



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

Adoption Task Force

Adoption practice stakeholder engagement 2014 to
2016: an overview

CELCCIS

January 2017



Background to the Task Force

The work of the Adoption Task Force, hosted by CELCIS and supported by Social Work Scotland (SWScotland) and the Scottish Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, began in mid-2014. It was initiated in recognition of the need to address the role of contemporary adoption in the Permanence Planning improvement agenda of the Scottish Government in providing a safe, nurturing and committed option for the small proportion and number of children in the country who cannot be brought up within their family of origin.

Enquiries by CELCIS as to any wish and need for action on stimulating adoption practice elicited an enthusiastic response from senior officers of SWScotland and the Consortium.

A survey carried out by SWScotland (then ADSW) in 2013 had shown a concerning inconsistency in expectations across the country about, for example, the age of children who could be adopted. Officers also noted concern about differences in the extent of modernisation of infrastructure and practice.

Stakeholder engagement activities

Adoption assessment and preparation

Initial discussions with a small number of experienced professionals in key roles led to the organisation of a national conference in November 2014 to promote constructive debate and share experiences of updating practice safely, particularly in the assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive parents.

The majority of the day was spent on discussion and sharing practice among managers and practitioners from the relevant organisations across Scotland. We discussed whether current systems and methods are as effective as they can be and generated a large number of fresh thoughts and ideas for further development. The resources from the day include:

- [Adoption Assessment and Preparation: what works](#) presentation highlights what is working well in adoption in Scotland at present.
- [Adoption Assessment and Preparation report](#) captures the discussion and comments from the day and the ideas that will be taken forward by the adoption task force.

Assessing and preparing adoptive parents: refreshing our approaches

We held a second event in March 2016 to share examples of progress and initiatives being tried out across Scotland and to follow up on two issues identified at the first event; best practice in assessment and report writing, and best practice in supporting a child's ongoing connections with birth family members.

- [Building and sustaining adoptive family relationships: preparing adopters for the task ahead](#), presentation by Dr Christine Jones

- [Post adoption contact in an internet era: risks and opportunities](#), presentation by Dr Christine Jones

Again, participants discussed the issues in small groups which has been collated and reported in:

- [Summary of comments and themes on assessment and preparation of adopters](#), professional needs, adoption support and contact (in particular risks and needs in an internet era).

A main activity of the workshop was small group discussions on improving the current format and approach usually used as the basis for adoption assessment reports:

- [Summary of discussion](#) was compiled and while some differing views were expressed, a number of clear themes emerged for further consideration.

Historical adoption

We hosted a practice exchange workshop in April 2016 to share existing knowledge and practice about historical adoptions.

It is widely acknowledged that social situations that led to placements for adoption in the mid-20th century still have an impact today on many adopted people, adoptive and birth families, and there is a great deal of knowledge and skills held by a number of experienced practitioners. This workshop provided an opportunity to discuss how we can apply learning from the past to current practice, especially in supporting long term ongoing connections among adoptive and birth family members.

- [Benefits of adoptive parents and birth parents meeting](#), presentation by Janet Neill, South Lanarkshire Council, highlighted the learning and good practice.

Small group discussions focussed on how the past can inform future adoption practice and learning was captured for future reference by the task force:

- [How can the past inform future adoption practice summary report of discussions](#)

We also produced a number of supporting documents following the workshop:

- [Timeline of key Scottish adoption legislation](#), with information on the social and political rationale for the various changes.
- [A short continuum of circumstances under which women may have had their children adopted pre 1980 is helpful in highlighting the impact of individual circumstances on decision making.](#)
- [A list of services to birth parents and relatives](#) in recognition of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 emphasis on adoption support for all parties affected by adoption.

Following these events, a practitioner in one local authority produced a helpful reflection and learning paper to consider how to give birth parents the opportunity to express their views about proposed permanence plans:

- [Practice learning paper](#) from Anne Ritchie, Independent Chair, Inverclyde

Adoption Task Force developments

The current membership is from all the key national groups. The roles of those involved include senior managers in the local authority and voluntary sectors, front line managers responsible for children, birth parents and adopters at all life stages, a children's rights' professional, researcher, and chair of an adoption panel.

Members of the Task Force met in September 2016 to consider its role and any further useful activities. As there are a number of forums which discuss adoption, for example, the SWScotland sub group, the Consortium and practitioners' meetings, there was a wish not to replicate these. However, those involved agreed there is value in having a small, inclusive, specialist group who can link the groups with each other and take an overview of national practice achievements and challenges based on stakeholder feedback and arrange occasional activities which are helpful to all. It was also noted the particularly helpful willingness of practitioners and service users across the country to contribute to the activities which had been held.

It has been proposed that the Task Force continue to meet, be hosted by CELCIS and chaired currently by the Permanence and Care Team.

The Task Force will continue to be very much a 'doing' and 'action' group, reviewing ongoing purpose and tasks at completion of each activity. The next activity planned is:

- A workshop in early 2017, north of the central belt, which combines the topics and materials from the two workshops held in 2016. This is in recognition of the over subscription to these events and their positive response.
- An event on sibling placements, related to Dr Christine Jones' current research. This may be in Aberdeen and linked to the work of the Permanence and Care Excellence programme there.
- A potential workshop later in the year on transitions and follow through for children, birth families and adopters.

References List

Beesley P, Making Good Assessments, BAAF, 2010

Collins and Foley [Ed], Promoting Children's Wellbeing, OU, 2008

Cousins J, Pushing the Boundaries of Assessment, BAAF, 2010

Clapton and Hoggan, Adoption and Fostering in Scotland, Dunedin Academic Press, 2012

Dibben E and Howorth V, Adoption by Foster Carers: A guide to preparing, assessing and supporting foster carers adopting children in their care, BAAF, 2012

Jones, C. A. (2009) What makes adoptive family life work? Adoptive parents' narratives of the making and remaking of adoptive kinship. Doctoral thesis, Durham University, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2052/>

Marsden, R, The Family Business, BAAF, 2008

Neil E, Contact After Adoption, <https://www.uea.ac.uk/contact-after-adoption/home>

Plumtree A, Child Care Law Scotland: A summary of the law in Scotland, BAAF, 2014

Rushton and Monck, Enhancing Adoptive Parenting, BAAF, 2009

Saunders and Selwyn, Adopting Large Sibling Groups: The experience of adopters and adoption agencies, CoramBAAF, 2011

Saunders H, Selwyn J and Fursland E, Placing Large Sibling Groups for Adoption, BAAF, 2013

Sellick et al, What Works in Adoption and Foster Care, Barnardos, 2004, [Summary PDF on http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_works_in_adoption_and_foster_care_-_summary_1_.pdf]

Sims N, How to Run a Great Workshop, Pearson Education, 2006

Swift, R, Adopting a Child in Scotland, BAAF, 2013

Woolgar and Scott, The negative consequences of over-diagnosing attachment disorders in adopted children: The importance of comprehensive formulations Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry 04/2013

Websites of Bristol (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/centres/hadley/>), Cardiff (<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/research-units/adoption-research-group>) and East Anglia (<https://www.uea.ac.uk/>) Universities in particular – for information on current adoption research.

About CELCIS

CELCIS, based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. Ours is a truly collaborative agenda; we work alongside partners, professionals and systems with responsibility for nurturing our vulnerable children and families. Together we work to understand the issues, build on existing strengths, introduce best possible practice and develop solutions. What's more, to achieve effective, enduring and positive change across the board, we take an innovative, evidence-based improvement approach across complex systems.

For more information

Visit: www.celcis.org **Email:** celcis@strath.ac.uk **Tel:** 0141 444 8500