



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu **Cymru**  
Adoption Register **Wales**

# Annual Report 2019-20



# Introduction

We are pleased to share the annual report of the Adoption Register Wales for the period 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020. The new Adoption Register for Wales (ARW) which was launched in June 2019 is a fully bilingual, online family finding service. Using Link Maker, a quick and easy to use secure system, the register aims to provide suitable matches for children with plans for adoption and to reduce their waiting time.

Under the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) (Amendment) Directions 2019 local authorities within the regional collaboratives and Voluntary Adoption Agencies are directed to refer both children and prospective adopters to the Register within one month of agency decision for children or approval for adopters. The Register is the Welsh Government system to support adoption matching; since 2015 the National Adoption Service (NAS) has been commissioned to host this service for Welsh adoption agencies. The new system which uses Link Maker allows agencies to use it for regional/agency level matching as well as at an All Wales level and beyond for the formal Adoption Register for Wales. Behind the statistics outlined in this report there is encouraging evidence that more practitioners across Wales are beginning to refer children to the register within the timeframes and there has been an increase in the number of adopters who have registered.

Family finding events and activities, collaboration with the NAS regions and VAA's is ongoing to ensure maximum use of the register's functionality. Whilst the current Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on health and social care services for children in Wales, it has been possible to continue at least the initial stages of linking and matching for all children needing adoptive placements.



# Covid-19

As an online resource use of the register has largely been unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some meetings that were due to take place were postponed but will be restarting during June and July. The Adoption Register Practitioner Manager left the post in April; plans for recruitment were in place but have been affected by the current crisis. This will be picked up as soon as it is practicable to do so. In the meantime any necessary additional work is being managed by the Policy & Practice Officer within the Central Team who ordinarily oversees the service in any event.

## Adoption Register Activity

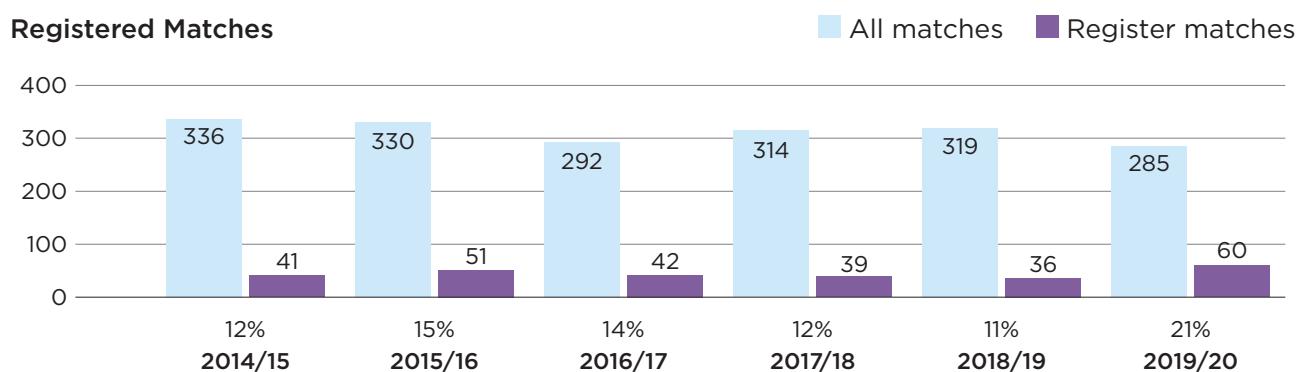
308 children have been referred during the above period alongside 193 prospective adopters who have either self-registered or been referred by their agencies. This compares with 319 children from 2018-19 and 119 adopters. The number of potential matches that have occurred via the register is 60, a comparison with 36 and 39 from previous years.

Unlike the previous register adopters now have direct access which may explain the increase in registrations. Whilst the number of children's referrals is relatively the same as previous years the increase in the number of matches may suggest that more children are being added earlier even when links have been identified outside of the register. As the new register becomes more firmly embedded there will be more work undertaken to better understand these trends.



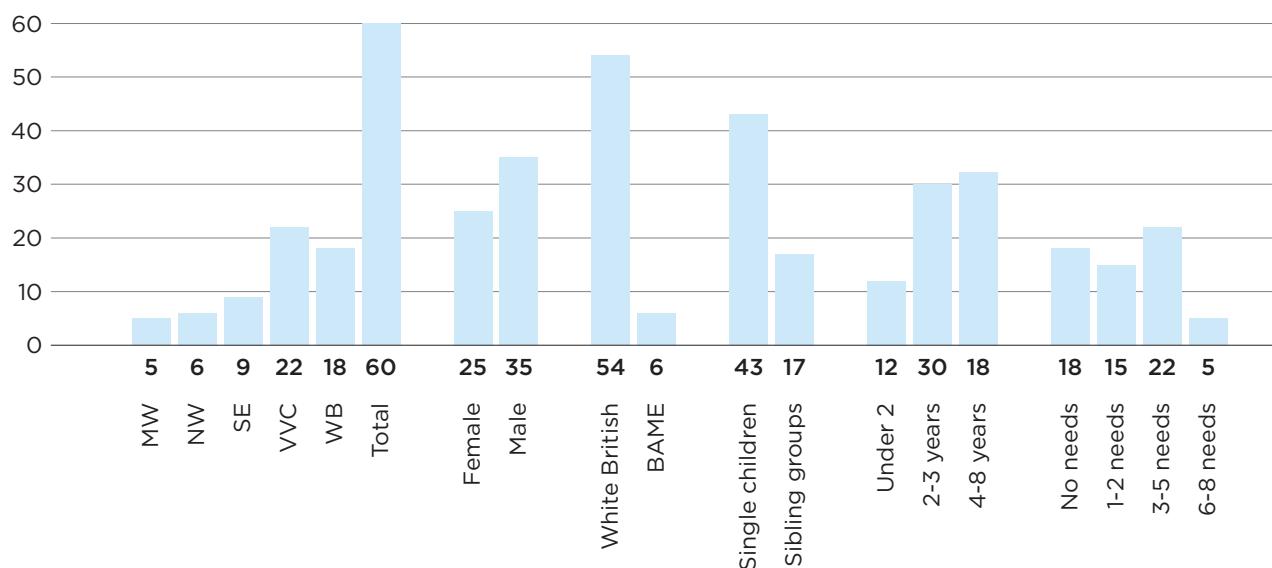
# Matches

A total of 285 matches have occurred in Wales this year, and whilst this is slightly lower overall than previous years, 60 of these were identified via the register. This is a significant increase on previous years where matches via the register have hovered around 11% and 15%. The change in the regulations to ensure children are placed on the register within one month of Placement Order instead of three months may account for this variance as matches that occur outside of the register for some of those children are now recorded earlier.



The graph below shows 70% (n42) of the 60 children placed via the register were children who might wait longer for placement due to their identified additional needs or have an increased chance of having additional needs. The majority (71%; n43) were single children; whilst we know that single children are generally less challenging to find placements for than siblings this would suggest that a high proportion of these children had at least one or more 'other'<sup>1</sup> characteristic or need. Additional information provided also indicates that 70% (n41) of these children had attachment difficulties and 36% (n22) were classed as having behavioural difficulties and/or emotional difficulties. Further analysis of this information will be considered in order to inform targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns for 2020-21.

## Matches made through ARW 2019-20



4 <sup>1</sup> The register records being part of a sibling group as an individual need

# Family Finding events and activities

## Adoption Activity Day, 14th March 2020

This was the fourth Adoption Activity Day held in Wales. Adoption Activity Days have become an established method of matching children waiting for adoptive placement and are aimed at supporting those children who have been waiting longer to find potential adoptive families, some of whom may have additional needs. The event this year followed a similar schedule as had proved successful in previous years although due to the emerging Covid-19 situation required some adjustments.

Thirty-five children were invited to attend but due to C-19 a significant number were withdrawn prior to the event resulting in only 11 children arriving on the day. Nevertheless all 35 profiles were shared with 19 prospective adopters who attended as well as with the agencies for a further 16 prospective adoptive families who were unable to travel on the day. As a result there were 17 expressions of interest (compared to 14 in 2018-19) from families and these are in the process of being followed up.



This was a very well planned and thought out event. The children were provided with a fun, interesting and engaging environment.

..... thoroughly enjoyed himself and did not want to leave at 4pm!

## Adoption Exchange Days

There were two Exchange Days held during the past year; the first in Cardiff on 24th October 2019 and the second at Colwyn Bay on 30th January 2020. Both events were well attended by 27 families in total and 136 children were profiled. The majority of children were part of sibling groups and all had complex needs. As a result of these events there were 4 successful matches (in comparison to 3 in 2018-19). Whilst this number remains relatively small experience generally shows that the conversation rate for such events is around 5%; the more significant impact being the opportunity of bringing professionals and adopters together to enable adopters to reflect more widely on the children they might not otherwise have considered.



- Very well organised, great venue, adopters went away happy feeling that attendance was worthwhile and beneficial
- Difficult for some adopters to take time from work; a separate event in the north needed
- Excellent event. Good networking opportunities & well organised.
- Lovely atmosphere. Very busy. Well organised.

## Adopting Together Service

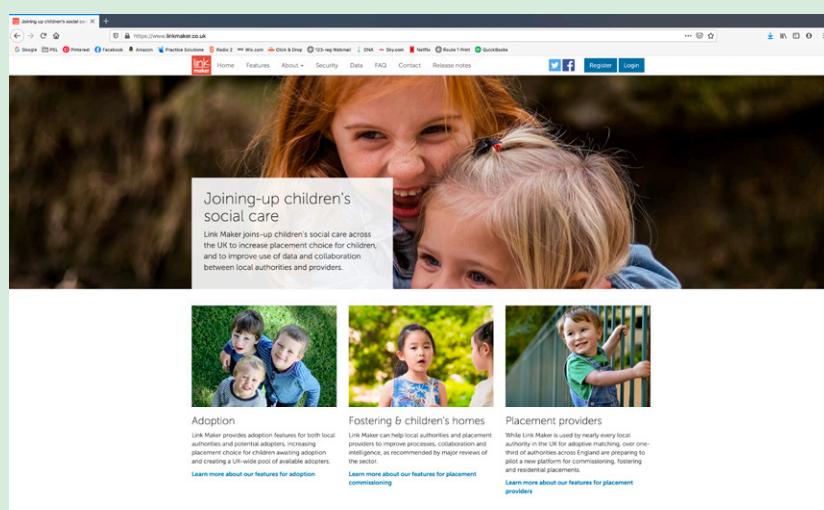
Since January 2020 the Adoption Register has been working closely with the Adopting Together Service to assist with those children on the register who meet the criteria for referral to the service, particularly those children who have waited, or are likely to wait, 9+ months for a placement. An audit carried out in March identified 83 children in this category. All children are now regularly monitored by the register team and there has been a 36% (n.22/30) increase in referrals to the Adopting Together service. This audit is still in its infancy and whilst the increase cannot be directly attributed to this work monitoring these children in this way provides an additional layer of opportunity.

# Collaborative working with the regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies

- **Practitioner Meetings** continue to take place bi-monthly and focus on sharing profiles and planning for family finding events. The meetings have provided a significant opportunity for staff to consider children who have been waiting the longest.
- ‘**Super-user’ meetings** have continued for identified staff from each region/agency to consider and resolve issues in relation to the use of the Link Maker system. Close working with Link Maker has resulted in small modifications to be made to improve system functionality.
- **Child and adopter profile writing training** took place in October 2019; was attended by 100 practitioners from across Wales and although feedback was mixed there was good evidence that attendees understood the purpose of the register and the need for children’s profiles to be authentic and realistic if they are to achieve positive outcomes.

## Community Functionality

Link Maker provides an online community facility for adoptive families and practitioners which includes an online forum and an events page. Both aspects have been explored alongside consideration of current availability of similar online platforms. Whilst the final outcome is yet to be decided early indications would suggest that both resources currently exist in other formats for adopters (Facebook/WhatsApp/AUK), are easily accessible and could result in duplication of such a provision. Further consideration of whether a provision for practitioners might be helpful will take place at the next ARW Implementation group meeting due to take place in June 2020.



# Moving Forward

## Priorities for 2020-21

1

In order to continue to maximise children's chances in adoption it is crucial for professionals working with them to have a number of different family finding tools at their disposal; the team will therefore continue to prioritise working closely with the regions and Link Maker to increase the number of referrals to the register at the point of decision or approval.

2

At the earliest opportunity recruitment activity for the Adoption Practitioner Manager post will be resumed.

3

In line with public health guidance Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Days will be set up. Whilst it will be possible to undertake virtual Exchange Days, Activity Days are about the importance of personal chemistry in relationships and therefore will be harder to achieve with any form of social distancing. The team will therefore continue to explore how these events can best maximise opportunities for family finding whilst at the same time observing government rules in place.

4

Continued monitoring of children on the register for 9+ months to ensure regions are prompted in a timely way to consider referring to the Adopting Together Service (where this is necessary and appropriate).

5

Register data will continue to be analysed to better understand children's needs alongside placement activity, including geographical spread to ensure as many children as possible are placed within region and within Wales.

6

As outlined above a decision on the use of the Community Functionality function on Link Maker will be taken.