



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol | National
Adoption
Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

Mid-Year Progress Report 2024/25



Introduction from the Director, Suzanne Griffiths



This year marks the tenth anniversary since the National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) was set up to create a Wales-wide collaborative for the provision and development of adoption services.

We are proud of the work that has been done over the last 10 years to enable our adoption community to flourish. Significant successes and improvements have been achieved by NAS across Wales; for children, for adopters and for others affected by adoption, as we continue to modernise services.

Adoption remains the best option for a small number of children who cannot be provided with a safe home within their birth family or community or, in less common circumstances, when a parent chooses to relinquish their child for adoption. Since NAS was created, thousands of adopters have given so many children and young people the safety and opportunity to thrive. It is important that we can recruit sufficient adopters and that they can meet the needs of these children supporting them to develop a better understanding of their identity and early life experiences so they thrive as they mature into adults.

The challenges we face are ever present, including the ongoing cost of living pressures, the strain on public finances as well as how adoption is perceived and used by professionals planning for children. Our adopted children and their families are also often faced with emotional and wellbeing challenges and there are increased levels of demand for post adoption support; this mirrors the general increase in demand for this type of support in other social care services. By implementing positive approaches, responding positively at the earliest stage to prevent needs escalating, we are ensuring that effective adoption services will continue to lead to better outcomes for children.

I would like to thank all our adopters, foster carers, and others in their networks who display incredible commitment to caring for and supporting children in loving homes, as well as to all the adoption professionals and support staff that work tirelessly to achieve positive outcomes for children, their families and others affected by adoption.

NAS will continue to work with services and the Welsh Government to maintain support and investment in reforming adoption services for Wales.

Abbreviations used in this report

MWW	Mid and West Wales Adoption Service
NWAS	North Wales Adoption Service
SEWAS	South East Wales Adoption Service
VVC	Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service
WBAS	Western Bay Adoption Service
Barnardo's	Barnardo's
St David's	St David's Children Society
AUK	Adoption UK
LAs	Local Authorities

2024-25 Mid-Year Position

This report provides an overview of the first six months of 2024-25, as we implement Year 3 of our strategic plan '**Adoptcymru 2025 and beyond.....**'.

Our focus continues to be on the following priorities:



Key features of our plan include implementing best practice approaches in adoption, such as:

- ✚ raising awareness of adoption within communities
- ✚ recruitment of adopters as well as placing children,
- ✚ adoption support, contact and work with birth parents,
- ✚ improving areas of service that respond to the lifelong implications of adoption, in particular services to support adopted adults to access their personal information, as well as supporting them and/or birth relatives to contact each other if they wish to do so.

Things to Celebrate so far this year...

April

The inaugural meeting of the National Joint Committee for NAS and Foster Wales was held on the 19th April this year. The Committee is responsible for overseeing the work of both services on behalf of the 22 Welsh local authorities.

May

Adoption UK published the 2024 Adoption Barometer report, with feedback from almost 400 people across Wales. The NAS Governance Board has listened to the findings of the report and will focus on the identified areas for improvement.

June

NAS attended the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts for the first time. Located in the ‘family garden’ – a new space specifically aimed at younger audiences, – the stand provided various activities for children, alongside space to have conversations about adoption.

July

We engaged with 2 groups of adopted young people to ask for their input in the development of the All Ages Annual Report. Feedback was provided on the design and content. The young people also told us about the topics they would be most interested in reading about.

August

This year we sponsored Circus Skills in the Eisteddfod which provided us with opportunities to promote the NAS brand. We engaged with Welsh language adopters by delivering a talk with them on their experiences of adoption.

Sept

In September, we published our Annual Report for 2023/24, alongside an All Ages version. Both reports can be found here <https://adoptcymru.com/annual-reports/>

‘ADOPT CYMRU 2025 AND BEYOND....’ - OUR STRATEGIC PLAN AND PRIORITIES

The ‘Adopt Cymru 2025 and beyond....’ strategic plan is a three-year plan that we have been working towards since the start of 2022/23. It was developed following extensive engagement with children, young people and families, professionals, and service leaders, including via the annual ‘Big Adoption Conversation’.

As we enter the third year of implementation, the progress made so far this year is summarised below.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY A: THE BEST FAMILIES FOR OUR ADOPTED CHILDREN

This year, we have continued to improve the recruitment, preparation and training for adopters to ensure that every child is placed in a timely way with adopters who can, with early support, provide them with the best opportunities for family life.

What have we achieved?

Developed and implemented our **Recruitment and Marketing Strategy** for the year

Identified and established the **Success Factors** in adoptive placements and shared this across all agencies

Developed a new **website** for NAS, in consultation with professionals, adopters and young people

Developed a new **Adopter Qualities and Skills Framework**, which will be launched in the second half of the year

Throughout the year we will continue to embed the Good Practice Guides and the Welsh Early Permanence Framework.

The Regions and VAAs have reported good progress in relation to this priority area with the key areas of focus being:

Recruitment and Training

- All agencies are actively working to recruit adopters, with specific strategies to address the needs of children with more complex needs, sibling groups, as well as children with complex health needs.
- There has been an emphasis on comprehensive preparation training for adopters, including additional training days and webinars from medical advisors.

Support for Adopters

- Providing support to families to help them understand their strengths and the challenges they may face, ensuring they are well-prepared for adoption.
- Engaging with the local community to raise awareness about adoption and ensure it remains a key agenda.
- Reviewing and enhancing early support for adopters to ensure they have a solid foundation and understanding of potential challenges.

Case Study on Welsh Early Permanence (MWWAS)

A sibling group of two, aged 6 and 3 were to be placed separately. The foster carers decided that they could no longer continue to care for the older child because of the impact of her behaviour on the household.

Another couple who were undergoing the assessment process had been tentatively identified as a possible match. This assessment was fast tracked and taken through Welsh Early Permanence (WEP). At the same time, increased information was shared with the adopters about the child.

The child was then placed with the carers on a WEP basis, and this saved the child from having to move to another foster placement, whilst at the same time they were supported in maintaining the relationship with the younger sibling who then moved to another adoptive placement.

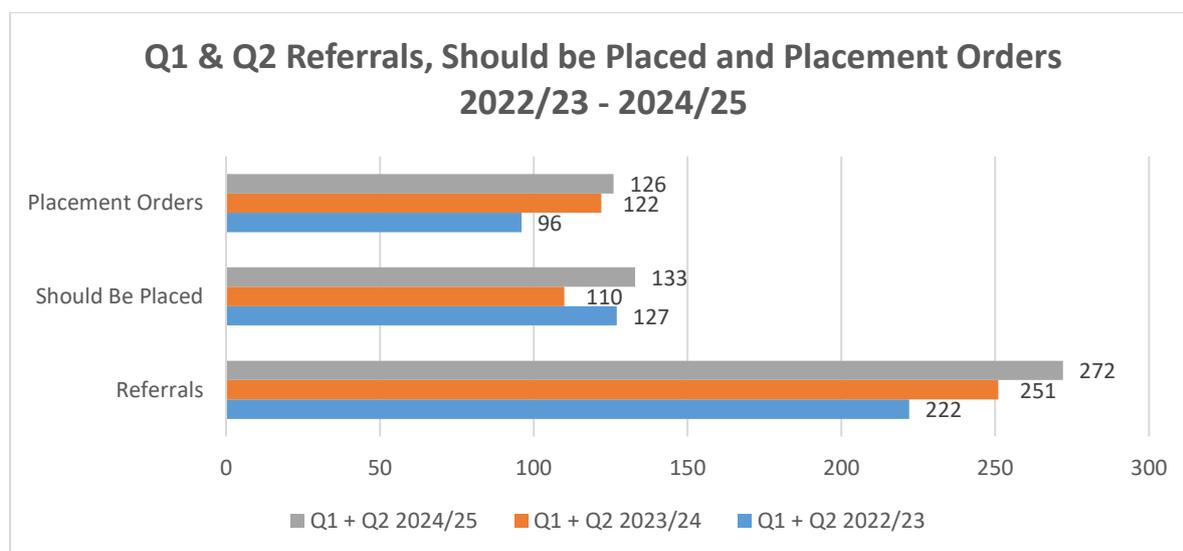
The relationship between the two sets of adopters was established and there is regular ongoing contact between the siblings.

Performance in the first six months of 2024/25

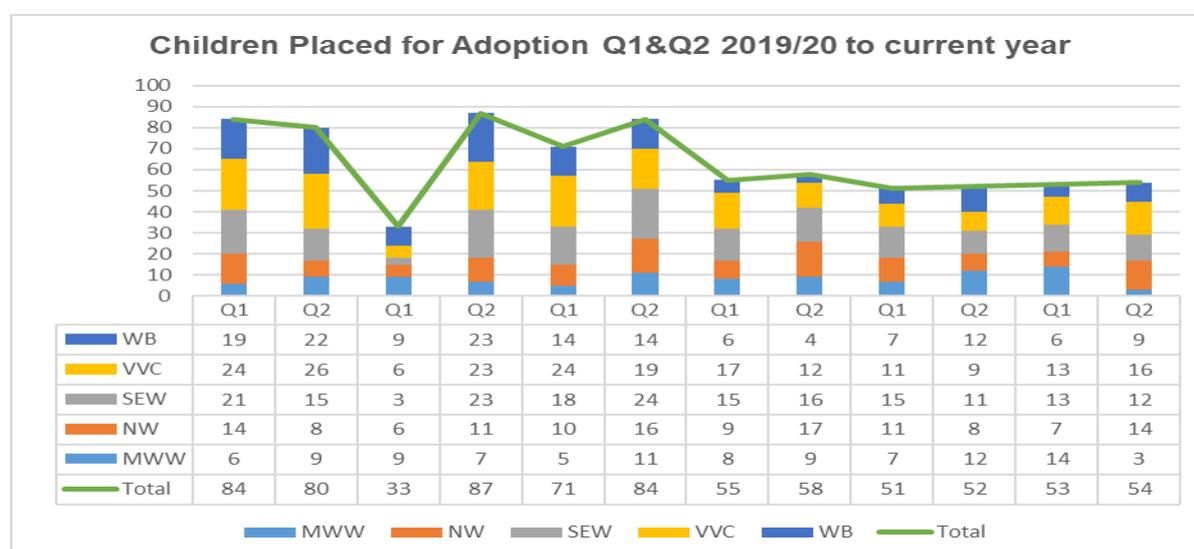
Children

There are fewer children in the system compared to pre-pandemic years. However, the number of child referrals, 'should be placed' decisions and placement orders have remained at a steady level over the last four years, with this year already seeing an increase in numbers compared to the last two years.

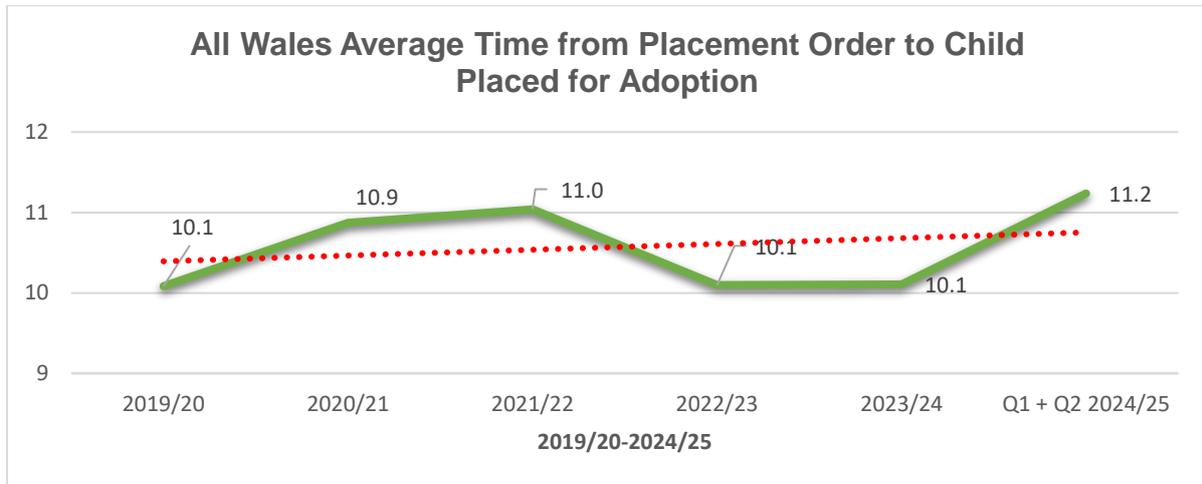
So far this year, 272 children have been referred to the regional adoption agencies across Wales. This is an 8% increase compared to the same period last year. Should be placed decisions have increased by 21% compared to the same period last year and the number of placement orders has increased again this year for the second year in a row.



Although the number of children coming through the system has increased, the number placed in the first half of this year has remained at a similar level to the previous two years. This is reflective of lower levels of adopters available to meet the needs of the children waiting, many of whom have increased complexities, lower levels of adopter approvals, along with other factors reported by the regions such as delays in health and legal processes.



The average time it took for a child to be placed after the Placement Order was granted has increased to the highest recorded since 2019, at 11.2 months. This is again likely to be attributed to the factors outlined above.

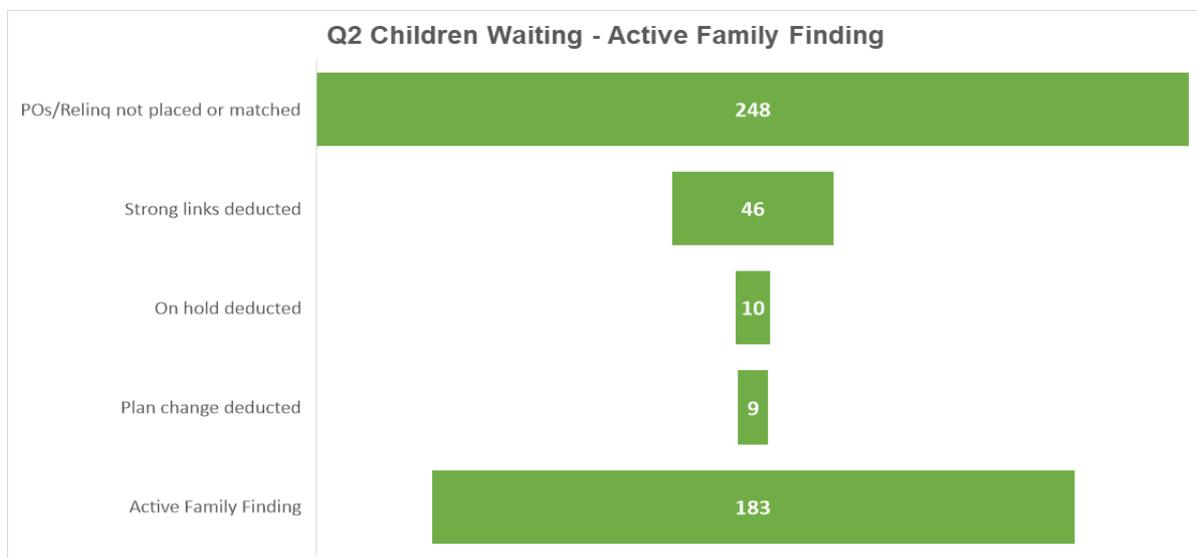


At mid-year, 248 children that services were working with were waiting to be placed i.e. children subject to a placement order or relinquished but not yet matched or placed. This is an increase of 12% compared to the end of 2023/24, when there were 222 children waiting.

Of the children waiting,

- 19% had a match or a strong link identified which was waiting to be progressed to formal agreement,
- 4% had planning 'on hold' due to legal challenges or additional assessments being undertaken, and
- 4% had a proposed change to their plan for adoption awaiting consideration.

Services were, therefore, 'actively family finding' for 183 children at the mid-year point, almost 18% higher than the number at the end of 2023/24.



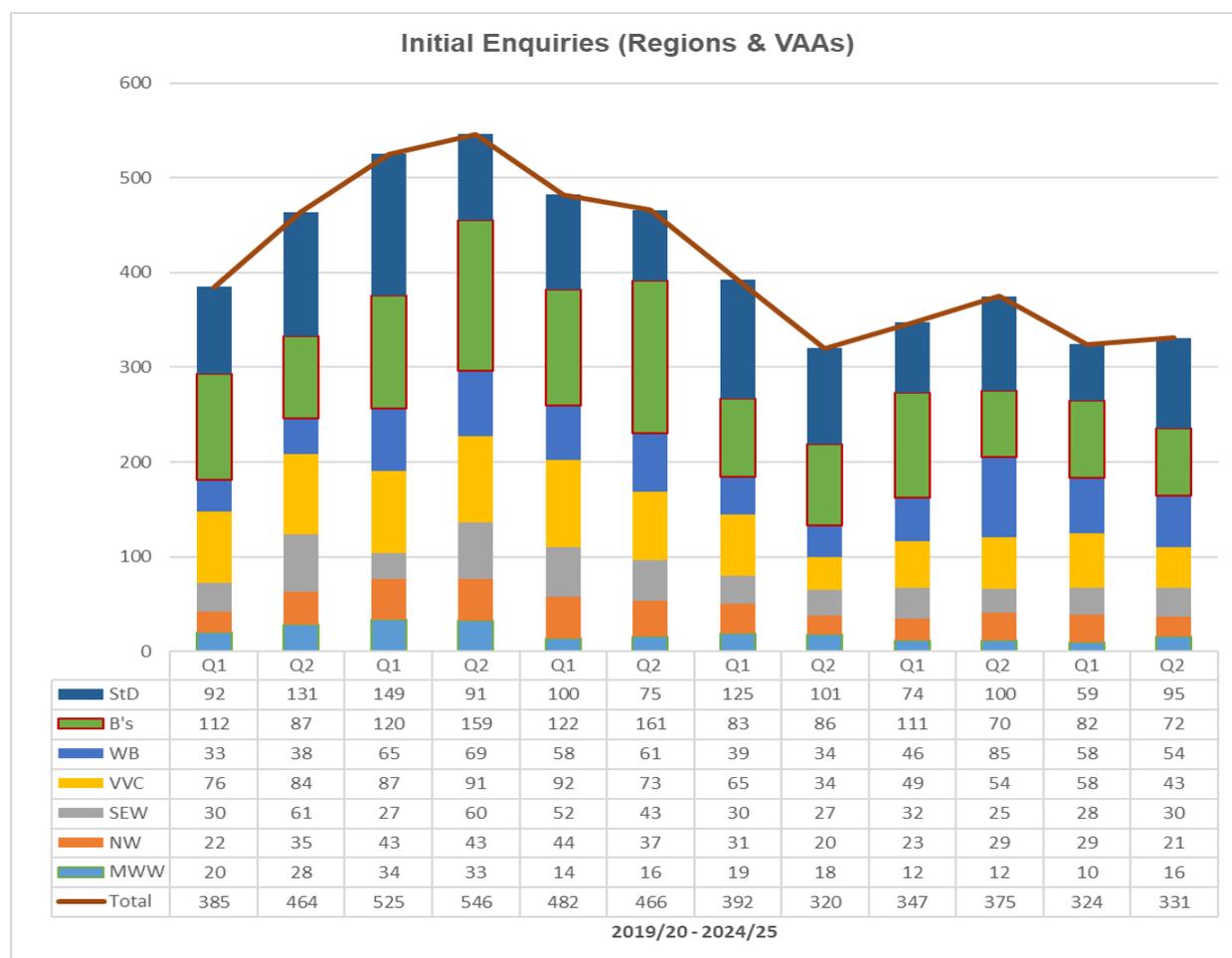
What challenges do we need to address?

The key challenge for NAS services is ensuring that there are sufficient prospective adopters to meet the needs of our children, especially those with complex needs, within larger sibling groups or with specific cultural needs. Balancing the need to find a match in a timely way, some driven by legislative requirements, with availability can lead to matches outside of the region or Wales which can have an impact on identity and contact.

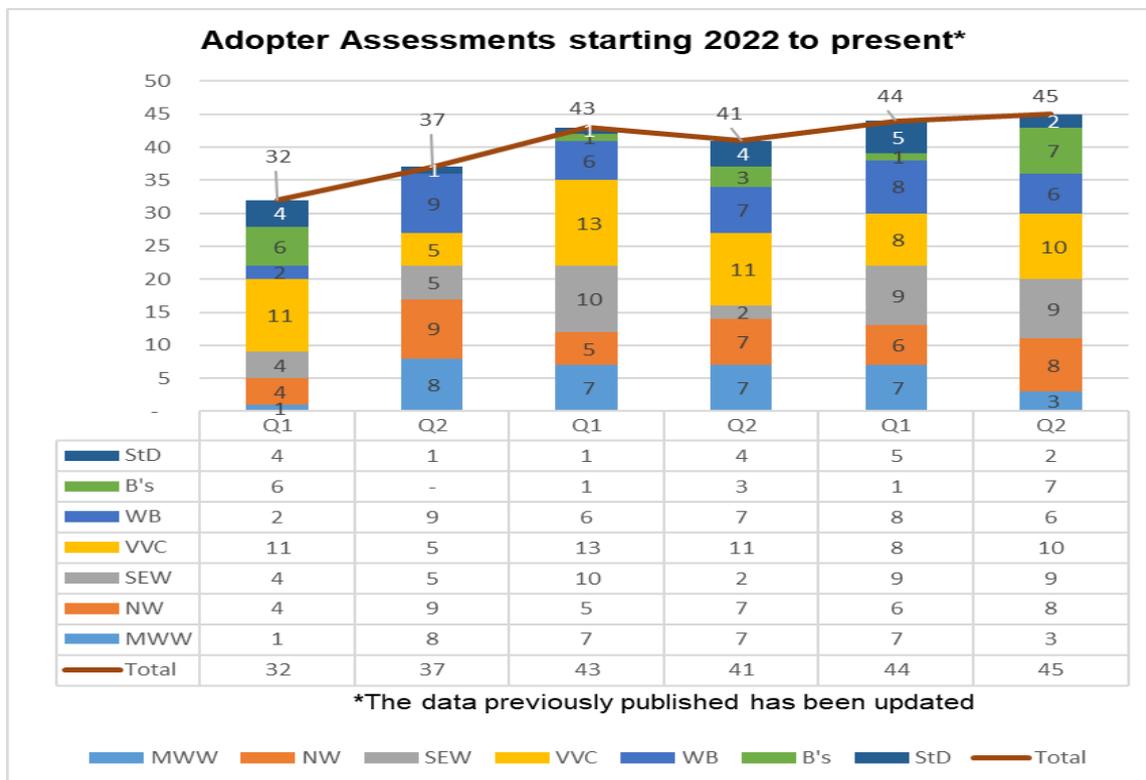
Timescales for placing children have increased and the regions are identifying legal challenges and medical delays as being key factors in this. This is being considered at a national level in order to address any issues that are impacting on this.

Adopters

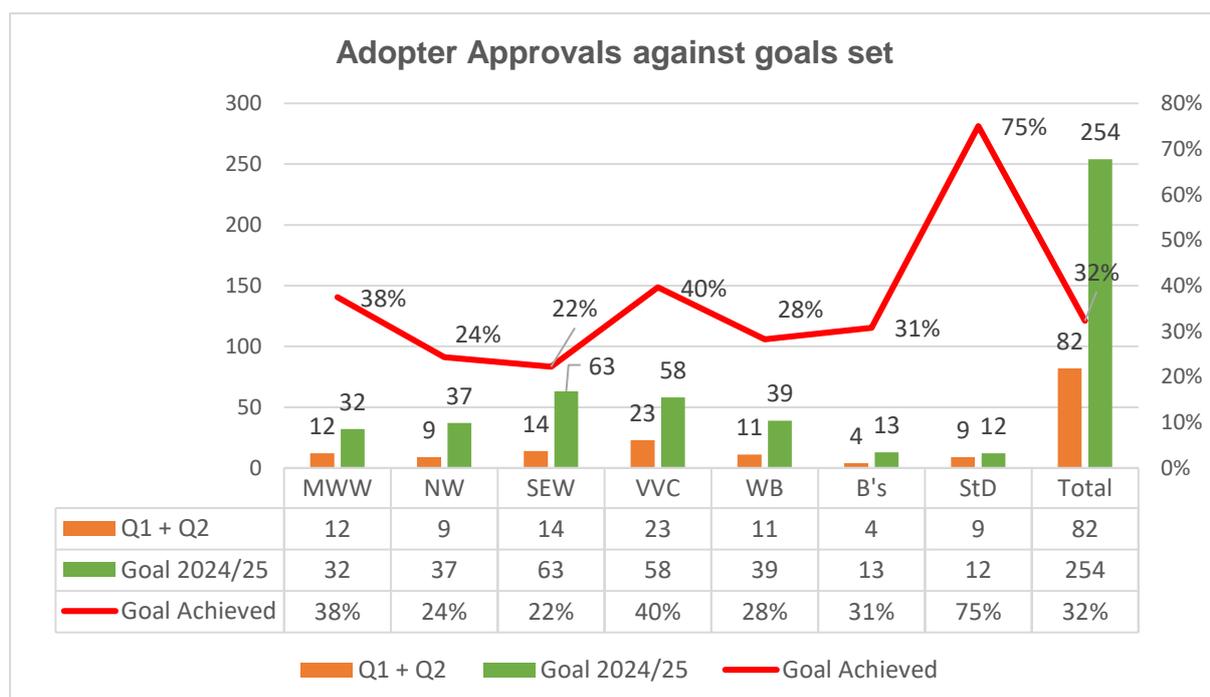
The number of initial enquiries to adopt has been falling since 2021/22, following the higher levels received during the Covid-19 pandemic and returning to more usual levels. So far, this year, this decrease has continued, the number of enquiries made to the regions and VAAs is averaging at 109 per month, compared to an average of 120 enquiries at this time last year. This emphasises the importance of improved marketing and recruitment initiatives to attract suitable adopters given the indicators that children coming into the system and waiting are increasing.



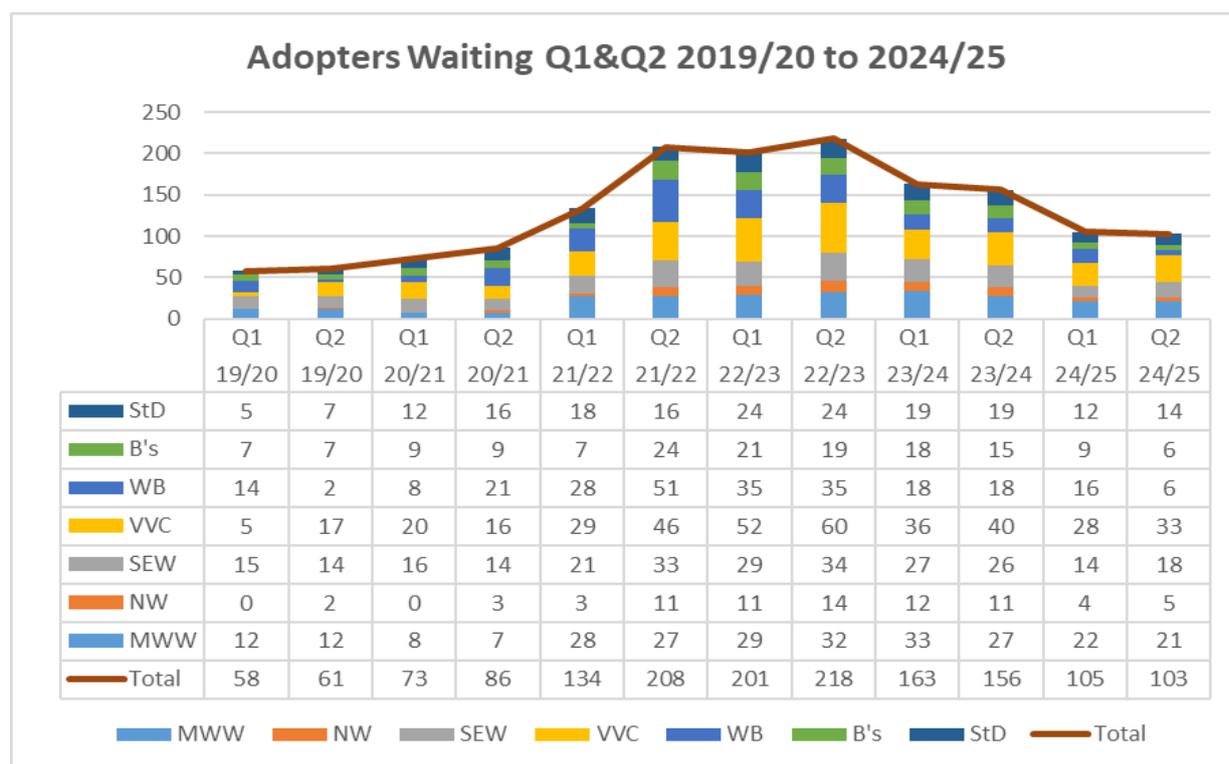
Performance in relation to the numbers of adopter assessments started has been collected in a different way since the new 'two stage' process was introduced in 2022. Since then, there has been steady positive progress made, with a total of 89 assessments (Stage 2) commenced in the first half of this year.



There have been 82 adopter approvals so far this year, an improvement on the same time last year when there were 58 approvals. The regions and VAAs agree their recruitment goals at the start of each year, based on projected need. Overall, recruitment to date has achieved 32% of the projected need, which is an indication that the target numbers may not be achieved by the end of the year.



In line with the above, the number of adopters waiting to be matched with a child has reduced to 103 as at the mid-year point, the lowest level since 2021.



Case Study on collaborative working (SEWAS)

Two young siblings were matched with approved adopters. The Family Finding Team Manager identified some areas for consideration in relation to the support needs for the children and their adopters. This included the possibility of financial support, so that the adoptive father could take more time off from work when the children were initially placed, the need for therapeutic support to be provided to the adopters and the preparation of the support network for therapeutic parenting.

The Family Finding Team Manager met with the social workers to develop the plan for the adopters and their support network. They were referred to the local authority's Family Group Conference team to provide an opportunity for the support network to gain an understanding of what their support roles would need to be.

Through discussions around financial circumstances for the adopters, a need was identified for the local authority to undertake a financial assessment of the adopters and provide a financial package of support to them.

To ensure that the adopters received therapeutic support following the placement of the children, it was agreed that a referral would be made to the Supporting Family Change Team. The team will support the adopters in therapeutic parenting, which is additional to the support provided by SEWAS, contributing to a robust adoption support plan for a sibling placement.

What challenges do we need to address?

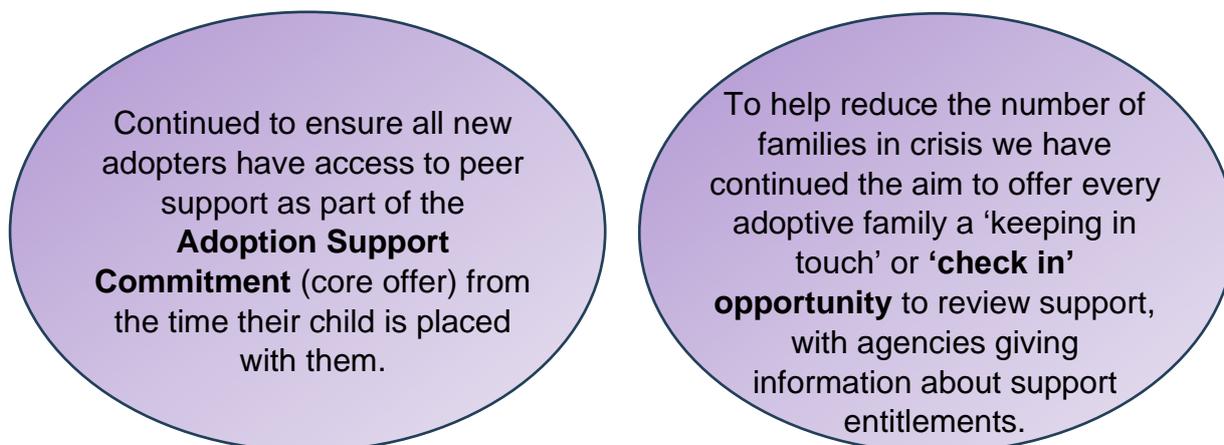
The key challenge in relation to adopters is the need to recruit more adopters to meet the needs of children of all ages and this is a key focus for NAS. Approving adopters who match the children waiting in family finding remains challenging, due to the factors outlined earlier in the report, resulting in extended support for approved applicants during the family finding stage.

Agencies also report that the assessment process for adopters is more challenging in part due to some having complex backgrounds and the importance of ensuring they have the emotional and physical resilience needed for permanent care. Delays in obtaining DBS and medical reports can further hinder the process.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY B: GREAT ADOPTION SUPPORT – WHEN AND WHERE IT’S NEEDED

This year, as well as continuing to take steps to improve the recruitment, preparation and training for adopters we aimed to ensure that every child is placed in a timely way with adopters who can, with early support, provide them with the best opportunities for family life.

What have we achieved?



In the first half of this year, as well as continuing to ensure we meet our priorities under the AC 2025 and Beyond plan, we have concentrated on responding to the findings of the Annual Adoption Barometer report, in relation to adult adoptees and birth parents.

These recommendations included:

- To reduce the numbers of young adoptees in crisis, adoption agencies to provide access to a targeted support pathway for adopted teens and young adults, co-produced with young people, with a mix of advice, training, peer and therapeutic support.

- To help adopted teens and young adults navigate statutory services, including health, education and the criminal justice system, provide access to specialist independent advocacy services.
- All adult adoptees should have access to adoption-informed counselling and therapeutic support at no cost, whenever it is needed.
- Alongside access to therapeutic support, all adult adoptees should have access to peer support, such as befriending and support groups.

To support the above, we have developed a training module which we hope to share with our partners in health and education in the second half of the year. We also aim to consider the future allocation of the Welsh Government adoption support grant to ensure continued best value.

Case Study on Adoption Support (VVC)

In 2022, C was referred to the service due to concerns with her mental health, suicidal ideations, self-harm, school refusal and risk-taking behaviours. A referral to PATH counselling service was made and C benefited from this support providing C an opportunity to speak openly with the support of a therapist. In addition to this, C started to attend our sports group on a weekly basis where she was able to make and maintain new relationships with the support of the team. C gained more confidence and secured strong friendships with other adopted young people.

The Adoption Support Team supported the family in sourcing a more suitable learning provision which had a positive effect on C's attendance. Work around healthy relationships and online safety was completed. Letterbox contact with birth mother was established. C was supported by one of our Social Care Officers (SCO) throughout and this is the feedback received from the family:

"SCO was a safety valve during the more explosive times. She steered C towards more positive outcomes and worked in a subtle way towards healthier relationships. She was never judgemental or told us what to do. She listened, suggested some ideas or thoughts re how we could move forward and always empowered us to take the steps we thought were appropriate.

There wasn't anything unhelpful. The dynamic of coming in to a family and supporting a child whilst also supporting the parents is a challenging dynamic but the SCO was mindful of this, and we were just so grateful for her support".

The Regions and VAAs have reported good progress so far this year in relation to adoption support, including:

- Services have increased their training provision and support for adoptive families, focusing on early intervention and ongoing support.
- There is a strong emphasis on early intervention to prevent long-term crises. This includes timely referrals, early check-ins, and proactive support measures.

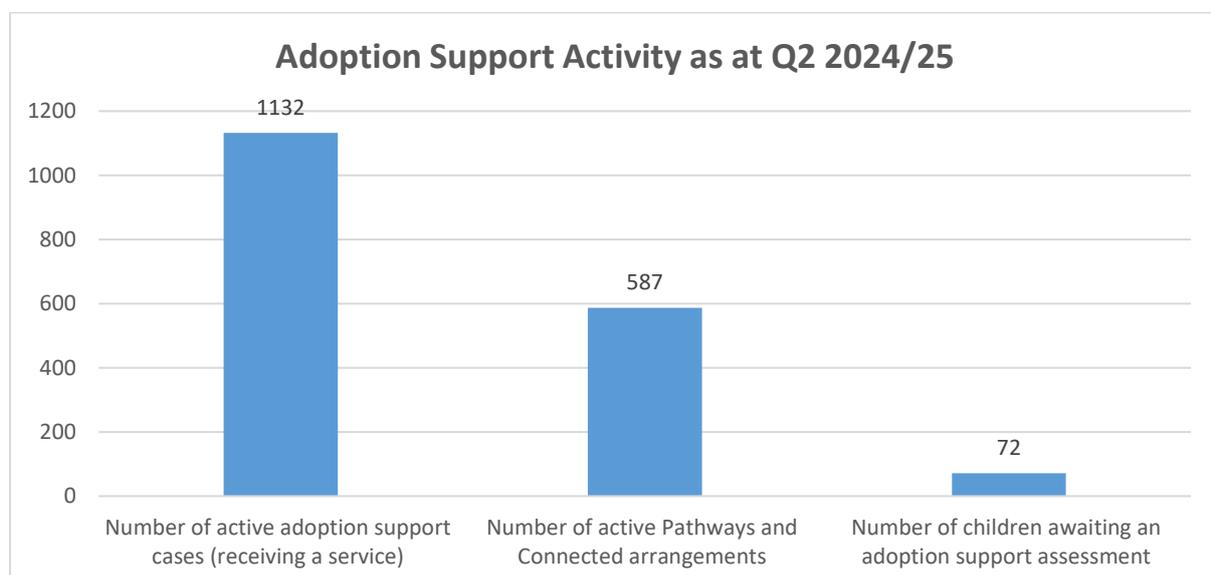
- Collaborative and innovative approaches continue to be used, such as Trauma Nurture Timelines, therapeutic parenting programmes, and virtual consultations.
- Targeted and tailored interventions are in place to identify the specific needs of families and children, including access to clinical psychology assessments and other professional support to provide more effective assistance.
- Community and peer support to help families gain support from others in similar situations.
- Specialised Programmes such as the BUSS model, Leaplets training, and support for specific groups within the adoption community (e.g., solo adopters, Muslim adopters).
- Support for birth parents and other relatives
- A strong emphasis on providing life journey materials to support the child's understanding of their background and identity.

Case Study on Adoption Support (Barnardo's)

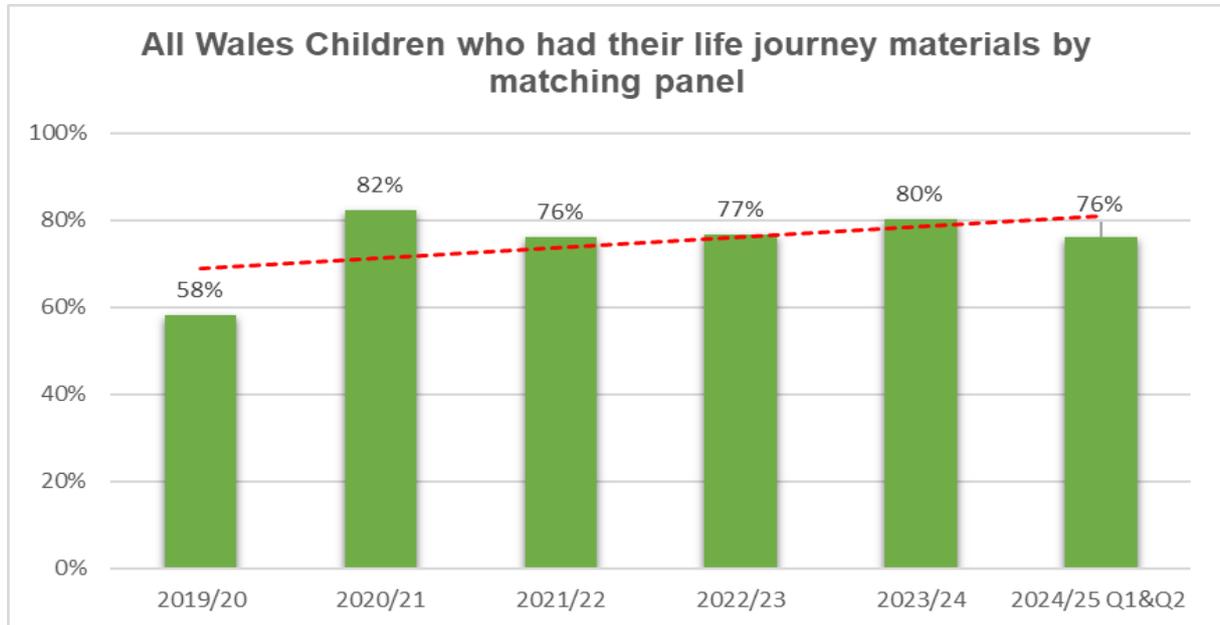
We have supported two children who previously experienced an adoption breakdown. The children are finding it difficult to develop relationships they can trust with their new family and are pushing the boundaries to test stability. We are working hard with the family to manage this and help hold consistency and safety for the children

Performance in the first six months of 2024/25

At mid-year there were over 1,100 active formal adoption support plans in place (following a statutory assessment), which is a reduction of around 20% compared to the same time last year. However, this does not include services provided without the need for an assessment, contact arrangements, the support provided by the VAAs to their adoptive families or those waiting for an assessment. The number of families in receipt of the Pathways or Connected services has increased from 450 at the mid-year point in 2023/24 to 587 this year. The number of children waiting for a support assessment has dropped by 16% to 72 compared to last year, when there were 86 waiting, which is also a positive trend.

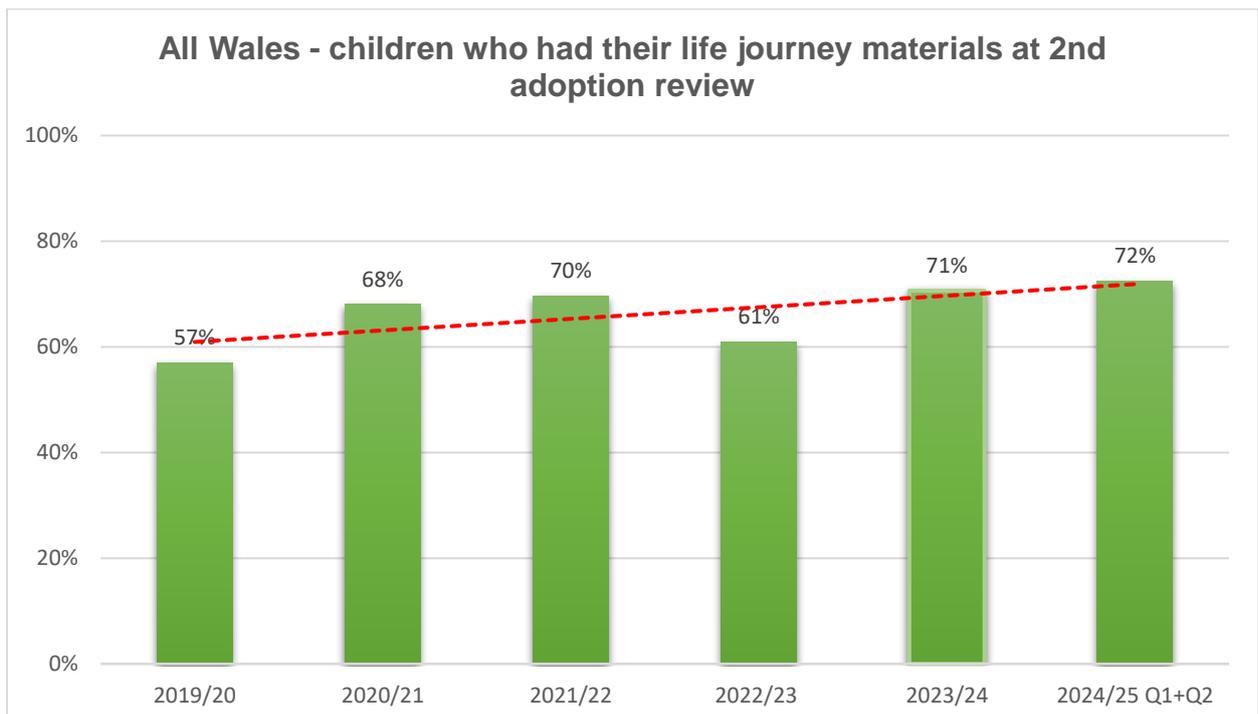


Performance in relation to life journey work remains good albeit seeing some impact from the pressures in mainstream services in the first half of the year, where performance was lower overall.



76% of all children placed so far this year had the agreed Life Journey materials in place at matching panel. This is a small reduction on the year end figure in 2023/24 but in the context of an overall improvement over time.

In the first half of this year, 72% of all children placed who had a second adoption review, had the agreed Life Journey materials as required. Again, this shows a steady improvement over time.



Case Study on Supporting Birth Parents (NWS)

Birth mother was a vulnerable young woman due to her own childhood adverse experience and adopted herself as a child. Sadly, due to birth mother's own needs the plan of adoption was recommended by the local authority and the court made her birth son subject to a placement order.

Working with birth mother at an early stage allowed NWS to establish a good working relationship with her, where she fully engaged in preparing her son's life story work, met the adopters and supported her son's transition to his adoptive family. This early intervention and support provided both birth mother and adopters a healthy platform to go forward in promoting future contact and sharing of the child's birth and adoptive identity with him in a positive light. This is likely to provide positive outcomes for the child as he grows and develops.

This work also provided birth mother with reassurances that her child would be well cared for and loved by the adoptive family, which promoted her identity as the child's birth mother in a positive manner. Providing the birth mother with the right support during her own loss allowed her to place her son's needs above her own which is a credit to her during what would have been a difficult and emotional time.

This work allowed birth mother to work through and come to terms with the loss of her son whilst providing reassurance and building new relationships with the adopters to promote future contact with him. According to birth mother, she found the support she received for her to support her son move on to his adoptive placement a positive experience. She has engaged with and is receiving support from the Leaving Care and Reflect teams.

The positive steps birth mother is taking will hopefully support her in going forward as a young adult.

What challenges do we need to address?

The increasing demand for adoption services, coupled with limited resources is a challenge for all regions.

The complex needs of some adopted children remains a significant challenge, and regions are reporting significant pressures in some families, particularly during the transitional period when young people reach their teenage years. The need for specialist support remains high, especially for families dealing with trauma and mental health difficulties. Financial constraints and the cost of living are also impacting adopters.

Education continues to be an area of difficulty, with increasing requests for support from schools. The challenges faced by children and young people in education often spill over into family life, causing issues such as school refusal, which impacts parents' ability to work and maintain financial stability.

Responsibilities for supporting access to records and contact with birth parents for young adults entitled under the 'Post-commencement' regulations are now emerging.

This can sometimes require intensive support and poses challenges in managing the needs of wishes of adopters and birth families alongside that of the young.

Going forward, there is a need to align resources to address these issues and meet the needs of our adoptive families.

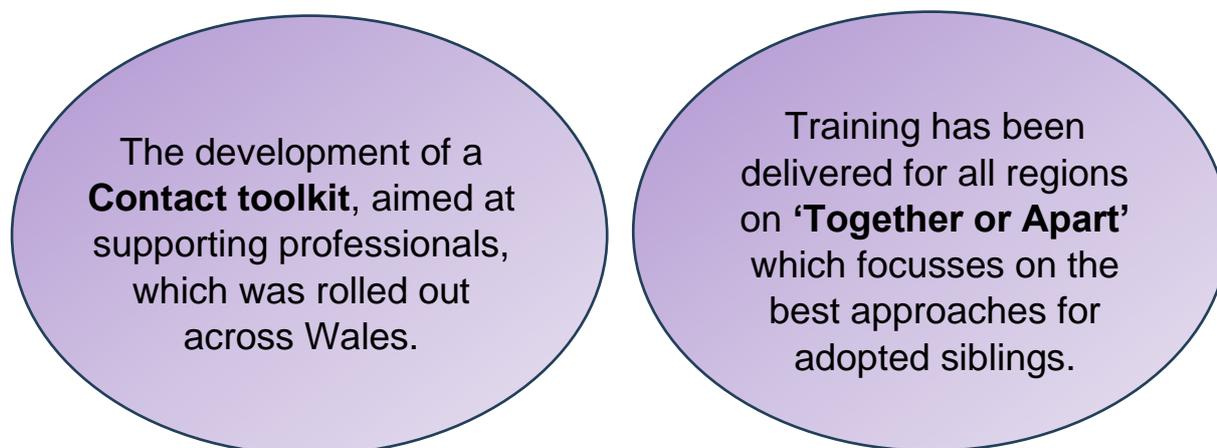
STRATEGIC PRIORITY C: HEALTHIER CONTACT THROUGH BETTER BIRTH FAMILY SERVICES

This year, we have continued to implement realistic approaches to contact across Wales that will ensure all adopted children are able to have contact with their birth families and significant others post adoption, which flexes to meet their needs throughout their childhood.

What have we achieved?

We have adopted a comprehensive approach to improving post-adoption contact, supporting birth families, and ensuring that adoptive families have the resources they need for successful and meaningful contact arrangements.

So far this year, we have implemented the following initiatives:



In the second part of the year, we will take forward some initial considerations into digital solutions to support contact. We also aim to engage with our Connected Youth Council to explore options to continue to review some of the terminology linked to contact and other adoption-related language.

Case study on Letterbox Contact (WBAS)

A new development has been the introduction of the Life Journey and Contact Hub for adopters who want support in managing letterbox with their children. The hub has worked well for the families who have attended so far – one or two sessions has been enough to help them with their situation and has avoided them sitting on a waiting list for a Contact Investigation and/or Life Journey Work Referral. A member from the Contact Team & a member from the Life Journey Team will meet with the adopters to support them.

A request came from an adoptive mother who had advised that she had been open and honest with the child since the day he was placed with them and he understood everything about why he's adopted and the letters from birth father, which had been introduced a year previous. The child had found the letter hard to read and didn't want to reply so the adoptive mother wrote the letter back on his behalf without his knowledge. This year, he again did not want to reply and didn't want her to finish reading the letter. Adoptive mother was concerned that it wasn't something she wanted to 'force on him' and she didn't want to reply again on his behalf in the fear that this could backfire in years to come.

We discussed how the child could have confused feelings about the birth father. The adopter didn't want him to stop writing letters but asked if they could be written differently as the emotions were intense which was most likely the reason why the child was struggling with them.

Actions were agreed to provide the birth father with support around letterbox and for the adopter to attend the next Life-journey workshop to talk to other adopters about how she had shared the child's life story with him and their experience of Letterbox would be useful.

The adopter was asked to rate on a scale 1-10 how confident she felt in managing letterbox and life-journey issues and she scored a 5. After the consultation she said *"moving forward I am now very confident (9) to address this issue again if I was faced with it in the future. On a scale of how happy I was with the consultation I'd say a 10"*

The Regions and VAAs have reported the following in relation to the approaches to contact arrangements across Wales:

- Improved Communication and Contact Methods:
 - services are enhancing forms and agreements for setting up post-adoption contact.
 - The introduction of creative contact methods, such as video calls between adopters and birth families.
- Support for Birth Families:
 - increased support groups and counselling services for birth families to help them navigate the adoption process and maintain relationships.
 - encouragement for birth families to engage in post-adoption support.

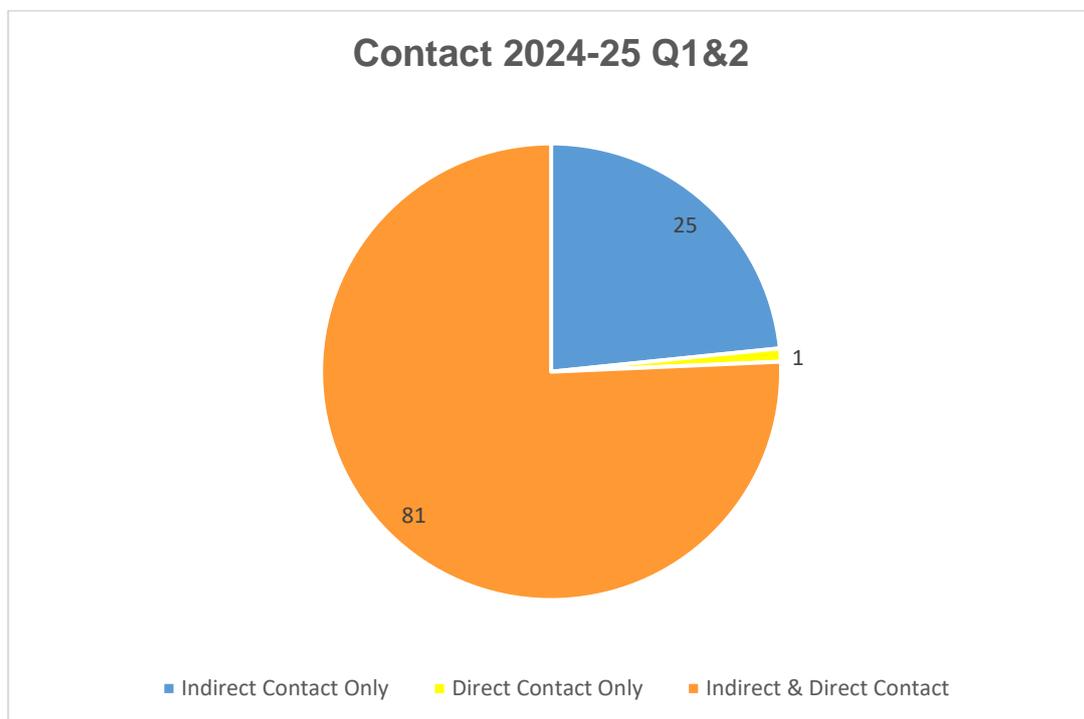
- **Focus on Flexible and Early Support:**
 - the establishment of dedicated teams and systems in some regions to support flexible contact arrangements, including sibling contact.
 - implementing voluntary check-ins with both birth parents and adopters to address issues early and provide ongoing support.

- **Raising Awareness and Training:**
 - efforts to raise awareness among childcare colleagues about the importance of identity, contact, and life journey work.
 - training and support for families to consider increased levels of birth family contact.

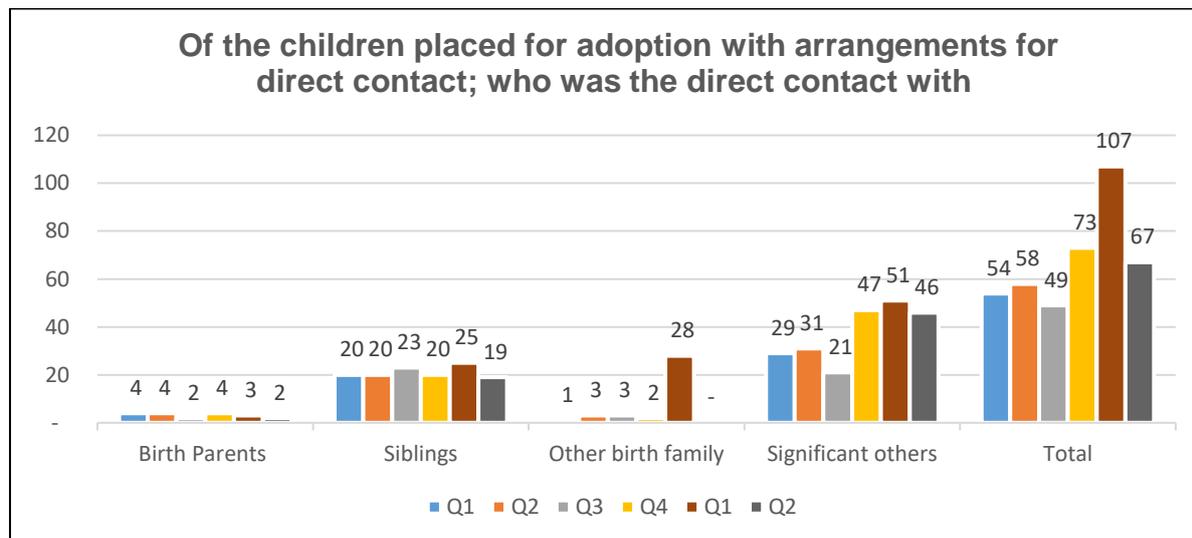
- **Consistent Promotion and Monitoring of Contact:**
 - consistent promotion of contact from the decision-making stage through to placement.
 - close monitoring of indirect and direct contact arrangements to ensure they are effective and beneficial.

Performance in the first six months of 2024/25

All children placed for adoption in the first half of the year, had a plan for contact arrangements in place. The majority (81/76%) had plans for both direct and indirect contact, a similarly high proportion to previous reporting periods.



Of the arrangements for direct contact, regions report on who this contact is with (there may be more than one arrangement in place. Most of these arrangements were with 'significant others' (likely former foster carers). The number of new arrangements in place for direct contact with birth parents remains small.



What challenges do we need to address?

The main challenge for agencies in managing contact is the need to have sufficient resources to develop this in line with new expectations and best practice. This extends to also improving support for birth parent, to ensure that all parties are prepared.

We will continue to explore options for supporting with contact, including the use of digital approaches to supporting with indirect contact.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY D: BETTER ADOPTION RECORDS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION AT ANY AGE

Our commitment to developing an effective access to records service has continued this year, with an aim to ensuring the importance of keeping and sharing quality information, alongside ensuring that children and adults have appropriate support in place.

What have we achieved?

There have been two key areas of focus this year:

The pilot Access to Records service, a joint initiative between St David's and Adoption UK. The service also provides intermediary support to those who are eligible. At present, the pilot is focussed on pre 1976 cases

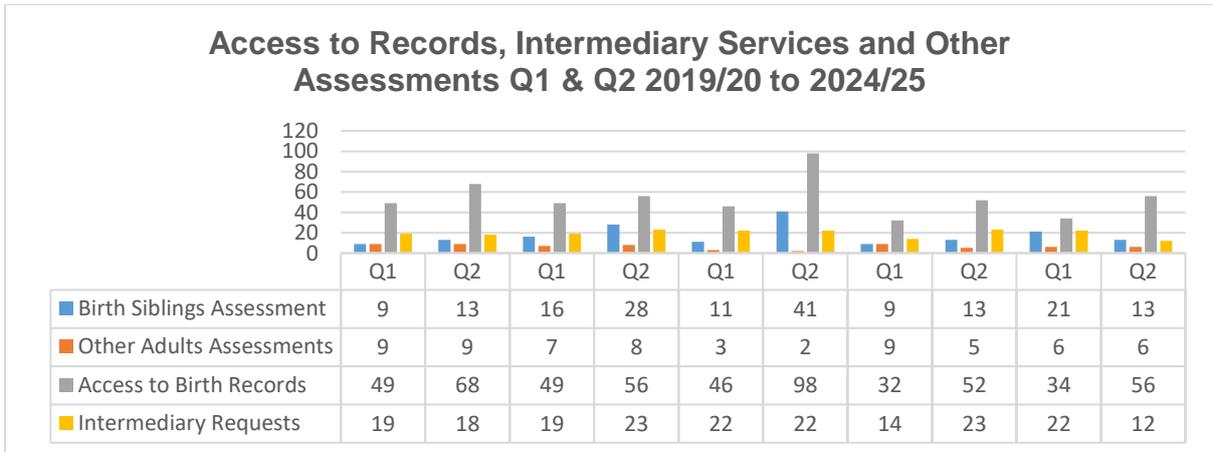
Continued positive links with the Improving Adoption Services for Adults project in England which aims to identify and propose solutions to barriers to tracing and support services which adopted adults and their birth relatives

This work will continue into the second half of the year, supported by a dedicated Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services sub group.

The Regions and VAAs have reported the following in relation to access to adoption records and intermediary services:

- Enhanced processes to provide easier access to adoption records, with clear referral processes and reduced waiting times.
- Agreements in place for collaboration with the St Davids and Adoption UK pilot project.
- Provision of intermediary services to help adopted individuals and birth families establish contact and build relationships providing emotional support and counselling to help adopted individuals and birth families navigate the process and manage their situations.
- Development of multidisciplinary practices to handle complex cases

Performance in the first six months of 2024/25



There were 90 Access to Birth records requests received during the first half of the year, a small increase compared to the same time last year, when there were 84. Intermediary service requests remain at a fairly low level, as do birth siblings and other adults' assessments.

What challenges do we need to address?

Some regions are reporting an increase in requests for access to birth records and requests for intermediary services, particularly requests under the Post Commencement Regulations which is posing challenges in terms of meeting those needs in a timely way. In other areas, waiting lists have reduced and the additional grant resources in place are supporting service provision.

The complex needs of adopted adults cannot be managed through accessing adoption records and contact support alone, highlighting the need for increased counselling and therapeutic support.

Case Study on Access to Records and Intermediary Services (St David's and Adoption UK)

So far this year, St. David's Adoption Service has worked with a number of adopted adults, adopted pre-1975, who have accessed their birth records through the Access to Records pilot project. The project has also provided an intermediary service for those people wishing to search and trace birth parents and siblings. Through ongoing consultation with the five Regions the project has been further refined. Evaluations from adopted people have rated on average a high level of satisfaction with the service received and that it:

- Met their needs
- Helped them
- Treated them with dignity and respect
- Gave them a voice and were listened to

For the therapeutic support from Adoption UK, initially, a plan for a group was developed. However, it soon emerged that, likely due to interpersonal and trust difficulties pervasive in adopted adults with trauma, most adoptees did not want to join a group straight away. Instead, AUK pivoted and decided to provide one-to-one peer support alongside one-to-one therapy with a psychologist or psychotherapist. For those accessing this support, feedback received so far has been extremely positive.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY E – MAINTAINING THE INFRASTRUCTURE NECESSARY TO DELIVER NAS AND MAINTAIN SOUND GOVERNANCE ACROSS NAS AND FOSTER WALES

What has been achieved in the first six months of 2024/25?

The role of NAS, and the range of functions delivered nationally in respect of adoption, have continued to develop. Foster Wales is now embedded into the overall joint structure, and this has been strengthened with the establishment of a new National Joint Committee, which provides oversight of both services on behalf of all 22 local authorities across Wales.

Key achievements in the first six months of this year have included:

- All local authorities across Wales signed up to the new NAS and Foster Wales Joint Committee agreement and the inaugural meeting was held in April. The committee will have oversight of the financial and service delivery arrangements for both services.
- The revised hosting arrangement with Cardiff Council was finalised and an agreement will be signed by all local authorities in the latter half of the year.
- A financial review of NAS and Foster Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Local Government Association was concluded and the findings reported to the Joint Committee. The recommendations included the need to develop a Medium Term Financial Plan for NAS and Foster Wales, to provide a clearer picture of future resource requirements and constraints and to facilitate more effective planning. This Plan was developed and presented to the Joint Committee and NAS Governance Board for ongoing monitoring and review.
- An All Wales Finance Review has subsequently been commissioned to identify the funding required to deliver adoption services operationally across Wales. The review will be completed by the end of the current financial year.
- National engagement arrangements continue, including the work with Adoption UK on the annual Barometer and Adoption Voices plus Connect (children and young people).

Regional Management Boards

The five Regional Management Boards (RMBs) across Wales meet on a quarterly basis. All RMBs have oversight of the performance, finance, and governance arrangements in each region.

Specific areas of discussion in the first part of this year related to:

REGION	TOPICS
MWWAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service Review ▪ Performance Report ▪ Safeguarding updates
NWAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of Care Report ▪ Service and Budget updates ▪ Life Journey work ▪ Information systems
SEWAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DBS checks for prospective adopters ▪ Staff and service updates ▪ Children and Adopters Medicals ▪ Adoption Allowances
VVC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance and Budget Updates ▪ Updates from Health, Third Sector and Central Team

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wales Early Permanence ▪ Adoption Support
WBAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance and Budget Updates ▪ Service Updates ▪ BLM Research

Links with Welsh Government

NAS works closely with Welsh Government Ministers and Officers.

Earlier in the year, an introductory meeting was held with the new Minister, outlining some of the improvements made by NAS over the last 10 years, and the importance of the support, financial and otherwise, that the service receives from Welsh Government and Ministers.

A meeting was also held with the Chief Social Care Officer in Welsh Government to discuss future support to NAS and Foster Wales.

The Central Team meets regularly with Welsh Government Social Care officials to maintain a dialogue about adoption policy, practice and developments. Meetings are also held with the Welsh Government Education department to discuss issues relating to adopted school pupils.

The Director and other members of the central team remain involved with various other Welsh Government strategic groups, including the Special Guardianship Expert Group, the Programme for Government (PfG) - Transformation Delivery Group, the Eliminate Profit Board and 3 workstreams (primarily linked to Foster Wales), the Corporate Parenting Expert Group, the development of the National Practice Framework for Wales, and Historical Adoption Records.

National Finances

The core funding for the national functions for the National Adoption Service is provided from a top slice of the Revenue Support Grant (made available through the WLGA). This allocation is subject to the annual approval of the WLGA Executive Board. WLGA formally reviewed the arrangements for this in 2023/24; they will remain the same but with the addition of enhanced monitoring and planning.

The top slice allocation is £509k for 2024/25, making up 13.8% of the total national budget of £3,640,507. The remainder of the national budget is made up of Welsh Government grant aid¹ to support expansion and service development in adoption; some of the grant aid is currently time limited. A significant proportion of the national budget is passported to regions and 3rd sector partners (the VAAs); 91% (circa £2.72m), will be made available to local authorities and VAAs in 2024/25.

¹ The 'Adoption Support grant' and the 'Adopt Cymru 2025 and beyond...' grant.

The income sources and expenditure to date are detailed in the table below. We are expected to fully spend the grant allocations for the year.

INCOME SOURCE	ALLOCATION FOR 2024/25	SPEND AS AT 30/09/2024	PURPOSE
Revenue Support Grant (WLGA Top-Slice)	£509,210	£277,774	National Co-ordination costs
Welsh Government Grant (Adoption Support)	£2,300,000	£1,247,546	Passported to the Regions and VAAs for the delivery of adoption support services
Welsh Government Grant (Adopt Cymru and Beyond)	£669,492	£569,747	National PR and Marketing, with the rest being passported to the VAAs for reforming adoption
Welsh Government Grant (Adoption Register for Wales)	£220,296	£142,560	Management of the Adoption Register for Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government

Summary and Next Steps

In the second half of 2024/25, NAS will continue to progress with its strategic priorities; specific areas of focus will include:

- Adoption Week and our 10-year anniversary celebrations
- The annual on-line 'Big adoption Conversation' event
- Launch of the Adopter Qualities and Skills Framework
- Marketing Strategy 'on message' and responsive
- Further implementation of initiatives to take forward the recommendations from the Adoption Barometer report, including the development of training modules on adoption support
- Considering a pilot of the Letter Swap system for digital letterbox contact
- Further meetings with our Connected Youth Council to engage in our work around adoption terminology

Our end-year Annual Report for 2024/25 will be available later in the year.



National Adoption Service Central Team
 c/o Cardiff Council,
 County Hall, Atlantic Wharf
 Cardiff, CF10 4UW
 T: 029 2087 3927
 E: contact@adoptcymru.com
www.adoptcymru.com