-agency board, and ultimately accountable to the relevant Welsh Government Minister.

#### **Update**

The National Adoption Service (NAS) was created through collaborative work led by local government in partnership with the voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) and other key partners, supported by Welsh Government. The resultant model was endorsed by all sectors. The National Adoption Service was launched on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014, during National Adoption Week, by the First Minister and the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The National Adoption Service is based on a unique concept of a nationally co-ordinated regional model, based around five “regional collaboratives”. The shape and operating requirements for the National Adoption Service were set out in directions which came into force on 13 March. They specify governance and accountability arrangements at regional and national level, overseen by a Director, governance board and advisory group; and they set out requirements for the outcomes expected of the new arrangements, underpinned by a national performance management framework.

All 22 local authorities remain statutorily responsible for identifying and meeting the needs of children for whom adoption is the most appropriate plan.

Governance of the National Adoption Service is managed through the National Adoption Service Governance Board. This is the decision making body for the national service. It reports at least twice a year to Welsh Ministers - as prescribed in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 (the 2015 directions) – as well as to Welsh Government and to the WLGA, which administers the funding for the central elements of the service from a top slice of the Revenue Support Grant. To support the National Governance Board its decision-making role, there is an Advisory Group, with cross-sector membership.

The National Adoption Service Governance Board has been set up to:

- provide strategic direction for the development and operation of the National Adoption Service
- receive information and monitor performance of the National Adoption Service to ensure its successful delivery; improvements in the adoption process; and positive outcomes for children and young people;

- receive regular updates from the regional collaboratives, holding them to account for their performance and providing direction as appropriate; and
- report regularly to Welsh local government and Welsh Government on progress and performance of the National Adoption Service

The National Adoption Service Advisory Group:

- provides independent professional advice and support to the National Adoption Service Governance Board, to inform the overall strategic direction of the National Adoption Service in Wales;
- supports the delivery undertaken by the National Adoption Service to ensure it reflects the best possible practice and is based on a culture of continuous improvement;
- contributes to developing the annual work programme for the service; and
- ensures that the Chair of the Advisory Group and the Director of Operations are able to represent the collective voice of service users in decision making about the direction and shape of the service.

This functional split between governance, advice and scrutiny was built on best practice in governance arrangements as set out by auditors in documents such as *Corporate Governance in Local Government: A Keystone for Community Governance Framework* and *Guidance Notes* prepared by CIPFA and SOLACE. The role of the Director of Operations for the central team is set out in the 2015 directions and includes reporting arrangements and requirements for an annual work plan to achieve the aims of the National Adoption Service - which are also prescribed in the directions. A small central team (consisting of the director, a policy and practice officer and a business and performance manager, with a part-time administrative assistant) has been created to drive improvement and consistency, manage the performance management framework and develop links with the voluntary adoption services.

The first annual report of the National Adoption Service is due to be published mid July 2015. These new arrangements are already showing a positive impact on the lives of looked after children, as local government and voluntary adoption agencies across Wales work together, regionally and nationally, to deliver more permanent family placements and to improve adoption services.

## **Recommendation 2 – Permanency planning for children**

The Welsh Government should work with the WLGA to establish a pilot voluntary sector partnership in one Welsh local authority (modelled on the partnership between Coram and Harrow Council) where a voluntary organisation works alongside the local authority and has early involvement in care planning with the aim of improving care management decision-making. We have ensured that the important relationship we have with the voluntary sector adoption services in Wales has been maintained throughout the initial phase of the National Adoption Service in Wales.

### **Update**

Alongside and linked to the development of the National Adoption Service, the Welsh voluntary adoption agencies have created a new accord for themselves. This network, known as the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (SVAP), meets

regularly to consider matters of common interest in relation to adoption services in Wales. This group consists of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF Cymru), St David's Children Society, Barnardos Cymru, Adoption UK and After Adoption and it has created a very strong voice and strategic link into the development of the service thus far. It has also agreed how the partners link into the Advisory Group and Governance Board as well as into the regional collaboratives. The relationship continues to mature as we work together to make strong links into the National Adoption Service at national and regional level so we can make the best use of resources and the intention is, as we go forward, to consider collaborative and joint delivery models.

***Detailed Actions: Permanency planning for children***

- the Welsh Government should require local authorities to have robust permanency planning systems in place which oblige senior managers and local authority members to scrutinise and monitor progress against individual plans;
- whilst the current performance indicator on permanency planning remains in place, the Welsh Government should require local authorities to issue an explanation outlining the reasons against any variation in the performance indicator target when the indicators are published.

**Update**

The local authority retains the responsibility for identifying and meeting the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan. The responsibility for finding an adoptive family falls within the remit of the regional adoption services.

The new Performance Measurement Framework for the National Adoption Service became operational from April 2014 and collates a range of performance data including timescales from when a child becomes looked after to being placed for adoption. Monitoring and scrutiny of regional performance is facilitated by the central team, for discussion within the National Adoption Service Advisory Group, the Governance Board. In particular, a Performance Subgroup has been created to consider these data and issues. Arrangements are in place for the narrative behind performance to be scrutinised, best practice to be shared and areas for improvement identified. The National Adoption Service has very recently received the first full year of data, a selection of which will be published in the first Annual Report. Arrangements are being established to ensure that this data is also scrutinised within local authorities.

The performance for 2014-15, the first year of the National Adoption Service, shows improvements in timescales for children being placed for adoption. The average length of time from becoming looked after to being placed for adoption for this year was 1 year 4.5 months, which is a 10 month improvement on the timescale recorded in 2013-14. Targets have been set to reduce this further to 13 months or less in 2015-16. The number of children placed for adoption also increased to 386 in 2014-15 continuing a trend of increased numbers being placed over the last 4 years. The National Adoption Service has a strong relationship with the Wales Adoption Register, which is now separately managed by BAAF Cymru and reports independently to Welsh Government in relation to children and adopters on the register.

### **Detailed Actions: Concurrent planning**

- the Welsh Government should establish a time limited review, working with the key stakeholders, to identify the current barriers to concurrent planning and set out a strategy to resolve them. The review should also identify any legal issues which need clarification.

### **Update**

Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being Act makes provision for “fostering to adopt”, which reflects Welsh Government’s policy approach to this issue.

### **Detailed Actions: Financial issues**

- the Welsh Government should work with the WLGA to support local authorities to review their adoption and fostering budget structures and identify any potential impact these have in securing timely permanency for children;
- the Welsh Government should, with reference to the WLGA, commission a review of the full costs of providing adoption services within local authorities with a view to identifying budgets which, in the medium term, could be used to finance the sustainability of a National Adoption Service;
- the Welsh Government should enable local authorities to introduce charging for step-parent adoptions.

### **Update**

Step parent adoptions and inter-country adoptions and their charging arrangements, though important adoption services, have not been considered a priority to date in terms of the primary aims of the National Adoption Service as reflected in the 2015 directions and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. These services continue to be provided by local authorities in Wales, in some cases through the regional adoption collaborations.

### **Recommendation 3 – Adopter initial enquiries**

The proposed National Adoption Service should be the first point of contact for inquiries about adoption including the responsibility for delivering (or commissioning) a telephone helpline and website aimed at attracting prospective adopters.

### **Detailed Actions: Advertising campaigns**

- the National Adoption Service should work with key stakeholders to develop a national advertising campaign. This should include distinct strategies to target adopters for difficult to place children.
- the National Adoption Service should develop (in conjunction with experienced adopters) a range of suitable materials aimed at prospective adopters in order to support a national advertising campaign.

### **Update**

A new website has been launched: [www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com) which provides advice, information and an agency enquiry form for those interested in becoming adopters. The form is automatically sent through to the relevant regional or voluntary sector adoption service. At this point in time the agencies also retain their own enquiry portals. The website contains video clips of adopters which will be refreshed over time.

The National Adoption Service is developing a national marketing strategy, with input from approved adopters, and a focus on harder to place children - particularly sibling groups and older children.

The service aims to improve the consistency in service from enquiry to assessment and is working on a 'best practice model' for implementation across the service.

#### **Recommendation 4 – Assessment**

The National Adoption Service should be responsible for the assessment of prospective adopters, delivering this via regionally based staff employed by the Service.

#### **Update**

The assessment of prospective adopters is undertaken either by one of the five regional adoption collaboratives or by one of the two Voluntary Adoption Agencies that now operate in Wales. The reduction in numbers of agencies improves the opportunities for consistent, quality responses.

Performance measures show 96% of enquiries are responded to within 5 days; and the target will be 100% for 2015-16. The number of adopters approved has increased by 26% since 2014, with 297 adopters approved in 2014-15. The National Adoption Service has set a target to increase this by a further 25%.

The length of time from enquiry to approval is currently at 9.4 months with a target now set to reduce this to 8 months.

A new prospective adopters' report, produced by BAAF, in 2012 is used by all agencies. It enables a more concise, evidence-based assessment with analysis relevant to adoption and to parenting children who have previously been looked after.

Further work is being undertaken by the National Adoption Service Common Policies and Best Practice Subgroup to produce a best practice model from enquiry to approval.

#### **Recommendation 5 – Adopter training and preparation**

The National Adoption Service should be responsible for the training and preparation of adopters, delivering this via regionally based staff employed by the Service. In collaboration with key stakeholders, including adopter parents, the Service should review the existing arrangements across Wales develop a comprehensive programme building on current good practice.

#### **Update**

The regionalisation of services has improved the availability of adopter training and preparation as evidenced by the reduced timescale from enquiry to approval. Further work is being undertaken, alongside the work noted above, to ensure the consistent delivery of training courses.

## **Recommendation 6 – Matching**

The Welsh Government should establish a National Adoption Register for Wales and all prospective adopters and children with an adoption plan should be immediately placed on the register to be available for matching.

### **Update**

On 4 June 2014 the former Deputy Minister for Social Services launched the Wales Adoption Register, which is being managed by BAAF Cymru under a contract to the Welsh Government.

The register replaces the England and Wales register and it forms an integral part of the infrastructure for the National Adoption Service for Wales. Its main function is to tackle delays in finding suitable adoptive families for those children whom local authorities have not been able to match successfully within their own area. It is a resource which the new regional collaboratives can use to maximise opportunities for children and prospective adopters in Wales. The Wales Adoption Register was one of the first elements of the National Adoption Service to go live.

The register provides a new, secure online service which allows adoption agencies in Wales to access, free of charge, a Wales-wide register of children waiting to be adopted and of approved prospective adopters. The Welsh Government's investment in an all-Wales register is designed to help adoption agencies in Wales make potential matches quickly and to speed up the adoption process both for children and prospective adoptive parents.

### **Detailed Action:**

- the National Adoption Service should work with key stakeholders with a view to increasing the adopter pool for 'difficult to place children' taking into consideration both ways in which recruitment could be improved and also examining issues relating to increased practical support which could be provided.

### **Update**

The new register provides a wider pool of prospective adopters for children in need of an adoptive placement and whose local authorities have been unable to find a placement locally. It will enable potential matches to be identified much more quickly than would be the case for many children if matches were identified only at a local level.

The new Register, replaces the old England and Wales register, which we know was under-used by Welsh local authorities. It should help more children from Wales to be placed in Wales.

Since the register has been set up, two successful exchange days have been held to aid the matching process between children and approved prospective adopters in Wales (including those children who might be difficult to place).

### **Detailed Action: Preparation support for children**

- foster carers should receive mandatory training on 'supporting children to move on for adoption'. Any specific foster carer support needs should be identified at the time

a decision is made on moving a child placed with them on to an adoptive placement. The Welsh Government should work with the WLGA to ensure this happens.

### **Update**

Providing quality training for foster carers on how to support a child to move on to an adoption placement was one of the key issues which was raised within the Adoption Disruption Study by Prof Julie Selwyn & Dr Sarah Meakings. An action plan in response to these findings is being developed which will consider the work required to ensure that foster carers and children are fully supported during the child's transition between foster care and adoptive placement.

### **Recommendation 7 – Children and young people's participation**

The Welsh Government should establish a mechanism for adopted young people to participate in the on-going development and delivery of the National Adoption Service.

#### **Detailed Action: listening to children and young people's 'wishes and feelings'**

- the remit of the National Adoption Service should include the promotion of existing information for children and young people and developing accessible materials to meet any gaps in the current available resources. The Service should also have a broader role in promoting training and good practice in respect of listening to children's wishes and feelings during the adoption process.

### **Update**

The vision was set for the National Adoption Service by involving young people in its launch. Since the launch the National Adoption Service has commissioned 'Talk Adoption' (a service run by After Adoption in Wales for adopted children and young people) to find out what the key issues are for young people and in what ways they wish to be engaged with the National Adoption Service in the future.

Two meetings are being set up this year for this group of young people to meet with the Independent Chair of the Advisory Group and the Director of Operations, to take forward some of the views expressed by adopted children and young people. This is part of the roll-out of an initial phase in the development of a wider Service User Engagement Strategy for the National Adoption Service, which will feature engagement at national and regional levels with children and young people as well as with other people who use adoption services.

We know that key issues for children and young people are: needing support in school, support to understand their emotions and information about their past. The National Adoption Service has developed links with Welsh Government's education department and promoted the Adoption UK education video, funded by Welsh Government, to highlight the needs of adopted children in school. The Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) has become a member of the Advisory Group for the National Adoption Service which will support ongoing development of this aspect. Additionally the National Adoption Service is encouraging regional collaboratives to make links with their counterparts in Education Services to consider locally how the extension of the former Pupil Deprivation Grant, to include adopted children who were previously looked after, can be used to support adopted children who may need it.

### **Recommendation 8 – Life-story work**

Every adopted child should be offered quality life-story work. The Welsh Government and local authorities must, as a matter of urgency, review the extent of gaps in the provision and put a strategy in place to ensure that all children have access to quality information.

#### **Update**

The collation of data relating to life-story work was perhaps one of the most challenging for regional adoption services as it has not been reported on before, and the responsibility for undertaking the work relies, in many areas, on local authority teams. The performance measures show poor results across Wales, with pockets of average performance but this is an area for considerable improvement.

The work being undertaken by the National Adoption Service to develop a best practice model for family finding will include a focus on the preparation of children and the provision of life journey materials of good quality.

#### **Detailed Action: Contact**

- where it has been decided that contact with their birth family is in the child's best interest, the Welsh Government should require local authorities to identify ways of improving practical support to sustain and better monitor such arrangements

#### **Update**

Management of contact for adopted children is now the responsibility of the regional adoption collaboratives. The reduction in numbers of agencies improves the opportunities for consistent quality responses as we go forward.

### **Recommendation 9 – Post-adoption support**

The Welsh Government, in conjunction with the UK Government, should explore the feasibility of the responsibility for the provision of post-adoption support remaining with the placing authority until the child's 18th birthday.

### **Recommendation 10 – Entitlement to adoption support services.**

The Welsh Government should amend current regulations to create a statutory entitlement to adoption support services, not limited to the entitlement of an assessment of need.

#### **Update**

The implications for adopted children of not having timely assessments by an adoption-aware workforce, with the provision of services to meet need, are serious. The lifelong impact of neglect and trauma is known to have an enduring impact on many adopted children's health, education and wellbeing throughout their lives. Access to the right support at the right time will offset the need for more intensive services if that early support has not been readily available.

The National Adoption Service is working to develop fully and to implement a framework for adoption support. This framework involves a three-tiered approach to services:

1. universal services (e.g. newsletters, support groups)



2. targeted services (e.g. streamlined access for assessment and provision of health and mental health services, parenting courses with a focus on developing attachment and parenting children who have had early trauma)
3. therapeutic services.

Work is underway in the Adoption Support Subgroup of the Advisory Group to map existing services, publishing what is available, and working to establish a streamlined approach to assessment.

Subject to available funding, the National Adoption Service intends to undertake a scoping exercise to develop a database of adopters in Wales, so that those adopters who wish to remain in touch with the service can do so and receive an annual newsletter, plus information updates as appropriate.

It will be important to ensure that when the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 comes into force in 2016, there is a good understanding of how this framework applies to formerly looked after children who are adopted. If such a child or young person has a need for care and support, that must be picked up and responded to as appropriate to ensure that their wellbeing outcomes can be met effectively. This will be brought out in work to develop the Code of Practice and in training and development for practitioners.

#### **Recommendation 11 – CAMHS and therapeutic service**

The Welsh Government should, as a matter of urgency, work with the Welsh NHS Confederation in respect of provision to adopted children to audit current provision and identify gaps, considering the issues highlighted in our evidence with specific attention to access to specialist therapeutic services. They should subsequently set out a plan which outlines the specific actions which will be taken to address the current shortcomings in provision for adopted children. As part of this approach, the Welsh Government should also compel local authorities and local health boards to work jointly. Further evidence should be sought from all interested parties including adoptive families. The plan should outline whether therapeutic services will be delivered via the development of a new specialist service or make it clear how they can be delivered in a timely way within CAMHS.

The Children and Young People Committee will specifically revisit the progress which has been made in delivering this recommendation in 12 months' time. We commit to undertake any further scrutiny we regard as necessary to review progress and secure the changes needed in delivering these important services.

#### **Update**

The 2015 directions provide for CAMHS membership of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group. A CAMHS representative will join the Advisory Group shortly and links will be made at regional level in the future.

The National Adoption Service strategy for the improvement of adoption support services will dovetail with developments in the mental health strategy for children and young people in Wales. The role of CAMHS in the Welsh Government 'Together for Children and Young People' service improvement programme will also impact on

the provision of services for adopted children but there is some further work to do to ensure that adopted children benefit fully from these initiatives.

Links are being made to ensure that the baseline audit of CAMHS provision will feed into the mapping of adoption support services that is being undertaken by the National Adoption Service - and vice versa.

Further strategic development work is required with health partners to address the therapeutic services required by families such as those highlighted in the 2015 research on disruption that was carried out by Prof Selwyn & Dr Meakings of Bristol University. These issues are currently being considered jointly by Welsh Government, the National Adoption Service and a range of key partners.

### **Recommendation 12 – Schools Admission Code**

Adopted Children should be given the same priority as looked after children within the Schools Admission Code.

#### **Update**

A consultation on the revised School Admission Code which was undertaken in September 2012 and closed on 4 January 2013. The revised Code has amended references to 'looked after children' to include 'previously looked after children' thereby giving adopted children the same status as that of looked after children.

### **Recommendation 13 – Remit of Looked After Children's Education Co-ordinators**

The Welsh Government should extend the remit of Looked After Children's Co-ordinator to include adopted children.

#### **Detailed Actions: Education**

- the Welsh Government should ensure that forthcoming changes to the framework for the assessment and planning of provision for children and young people with special educational needs include specific reference to the potential needs of adopted children;
- training on attachment disorders and the effects of early trauma on children within the school system should be incorporated within initial teacher training qualifications, as well as being part of the continuing professional development of teachers, school counsellors and other school based staff;
- the Masters in Educational Practice, introduced by the Welsh Government from September 2012, should, in the academic year 2013/14, include a focus on attachment issues as part of its core teaching on additional learning needs;
- the Welsh Government should work jointly with ADEW to develop written materials for adoptive parents to give to school staff in Wales highlighting the particular needs of adopted children.

**This recommendation was not accepted by the Welsh Government.**

#### **Update**

Under the Children Act 1989 and 2004, responsible authorities are required to designate a specialist practitioner (the LAC Education Co-ordinator) to ensure every child looked after by them has an effective and high quality Personal Education Plan;

co-ordinate the child's education plan and address the education needs of looked after children and care leavers in the local authority area. The responsibility for providing support to adopted children is currently set out in the Adoption Support Service (Wales) Regulations 2005, which apply not just to children's social services but also to health and education. All relevant organisations should be responsive to the lifelong needs of children who have been adopted. Multi-agency training should be provided for all agencies with a responsibility to provide services for adopted children.

Adoptive families have an ongoing entitlement to an assessment of support need whenever they feel it would be helpful. However, it should not automatically be assumed that an adopted child will require support, as their position is not necessarily directly comparable to the needs of a looked after child who does not have the same parental support as other children. Foster carers go a long way to provide some parental support, but this is on a temporary basis or long term permanency plan. It is important to recognise that adopted children have the stability of their adoptive parents and may not want to continue to be considered as looked after children. It is also essential to normalise the life of adopted children so that they do not feel any different to their peers. Adopted children can access the same support that is additional to or different from that provided as part of universal service provision or a normal school curriculum. It is recognised, however, that practitioners and therapists play a vital role in supporting looked after children and adopted children who may require ongoing therapeutic support to deal with trauma they have suffered in their lives.

#### **Recommendation 14 – Parenting support**

The National Adoption Service, in conjunction with key providers, should be responsible for developing a wide ranging set of parenting support programmes which: meet the varying needs of families across the spectrum; focus on evidence based models; and promote opportunities for adopters be involved in designing and delivering content.

#### **Detailed Action:**

- the National Adoption Service should support adoption agencies and voluntary organisations to develop local peer support groups and develop national groups where there is an identified need, for example for single adopters.

#### **Update**

See also answer to recommendation 10. Work has been undertaken with the VAAs and regions to consider models of service delivery that might address parenting support needs, including adoption support groups, newsletters etc.

The National Adoption Service is working to develop fully and to implement a framework for adoption support. This framework involves a three tiered approach:

- universal services,
- targeted services and
- therapeutic services.

Work is underway in the Adoption Support Subgroup of the Advisory Group that involves mapping existing services and publishing services that are available.

### **Detailed Action: Adoption disruption**

- the Welsh Government should work with adoption agencies in Wales to review the way data is currently recorded and should establish a new tracking and recording mechanism for the disruption and family breakdown 26 rates for children placed for adoption from the care system.

### **Update**

The publication of the Adoption Disruption Study by Prof Julie Selwyn & Dr Sarah Meakings identified the low rates of adoption disruption in Wales. It also highlighted a number of significant practice and workforce issues that require urgent action by a range of organisations. An action plan in response to these findings is being developed which will consider the preparation to be carried out prior to the adoption placement as well as the post-adoption support work that is required. It will also include the workforce development that is needed to achieve 'cultural change' in how requests for adoption support are viewed and responded to.

The new Performance Measurement Framework for the National Adoption Service records adoption disruption so that this can be monitored more closely across Wales.

### **Detailed Action: Financial support**

- the Welsh Government should make representation to relevant Ministers at a UK level, calling for a review of the tax and benefits systems to ensure that adopted families are supported and encouraged and that specifically there is parity between maternity and adoption pay.  
- the Welsh Government should consult on the standardisation of financial adoption allowances.

### **Update**

Maternity and adoption pay are now set at the same level.

The National Adoption Service has undertaken initial work to map the pattern of financial allowances: this has demonstrated significant variation across Wales. Further work is about to commence to look at this in more detail and make recommendations for the future. Its aim is to have a consistent approach to the provision of financial support in adoption, across Wales, linked to need.

### **Recommendation 15 - Workforce issues**

The Welsh Government should work with the Care Council for Wales and the WLGA to review the social work 'workforce strategy' as relevant to adoption, specifically identifying and addressing gaps in respect of knowledge of child development and attachment theory. The review should look at the needs of staff within a National Adoption Service and, of equal importance, the needs of social workers within local authorities undertaking permanency assessment and planning work with children. The proposed National Adoption Service should have a lead role in the training and continuous professional workforce development in respect of adoption issues.

### **Update**

Adoption is a specialist social service that newly qualified social workers may move into once they have gained some experience. Qualifying programmes should therefore address an understanding of child development which would include

attachment theory and the legislative framework, but it is at post -qualifying levels that most specialist learning will take place.

### **Detailed Action:**

- the Welsh Government and the Care Council for Wales should work with universities providing qualifying and post-qualifying social work programmes to identify, and if necessary, address gaps in the field of adoption including child development and attachment theory, law, policy and evidence based practice.

### **Issue**

The Care Council has confirmed that all qualifying programmes include reference to child development. The Care Council has also developed a framework for Continuing Professional Education and Learning for social workers. This includes a Consolidation Programme which seeks to embed and develop learning from social work degree in more complex situations and in specialist settings, followed by an Experienced Practitioner Programme (EPP) and other programmes for more senior practice-based roles. All of these programmes are firmly rooted in practice and learners are expected to draw on their own work in assignments and other assessed work. Fifty percent of the EPP is a specialist area of enquiry which allows the learner to study an area of social work practice in depth, drawing on research. This will be of particular value to those in specialist services such as adoption.

The framework is subject to evaluation which will give an indication of how this has benefitted social work practitioners and people who use services. The National Adoption Service has only recently been established and the Care Council will need to discuss with them how they are planning to take forward their staff development strategy, whether internally or through links to other programmes.

### **Recommendation 16 – National Adoption Service**

the Welsh Government should explore and take forward a management and accountability model for a National Adoption Service based on the framework recommended by the Children and Young People Committee (as outlined in paragraph 357 of this report).

- the development of the National Adoption Service should be informed by the views of adopter parents. The Welsh Government should ensure that there are meaningful systems in place for adopters to participate in the on-going development and delivery of the National Adoption Service.

- the Welsh Government should consider how work in respect of step-parent adoptions can best be taken forward within the context of the creation of a National Adoption Service.

### **Update**

Please see response to recommendation No 1 and 2.

Adopted parents were involved in the launch of the National Adoption Service and since the launch the National Adoption Service has commissioned 'Adoption UK' to find out what the current issues are for adopters in Wales and how they wish to be engaged with the national service in the future.

**Detailed Action: Data collection and monitoring**

- the proposed National Adoption Service should have a specific role in collecting, monitoring and publishing a full range of adoption data (including qualitative data where relevant) in order to inform service delivery and identify trends with a focus on delivering improved outcomes for children.

**Update**

Meetings are being set up this year for adopters to meet with the Independent Chair of the Advisory Group and / or the Director of Operations to take forward the issues they identified.

This is part of the roll-out of an initial phase in the development of a wider Service User Engagement Strategy for the National Adoption Service, which will feature engagement at national and regional levels.

A new Adoption Performance Measurement Framework was procured by Welsh Government and commenced data collection in April 2014. Regional adoption collaboratives and VAAs in Wales have provided historical data to help to identify trends. The new system is managed by the National Adoption Service, which will take on responsibility for it when the current licence comes to an end.

This is a significant step forward in adoption. It is also the first time that adoption agencies have been able to interrogate and consider the data.

On the basis of the first year's data it has been possible to set targets for 2015-16 to help to achieve the aims of the National Adoption Service: i.e. increasing the number of children placed for adoption, increasing the number of adopters and improving adoption support services.