

The quality and performance of adoption agencies in Scotland 2011 - 2013

6 November 2013

1. Background

The Care Inspectorate is the independent scrutiny and improvement body for care services in Scotland. We regulate some 15,000 registered care services, provide scrutiny of social work services, and, with partners, carry out joint inspections of services for young people and services for older people in each area across Scotland.

Where children cannot live with their parents they need safety, security and stability in their lives to achieve successful outcomes.

All adoption services operating in Scotland are required, by law, to register with the Care Inspectorate. Our specialist inspectors inspect these services annually, assess their quality, and support improvement where necessary.

On 30 September 2013, there were 39 adoption services operating in Scotland. Of these, 32 are local authority services. A further 7 are run by voluntary or not-for-profit organisations. In general, most adoption services perform well, with good grades. The Care Inspectorate is dedicated to highlighting excellent practice and ensuring services are delivering positive outcomes for children and young people who are adopted.

2. The importance of permanence in outcomes for children

We know from important research carried out, including from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, that permanence is a key issue in adoption services. Their 2011 report, *Care and Permanence Planning for Looked After Children in Scotland*, demonstrated that delays in decision-making and obtaining a permanent placement can mean poorer outcomes for children. The study showed that, for the majority of children, it took more than two years from their first involvement with services to when they achieved permanence through Adoption or Parental Responsibilities Order.

The Care Inspectorate welcomes and supports action which can secure faster permanence for children who cannot or do not live with their birth parents, noting that this must always be balanced with appropriate measures to safeguard and protect this vulnerable group of children. Work needs to continue to ensure that permanency for children is not delayed. Our inspectors will therefore continue to work with and support adoption agencies in timeously securing the best possible outcomes for children.

3. Quality grades of adoption services

We inspect adoption services against the National Care Standards, the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and, on occasion, the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Every care service in Scotland is assessed against a number of quality themes. Grades are awarded to adoption services for the quality of care and support, the quality of staffing, and the quality of management and leadership. Grades are awarded on a scale from 1 (unsatisfactory) – 6 (excellent). Appendix 1 lists the current gradings for each adoption service in Scotland.

As of September 2013, over half of adoption services had a grade 5 or 6 (very good or excellent) for the Quality of Care and Support theme. All services have at least a grade 3 (adequate) for Quality of Staffing and Quality of Management and Leadership. The grades for each theme are provided here:

<u>Latest Grade at 30th September</u>	Number of Services		
	<u>Quality of Care and Support Grade</u>	<u>Quality of Staffing</u>	<u>Quality of Management and Leadership grade</u>
1 – unsatisfactory	0	0	0
2 – weak	1	0	0
3 – adequate	2	2	4
4 – good	15	21	19
5 – very good	19	15	15
6 - excellent	2	1	1

<u>Latest Grade at 30th September</u>	% of services		
	<u>Quality of Care and Support Grade</u>	<u>Quality of Staffing</u>	<u>Quality of Management and Leadership grade</u>
Grade 1 or 2	3%	0%	0%
Grade 3 or 4	44%	59%	59%
Grade 5 or 6	54%	41%	41%

4. Complaints and enforcement

The Care Inspectorate has the power to investigate complaints against all care services, including anonymous complaints if necessary. There have been no upheld complaints in the last three years in relation to adoption services. The last upheld complaint against an adoption service was in April 2010.

Where there is evidence of sustained underperformance (unsatisfactory or weak grades), the Care Inspectorate has the power to take enforcement action. This includes imposing emergency conditions, or issuing formal improvement notices, with which services must comply or face closure. No adoption service in Scotland has had enforcement action against them in the last three years.

5. Summary of findings from inspection reports

Each time we inspect an adoption service, we publish a public report setting out our findings, identifying good practice, and making recommendations for improvement. This section provides a short summary of findings from inspection reports of adoption services in the last three years. All inspection reports are available online at www.careinspectorate.com.

Recruiting and working with adopters

Generally, services were found to be providing a good quality service in regard to recruitment, assessing and supporting prospective adoptive parents to meet the increasing demand for placements. We saw evidence that prospective adopters and approved adopters felt a valued part of the service, feeling listened to and very well supported.

We saw examples of good systems for keeping in contact with adopters through various routes, for example through adoption support groups. Adopters were generally provided with good information about children's health and future development issues.

Adoption panels

In some cases, we saw evidence which suggested that efforts are still needed to ensure the independence and experience of adoption panels.

Preparing children for transition

In many cases, we saw evidence that adopters felt children had been well prepared by their foster carers for the transition to adoption. Examples found across services included a child given a memory box of their time with the foster carer, photograph albums containing photos of the child's birth parent, or later life letters for children.

Permanence and the impact on outcomes for children

The evidence around issues of permanence is mixed. Following the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, there was evidence some services were working to ensure there was permanency planning and improved timescales for adoption. Other services need to evidence better the outcomes for children and young people as a result of their interventions, particularly concerning permanency planning. Work therefore needs to continue to ensure that permanency for children is not delayed and does not cause unnecessary drift, noting that this is sometimes due to court processes or appeals being lodged by birth parents.

Generally, our inspections found evidence of good outcomes for children placed with their adoptive families, for example by actively promoting sibling contact where appropriate. One child placed for adoption whose care plan recommended regular contact with siblings who placed with other adopters told his adoptive parent that he was "so happy, my sisters have never played in my bedroom before". The approved

adopters for the children stated their commitment to this plan and said that the boys' siblings are now seen as "an extension to our family".

Supporting birth parents

There was evidence from our inspections that some services are helping to support birth parents where possible. Examples of such help include attending the child's reviews, attending the adoption panel considering the need for adoption, offering independent advocacy, later life letters, and letter box contact. Our inspection findings suggest some services still need to further develop and assess the systems which allow birth families to participate at all parts of the adoption process, where it is safe for the children and carers.

Staffing

Our inspections found that staff within services tended to be professional, approachable, knowledgeable and skilled in the work they undertook. The management and staff who work in adoption services are usually very dedicated to their work.

Case Study: a local authority care service

Staff within the service told us they had established links to some birth families where there was indirect "letter box" contact. In two of the three cases we tracked, children maintained direct contact with their birth families (mainly grand parents and extended family).

The matching and coordination process was for the most part handled sensitively.

Each adopter had produced a book about their family which had been shared with the child by the foster carer prior to meeting with the family. Coordination plans were seen to be flexible to ensure that as far as possible children's routines could be maintained.

[The] Council was committed to reducing timescales for children being placed for adoption. IT systems were being used to highlight where children were in their journey through care. These lists were given to managers for discussion with staff to try to reduce drift for children. For example permanence process meetings allowed professional staff, including legal staff to consider children's situations and recognise barriers to achieving permanence plans. In addition to this, legal routes to permanence were established once families had been identified thereby reducing some potential for drift for children who were waiting to be placed.

Council Adoption Service (Inspected May 2013)

6. Recommendations and requirements made during inspections

As part of an inspection, it is usual for inspectors to make recommendations and requirements showing where improvements should or must be made. Of the 39 adoption services operating at September 2013, only a small proportion had had requirements made at inspection, as illustrated in this table.

Adoption services with requirements made at inspection	Number
2011/12	2
2012/13	7
2013/14 (April – Sept 2013)	4

In some cases, the requirements were very specific and design to address shortcomings in practice in specific areas. The following requirements are taken from inspections reports published during 2012/13 and 2013/14.

- The service requires to have formal adoption support plans for those who request on-going support.
- The service provider must make sure that for all applications, including inter-country kinship adoptions:
 - there is clear internal written guidance, so that all those involved are clear about the process and their role in that process.
 - assessments are rigorous with evaluation and analysis of information leading to a clear recommendation to the adoption panel.
 - assessments have been effectively scrutinised by management before they are presented to the adoption panel for their consideration. This must adequately cover significant aspects specific to each case.
 - the Agency considers circumstances where they require legal advice. Seeking legal advice would ensure that the recommendation being made to the adoption panel in the assessment report and the recommendation made by the adoption panel to the Agency Decision Maker is competent.
 - adoption panel minutes fully reflect the panel discussion which leads to the recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker and the panel chair person verifies and confirms that the minutes are an accurate reflection of the discussion that took place.
- Notifications must be submitted to the Care Inspectorate in accordance with the Care Inspectorate publication “Records that all registered care services (except childminding) must keep and guidance on notification reporting”.

- The provider must notify the Care Inspectorate when there is a change of manager within the service.
- The provider must ensure that a proper assessment as to the capacity of foster carers to provide permanent care is carried out in all cases. In order to achieve this the provider must:
 - ensure all relevant checks are carried out including contact with extended family members
 - detail all visits taking place during the assessment process
 - detail the areas covered during the assessment process
 - detail any training taking place during the assessment to prepare prospective carers to be adopters.
- The service provider must make sure that there are effective systems in place to support improvements to the permanence panel, including:
 - organising panel business meetings to consider how well the panel functions and any areas for improvement.
 - a training needs analysis of panel members
 - a training programme for panel members
 - panel member supervision and appraisal
 - formal opportunities for panel members to feedback their views on each panel, including the quality of reports submitted
 - feedback from attendees for panel members on their effectiveness.

7. Conclusions

It is clear that adoption services in Scotland are generally performing well and improvements are being made where necessary. The quality of care offered is generally high, and in most services the quality of staffing and leadership is good or very good.

The Care Inspectorate will continue to carefully and robustly inspect each adoption service in Scotland in line with our agreed inspection plan. We will work with services to ensure they continually improve. We have recently established team specialist inspectors to inspect the types of service in which they have a practice background. We believe this will allow us to better identify further improvements in adoption services across Scotland, minimise the risk of drift, and improve outcomes for children in need of adoption.

Appendix 1: Quality grades awarded to adoption services in Scotland, as at 4 November 2013

Registered Adoption Service	Quality of Care & Support	Quality of Staffing	Quality of Leadership and Management
Aberdeen City Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
Aberdeenshire Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar - Stornoway Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	4 - Good
Angus Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Argyll and Bute - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
BAAF Scotland Adoption Service	6 - Excellent	6 - Excellent	6 - Excellent
Barnardo's Scotland Adoption Services	6 - Excellent	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Birthlink	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
City of Edinburgh Council - Adoption Services	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Clackmannanshire Council - Adoption Service	3 - Adequate	3 - Adequate	3 - Adequate
Dumfries & Galloway - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	Not assessed
Dundee City Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
East Ayrshire Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	3 - Adequate
East Dunbartonshire Council Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
East Lothian Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	4 - Good
East Renfrewshire Council Adoption Service	4 - Good	Not assessed	5 - Very Good
Falkirk Council Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	4 - Good	5 - Very Good
Fife Council Adoption Service	3 - Adequate	3 - Adequate	3 - Adequate

Glasgow City Council Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	5 - Very Good
Highland Council Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Inverclyde Council Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Midlothian Council Adoption Service	2 - Weak	4 - Good	3 - Adequate
Moray Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	Not assessed	Not assessed
North Ayrshire Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	5 - Very Good	4 - Good
North Lanarkshire Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	Not assessed	5 - Very Good
Orkney Council Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Perth & Kinross Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
Renfrewshire Council Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	Not assessed	4 - Good
Scottish Adoption	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
Scottish Borders Council Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
Shetland Islands Council - Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	Not assessed	5 - Very Good
Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association	Not assessed	4 - Good	4 - Good
South Ayrshire Council Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
South Lanarkshire Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	5 - Very Good	4 - Good
St. Andrew's Children's Society Adoption Service	5 - Very Good	Not assessed	4 - Good
St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good	5 - Very Good
Stirling Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good
West Dunbartonshire Council Adoption Agency	5 - Very Good	4 - Good	Not assessed
West Lothian Council - Adoption Service	4 - Good	4 - Good	4 - Good

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অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iarrtas.

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یہ اشاعت گزارش پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں دستیاب ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

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