

Adoption: inspections of voluntary adoption agencies

The framework and evaluation schedule and grade descriptors

This document outlines the framework for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies and sets out the areas that inspectors will evaluate in order to make their judgements from September 2013.

It replaces the framework for the 'Inspection of local authority and voluntary agencies' and 'Inspection of adoption agencies: evaluation schedule and grade descriptors'.

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the judgements that inspectors make and report on when inspecting voluntary adoption agencies. It shows how the principles and processes underlying all Ofsted inspections are applied, sets out the statutory basis for inspection, and summarises the main features of the inspection process. There are two sections of grade descriptors, Part one and Part two. Part one applies to voluntary adoption agencies that offer the full range of adoption services. Part two applies to voluntary adoption agency branches that only offer adoption support services.
2. Throughout this evaluation schedule, references to children and young people, adoption and adopters include, where appropriate, children and young people who may be adopted or who have been adopted; inter-country arrangements; people who enquire about and apply to adopt; prospective adopters; and those who have adopted.
3. This framework and guidance remain subject to periodic review. Any changes will be published on our website.

Legal basis for inspection

4. Ofsted inspects voluntary adoption agencies under the Care Standards Act 2000.¹ The Care Standards Act 2000 sets out Ofsted's power to register and inspect voluntary adoption agencies and, where necessary, to enforce compliance with statutory requirements including relevant regulations. Section 9 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 allows regulations to be made in relation to the functions exercised by voluntary adoption agencies relating to adoption. The Care Standards Act 2000 at section 4(7) sets out a definition of an adoption agency that refers to the definition of a voluntary adoption society found in section 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
5. Ofsted is required to encourage the services it inspects and regulates to:
 - improve
 - be user-focused
 - be efficient and effective in the use of resources.

¹ The Care Standards Act 2000; <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>.

6. When inspecting voluntary adoption agencies, Ofsted gives consideration to knowledge and understanding gained from previous inspections and:
- the Care Standards Act 2000
 - the Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - the relevant regulations²
 - Adoption: National Minimum Standards. Department for Education. 2011
 - Adoption Guidance Adoption and Children Act 2002 Second revision July 2013 (referred to as statutory guidance). Department for Education. 2013.

Frequency of inspection

7. The frequency of inspections is set out in regulations.³ Voluntary adoption agencies must have at least one inspection during each three-year inspection cycle.
8. The timing of any inspection is influenced by an assessment of:
- any current complaints or enforcement action
 - notifications received from the voluntary adoption agency
 - the outcomes of previous inspections
 - other relevant information held by Ofsted.
9. Where we judge a voluntary adoption agency as inadequate, we normally re-inspect it within 12–18 months.

Notice given for inspection

10. Ten working days' notice will be given before an inspection begins.

² Including: The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
 The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
 The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
 The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
 The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
 The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003
 The Arrangements for Placement of Children by Voluntary Organisations and Others (England) Regulations 2011
 The Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005

³ Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Children's Homes etc.) (Amendment) Regulations SI 2007/694, as amended

Inspectors

11. Voluntary adoption agencies are inspected by trained social care inspectors. Usually there will be one inspector for each inspection.

How the regulations and national minimum standards inform inspection judgements

12. Inspection is intended to help raise standards and support improvement in the sector. This requires a focus on the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors evaluate how the agency contributes to delivering improved outcomes. The framework and the inspection judgements are underpinned by the regulations, the national minimum standards and statutory guidance. Ofsted wants all provision to achieve a good standard, not just the minimum standard, and our inspectors judge whether services are good or not, as well as whether they comply with basic requirements.
13. The headline outcome statements for each standard can be found in Annex A, Part one and Part two, and the national minimum standards in full are on the Department for Education's website.⁴
14. The introduction to the national minimum standards for adoption states that:

'Each standard is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the agency... Agencies will normally show they are meeting the headline statement of the outcome by following the standards below. However, these do not have to be followed exactly if the agency can demonstrate, and Ofsted is satisfied, that the outcomes are being met in a different way. The exception is where standards refer to a requirement set out in regulations, in which case the regulation must be met.'
15. The strengths and weaknesses of the agency will be highlighted throughout the report to illustrate how inspectors have arrived at their judgement. Voluntary adoption agencies are required to meet regulations and notices will be served for them to meet these when necessary. Any areas for improvement will be the subject of a recommendation to help ensure that standards are met in a manner that helps ensure 'good' experiences, progress and outcomes for children and young people. Failure to meet regulations or observe standards will be taken into account, as well as the impact of this on children and young people.

⁴ *Adoption: national minimum standards*, DfE, 2011;
www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00028-2011.

The role of voluntary adoption agencies

16. Voluntary adoption agencies recruit adopters for children who need families, regardless of which local authority is responsible for the child. Children from any local authority in the UK can be placed with adopters approved by a voluntary adoption agency. Voluntary adoption agencies may also be responsible for, and place, children themselves. The agency must contribute to meeting the needs of children and young people through their recruitment, assessment, preparation and training of adopters, and through effective support of adoptive families following a child's placement. Certain branches of voluntary adoption agencies only provide adoption support. Part two of this schedule applies to these branches.
17. Through the inspection framework, Ofsted aims to raise standards and support improvement. This requires each voluntary adoption agency to have a very clear focus on improving outcomes for children, young people, adults and families. The inspection evaluates how effectively a voluntary adoption agency works in partnership with local authorities and contributes to ensuring that children are placed appropriately and without avoidable delay.
18. The inspection framework recognises adoption as an evolving and lifelong process for all those involved. It considers the impact of the agency's work on the lives of adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families, as well as on children and young people.

Inspection activity

19. Inspectors:
 - evaluate and explore the agency's work in relation to a sample of adopters in order to judge the quality of practice and management and the difference it makes to the lives of children and young people – this includes discussions with the agency provider, manager, staff, panel members, children's social workers and other professionals working with children or young people who are living with adopters approved by the voluntary adoption agency
 - talk with, as appropriate, children, young people, adopters and adult adoption support users
 - analyse information about the voluntary adoption agency to inform the inspection and inspection judgements, including the annual quality and data form and returned questionnaires from all those involved with the agency.

20. Full details of the method of inspection are available in *Adoption: Conducting inspections of voluntary adoption agencies*.⁵

Grading inspection findings

21. Inspectors make judgements against the evaluation schedule using a four-point judgement scale.

Outstanding	An agency that is demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement, where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.
Good	An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.
Requires improvement	An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards (NMS) but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore 'requires improvement' to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or NMS but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.
Inadequate	An agency where there are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

22. Voluntary adoption agencies must meet their responsibilities as set out in the equality legislation. For all children, young people, adopters and adult adoption support users, the expectation is that the services provided are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.

⁵ *Adoption: Conducting inspections of voluntary adoption agencies* (130206), Ofsted, 2013; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130206

Using the grade descriptors

23. Part one of the evaluation schedule applies to voluntary adoption agencies offering a full range of adoption services. The judgements made are:
- overall effectiveness
 - the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people
 - quality of service (this includes the experience and progress of adult adoption support users)
 - safeguarding children and young people
 - leadership and management.
24. Part two of the evaluation schedule applies to voluntary adoption agency branches that only offer adoption support services. The judgements made are:
- overall effectiveness
 - the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, service users
 - quality of service
 - safeguarding of children, young people, adults and families
 - leadership and management.
25. The framework sets out the characteristics of a good voluntary adoption agency for all judgement areas. Inspectors use these criteria to evaluate the experiences of children, young people, adult adoption support users and adopters, and the quality of services they receive. Inspectors make a judgement of good where the characteristics set out are widespread across the agency and are leading to positive progress and experiences and improved outcomes for children and young people. Inspectors use professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings for children and young people. A judgement of good is made where the inspector concludes that the evidence overall sits most appropriately with a finding of good.
26. Voluntary adoption agencies must meet the requirements of statute and regulations, and take account of the national minimum standards and statutory guidance.
27. Meeting all the requirements does not of itself result in a judgement of good or outstanding, nor does failure to meet all the requirements in full necessarily result in a judgement of requires improvement or inadequate. The quality of the service, the way in which standards are met, the seriousness of any failure and its potential impact on outcomes for children and young people are considered carefully to determine the overall judgement. Inspectors use their professional judgement to assess the impact of any breach of regulation, or

failure to meet the national minimum standards or statutory guidance, against other aspects of the services provided. However, it is expected that, in an agency judged to be outstanding, there are no breaches of regulations and, in an agency judged to be good, if there are any breaches of the detail of the regulations, these are infrequent, minor, have no impact on safeguarding or promoting children's welfare and can be immediately remedied (although they will still be referred to in the inspection report).

Part one: voluntary adoption agencies offering a full range of adoption services

28. This section applies to all voluntary adoption agencies and their branches except those branches that offer only adoption support. Part two provides guidance on evaluating branches that only offer adoption support.

Overall effectiveness

29. Inspectors consider the evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement. They take account of the context of the agency and whether they specialise in placements for particular groups of children, for example disabled children, or if they specialise in types of placements, for example 'concurrent planning'.

30. In an outstanding voluntary adoption agency:

- Direct work, provided by the agency, with children, young people and adoptive families is of the highest quality and is delivering measurably improved progress and/or outcomes. Some children and young people do far better than was expected by people who are closely involved with them.
- Inspirational, confident, ambitious and influential leadership of the agency changes the lives of children and young people placed for adoption. Leaders are visible and effective. They innovate and attract creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services for children and young people and their adopters.
- Effective and continuous learning improves professional practice throughout the agency. This is sustained over time. Leaders, managers and staff have ambition and inspire high quality work with adopters, which supports exceptional progress and protects and promotes the welfare of all children and young people who are adopted or placed through with the agency.
- There are no breaches of regulations.

31. In a good voluntary adoption agency:

- Children and young people who have the most complex needs are carefully and appropriately placed with adoptive families. The placements are successful and are sustained through the provision of proactive and effective support and interventions from, as appropriate, social workers; therapists; and health and education professionals. Where there are delays in the delivery of services, the voluntary adoption agency can provide clear evidence of their efforts to pursue services for the benefit of the child or young person.

- Recruitment processes are accurate, focused and analytical assessments of adopters produced in a timely manner. Partnerships between the adoption agency and other agencies ensure that individual children's needs are met without delay and that they are protected.
- The agency supports adoptive families so children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted. The children and young people benefit from a stable family life and develop safe and secure relationships with adults which persist over time.
- Leaders and managers develop or maintain partnerships with local authorities, are committed to adoption, have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and take effective steps to improve it.
- The views and experiences of children, young people, adopters and, where appropriate, adults receiving adoption support and birth relatives influence agency developments and strategic thinking.
- Any breaches of regulations are infrequent, minor and immediately remedied.

32. In a voluntary adoption agency that requires improvement:

- The agency is not yet delivering good services to children and young people, good support and preparation to adopters or good support to birth relatives or adopted adults. It therefore requires improvement to get to good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures which result in individual children, young people and, where appropriate, those receiving adoption support not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted, or in the significant loss of adoptive applicants.

33. In a voluntary adoption agency that is inadequate:

- There are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people who are placed for adoption and, where appropriate, those receiving adoption support not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. This will be the case if any of the judgements are inadequate.

The approach following an overall judgement of inadequate

34. An overall effectiveness judgement of inadequate is made where there are widespread and serious failures to comply with requirements, which result in children and young people, adoptive families, adults receiving adoption support or birth relatives not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Serious failures may affect only one individual but will still lead to a judgement of inadequate. In these circumstances, the inspector sets requirements to achieve compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant adoption regulations. Inspectors may also make recommendations to help the registered person(s) to improve the quality and standards of care.

35. On making a judgement of inadequate, the inspector must consult with the Social Care Compliance team, and must instigate a case review.
36. The inspector should also consider consulting with the Social Care Compliance team where there is any history of:
 - complaints against the voluntary adoption agency that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
 - failures to comply with regulations and/or national minimum standards that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
 - failures to take satisfactory action to meet requirements/actions and recommendations that call into question the suitability of the registered person.
37. The purpose of the case review is to consider whether any enforcement action should be taken.
38. When agencies are judged to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, the next inspection will normally take place within 12-18 months. It will take place sooner if any further significant concerns arise during this period or if earlier inspection is necessary to meet statutory requirements.

The experiences and progress of and outcomes for children and young people

39. The most important outcome for children and young people who are to be adopted is that they should be placed into a stable adoptive family as early as possible. In those adoptive families, they should:
 - develop or achieve their potential
 - develop or maintain a positive self-view
 - begin to make positive attachments
 - develop a knowledge and understanding of their background.

Children should also understand and, if appropriate, influence what is happening to them. The progress of children is judged in the context of their individual needs, experiences and starting points and recognises the potential impact of early trauma on their development. This may relate to a child or young person's adoptive placement before or after an order has been made and include the impact of adoption support on improving outcomes.
40. The judgement evaluates the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people, not who contributes to those outcomes. It is essential that agencies monitor children's starting points and their progress in order to understand the impact of their agency on children and young people. The agency's input will be judged and reported on in other sections of the report.

Good

41. The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people is likely to be good where the criteria below best describe the experiences of children and young people:
- Children, irrespective of ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, language, religious belief or sexual orientation, have their needs met by suitable adults in carefully matched adoptive placements with their brothers and sisters where appropriate. They live in safe, stable and secure adoptive families, progress emotionally and develop secure attachments with the adults caring for them. Children also progress well in their social, emotional, physical and educational development and receive the support they need in any of these areas. They develop a positive identity and have access to the written records kept by the voluntary adoption agencies about their life history when they are needed. Their individual needs dictate the services provided and are regularly assessed to ensure that they remain appropriate. They have contact with brothers, sisters and other family members, and people who are significant to them where it is in their best interests. Children's, young people's and adults' needs are very carefully considered when access to their records is requested so that the unique circumstances of their situations are recognised and care is taken to help them to understand their experiences.
 - Work with birth relatives and adult adoptees leads to positive changes in their circumstances. They may not achieve their desired outcome but, if this is the case, they are very carefully supported to understand why. The adoption support overall meets their needs and leaves people feeling positive about the service and that they have been helped and supported.

Outstanding

- The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people placed for adoption is likely to be judged outstanding if it is evident that children and young people are making exceptional progress in their social, emotional and educational development and that those receiving adoption support are also progressing exceptionally well. In addition, the characteristics of a good judgement must be met.

Requires improvement

42. The agency is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in individual children, young people or people receiving adoption support not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate

43. There are widespread or serious failures that result in children, young people or people receiving adoption support not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations that have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Quality of service provision

44. The central focus of service provision in a voluntary adoption agency must be the welfare and safety of children and young people who are placed for adoption or who are adopted. This should be achieved through providing services that focus on children and young people, and their placement in families who can meet their needs and are likely to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children and young people.
45. The judgement of the quality of service provision is based on an analysis of how the recruitment, assessment, preparation and support of adopters enhances the experiences and progress of, and improves outcomes for, children and young people. It also takes account of the agency's work with and impact on any adults receiving an adoption support service.

Good

46. The quality of service in a voluntary adoption agency is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe the service provided:
 - People contacting the agency who are considering adoption feel highly valued and welcomed by the agency. They are sent clear and comprehensive written information and are offered an interview (which may be by telephone) or invited to an information event within set timescales. The customer service standards are met.
 - Preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters are effective. This enables them, in many cases, to consider a wide range of children and young people, to manage the tasks of adoption and to help children to recover from the impact of their early life experience of loss and trauma. This includes support of contact with birth relatives, including brothers and sisters where this is in the child's best interests and, where appropriate, the needs of children and young people placed through inter-country arrangements.
 - The prospective adopter report is clear, concise and analytical and contains all the required information. This high-quality social work analysis of prospective adopter parenting capacity informs the matching processes and help is available for adopters who need additional support or training prior to approval.

- Prospective adopters are subject to an agency decision on suitability within the timescale set out in the regulations, unless the delay is instigated by the adopters or is beyond the control of the agency. They are referred to the adoption register within three months of approval unless they are already linked with a child.
- Assessments of the needs of children and young people - including those in relation to age, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, language, religious belief and sexual orientation - are required from placing local authorities by the agency and are shared with prospective adopters prior to placement. Prospective adopters are supported by the voluntary adoption agencies to receive information about children's histories so they can make an informed judgement about whether they have the capacity to parent a particular child.
- Every six months, the panel provides the agency with an analysis of the performance that actively drives improvement. The six-monthly analysis includes an oversight of the approval of adopters and the panel carefully monitors the agency's responses and actions to the issues identified in the reports.
- Adopters understand their right to an assessment of their adoption support needs. They know that any request for support will be considered by the voluntary adoption agencies and will result in the provision of a service, if appropriate. Any direct work undertaken or arranged by the agency is skilled, sensitive and purposeful.
- Effective support is provided throughout adoption to children and young people, the whole adoptive family and birth relatives (when the agency provides direct services to them). This is valued by the families involved.
- Adopted adults and birth relatives are satisfied with the quality of the adoption support services provided. This includes birth records counselling and intermediary services, which are provided promptly by agencies carrying out this work. Adopted adults and birth relatives are appropriately supported to understand their histories. They clearly benefit from the adoption support provided, where a branch provides these services. The manager and staff are well trained, demonstrating an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of adoption issues relating to the services they provide. Staff knowledge and training have a positive impact on relationships with, and outcomes for, service users.

Outstanding

- The quality of service provision is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, there is evidence that professional practice exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children, young people and people receiving adoption support. Research informs practice, some of which will be innovative, and makes an exceptional difference to the recruitment, assessment, support and training of adopters and the stability of adoptive families.

Requires improvement

47. The quality of service provision is likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of individual children, young people or people receiving adoption support not being safeguarded and promoted or in a significant loss of prospective adopters. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children, young people or adults receiving adoption support.

Inadequate

48. The quality of service provision is likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations that have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

49. Safeguarding children and young people should be at the centre of all the agency does. Children and young people should be safe and feel safe. They should benefit from highly effective safeguards to ensure that unsuitable people do not have contact with them, especially those who are applying to adopt. The agency and all their staff should have a clear understanding of and effective practice in relation to disclosures of abuse by children, young people and adopted adults.
50. This judgement focuses on how the voluntary adoption agency places safeguarding at the centre of all it does and ensures that children and young people benefit from living with an adoptive family where they feel safe and protected. It also takes into account how the agency prioritises adoption support work that safeguards people receiving a service and their families.

Good

51. Safeguarding is likely to be judged good if the following criteria best describe the agency's practice:

- The agency is able to demonstrate a deep and effective knowledge about child protection, the relative roles of the agency and local authorities, and action to take where there are concerns or actual harm to a child.
- There is evidence of high-quality training for staff and adopters in respect of child protection procedures and the minimisation of risk to children, including those posed by social media and action to take where children are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters have a very strong focus on child protection, including help to ensure that children and young people living in adoptive homes are safe and feel safe. Preparation of adopters explains the potential impact of abuse and neglect on the behaviour and needs of children and young people and helps prepare them for the developing needs of any children placed. This includes how to manage the risk of children going missing and of unwanted or unsolicited contact through the internet.
- Ongoing appropriate adoption support ensures that adopters are able to manage contact effectively and continue to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect on their adopted child's behaviour as they grow older.
- Adopters are aware of the need for children to take age-appropriate risks and to develop an understanding of how to protect themselves. Adopters, children and young people know how to complain and feel able to do so. They know who they can talk to about any concerns they have and adopters will advocate on behalf of the child placed with them. They feel confident that they will be supported and listened to and that their concerns will be addressed without necessarily putting the adoptive placement at risk of disruption.
- All staff and panel member recruitment and vetting is thorough and complies with statutory requirements. As much as possible is done to assure the suitability of people working in the agency, including staff who do not work directly with children and where Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are unavailable. Working practices and panel procedures also help to prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and young people.
- Staff display high levels of expertise in, and awareness of, child protection. They demonstrate an understanding of the implications of historic abuse and neglect. They are supported by an open culture where leaders and managers constantly strive to improve safeguarding practice.

- Allegations against, or suspicions of harm by, adopters or staff are handled fairly, quickly and consistently. They are referred immediately to the local authority child protection service. The voluntary adoption agency protects and supports children, young people and adopters, and works with local authorities to help to ensure that child-centred decisions are made and unnecessary moves are avoided.
- Agency safeguarding procedures are systematically followed and comply with statutory regulations. They address abuse and historic abuse reported by children, young people, and adults who have been adopted. Where agencies offer birth records counselling and intermediary services, these are delivered to ensure the safety of all those involved. The agency maintains contact with local authority child protection teams, adult safeguarding services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer. This leads to easily accessible and effective liaison on any concerns about children and promotes a safe service.
- The agency learns from complaints and feedback from children and adults and there is evidence that improvements are made in response.

Outstanding

52. Safeguarding is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, the agency's safeguarding practice, including their work with adopters, birth relatives and adults who were adopted, is informed by research and developments in the area of safeguarding and child protection. This results in adopters who demonstrate a comprehensive and impressive understanding of safeguarding and of the impact of abuse on children, young people and adults. They, therefore, effectively support children and young people even in the most difficult and demanding circumstances and are prepared for future potential difficulties.

Requires improvement

53. Safeguarding is likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of individual children, young people or people receiving adoption support not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children, young people or people receiving adoption support.

Inadequate

54. Safeguarding is likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations that have a negative impact on the welfare of children, young people or people receiving adoption support.

Leadership and management

55. Leadership and management must demonstrate clear vision and ambition for children and young people who are, or are going to be, adopted. They should monitor all areas of the adoption process, including adoption support, promote positive outcomes and strive for continuous improvement.
56. The judgement of leadership and management is focused on the voluntary adoption agency's contribution to securing good outcomes for children, young people and people receiving adoption support. Effective partnerships with all those involved with children and young people who are placed for adoption, or who have been adopted, are essential to deliver best outcomes. These include partnerships with children and young people themselves, adopters, foster carers, looked after children's teams, education and health.

Good

57. Leadership and management is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe agency practice:
- Senior managers, leaders and trustees show a strong commitment to adoption and deliver an ambitious service to children, young people, adults affected by adoption, adopters and birth families. They develop, or strive to develop, highly effective working relationships with placing local authorities and social workers in particular. They also have, or are working to develop, effective relationships with commissioners, partner organisations and other adoption agencies. This improves the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults and prompt and effective action is taken if children are unhappy or unsafe.
 - Leaders and managers monitor service delivery and conduct a thorough and insightful review of the voluntary adoption agency at the frequency set out in the national minimum standards. The views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders inform this review, as do complaints, which are welcomed as an opportunity to learn and develop. Leaders and managers use the results of the review to drive continuous improvement in the agency and can demonstrate the improvements that have been made. Annual quality and performance data forms are promptly completed and submitted to Ofsted.

- Leaders and managers demonstrate a capacity for continuing improvement. This is based on the agency's track record and performance since its previous inspection and evidence of the impact of improvements on outcomes for children and young people. Leaders and managers have a well-developed sense of the needs of the local authorities that they work with and continually review how the services and placements they offer meet those needs.
- Recruitment of adopters is well planned and successful. It takes full account of children waiting for families and national initiatives in adoption. Managers keep under review the trends and patterns in the number of adopters they have available and how placements are made and supported.
- The voluntary adoption agency manages its resources effectively to meet the needs of the children, young people and their adoptive families, prioritises and invests in support work to reduce disruptions to a minimum and promotes family stability. It is also sufficiently resourced to provide any adoption support to adults who require this.
- The statement of purpose and children's guide are clear, accessible and comprehensive. This helps children and young people, birth parents and relatives, adopters, adoptees and staff to be clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and what services it provides.
- Staff, managers and panel members are appropriately qualified, experienced and supervised. They receive up-to-date relevant training to enable them to prepare, assess and support adopters so they provide good-quality, stable and safe care for children and young people. Staff and panel members' appraisals are held on time and include the views of children, young people and adopters, as appropriate. Appraisals clearly link to improved staff performance.
- Staff training and supervision reflect new legislation and practice developments, including research, and result in improved outcomes for children, young people and adoptive families.
- Records are clear, up to date, contribute to an understanding of the child's life and are stored securely. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and evidence of effective administrative systems.
- Regulatory notifications are made as required by regulations and the agency can demonstrate that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.
- There is evidence that effective action has been taken in relation to any requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Outstanding

58. Leadership and management are likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, there is evidence that leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious, innovative and influential in changing the lives of children and young people placed with the agency and in helping people receiving adoption support. Professional relationships between the agency and the local authority and other partner organisations are highly effective. The agency can demonstrate that it makes an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of children, young people and people receiving adoption support.

Requires improvement

59. Leadership and management are likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of individual children, young people and people receiving adoption support not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children, young people or people receiving adoption support.

Inadequate

60. Leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations that have a negative impact on the welfare of children, young people or people receiving adoption support.

Fitness and conditions of registration

61. Inspectors consider whether:
- the registered person remains fit for registration
 - the adoption agency is operating in accordance with any conditions placed on its registration.
62. Inspectors report any concerns they identify relating to the registered person's 'fitness' or to whether the conditions of registration are being met. They consult the Social Care Compliance team as appropriate.

Part two: voluntary adoption agency branches that only offer adoption support

63. This section applies to voluntary adoption agency branches that only offer adoption support. This is relevant to branches of voluntary adoption agencies, not the overall registration. If a voluntary adoption agency only offers adoption support to the exclusion of other services, they must register as an adoption support agency rather than a voluntary adoption agency.

Overall effectiveness

64. Inspectors consider the evidence and judgements from across the evaluation schedule before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement. They take account of the context of the branch of the voluntary adoption agency and whether they specialise in adoption support for particular groups.
65. In an outstanding branch of a voluntary adoption agency:
- Adoption support is of the highest quality and is delivering a demonstratively positive impact on the lives of the people involved. For some families, the progress made significantly exceeds expectations of all those who are involved with them.
 - Inspirational, confident, ambitious and influential leadership promotes and pursues a positive outcome for all service users. Leaders are visible and effective. They innovate and attract creative ideas to sustain the highest quality services for all service users.
 - Leaders, managers and staff have ambition and inspire high quality work which supports exceptional progress and protects and promotes the welfare of all service users.
 - The branch is constantly seeking new and effective ways to improve.
 - There are no breaches of regulations.
66. In a good branch of a voluntary adoption agency:
- Positive outcomes for service users are evident, including where this means helping them to cope with unavoidable disappointments.
 - The intended outcomes of individual pieces of work are clear and agreed with service users, and if possible with children and young people. The success of each piece of work is measured, recorded and understood.
 - Service users' views are routinely monitored and analysed. Their views inform service delivery, the development of staff, agency developments and strategic thinking.

- The lifelong implications of adoption are clearly understood by all who work for the agency and are reflected in practice. The branch has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and takes effective steps to improve.
- Effective and continuous learning improves professional practice and is sustained over time.
- Any breaches of regulations are infrequent, minor and immediately remedied.

67. In a voluntary adoption agency that requires improvement:

- The agency is not yet delivering good services. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted.

68. In a voluntary adoption agency that is inadequate:

- There are widespread or serious failures, which result in service users not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. This is likely to be the case if any of the judgements are inadequate.

The approach following an overall judgement of inadequate

69. An overall effectiveness judgement of inadequate is made where there are widespread and serious failures to comply with requirements, which result in service users not having their interests safeguarded and promoted. In these circumstances, the inspector sets requirements to achieve compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant adoption regulations. Inspectors may also make recommendations to help the registered person(s) to improve the quality and standards of service further.

70. On making a judgement of inadequate, the inspector must consult with the Social Care Compliance team, and must instigate a case review.

71. The inspector should also consider consulting with the Social Care Compliance team where there is any history of:

- complaints against the voluntary adoption agency that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
- failures to comply with regulations and/or national minimum standards that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory way
- failures to take satisfactory action to meet requirements/actions and recommendations that call into question the suitability of the registered person.

72. The purpose of the case review is to consider whether any enforcement action should be taken.

73. When agencies are judged to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, the next inspection will normally take place within 12-18 months. It will take place sooner if any further significant concerns arise during this period or if earlier inspection is necessary to meet statutory requirements.

The experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users

74. Inspectors evaluate the outcomes for any children, young people, adopted adults, adoptive families and birth relatives who receive an adoption support service. When making this judgement, inspectors take account of the nature of the adoption support provided and the potential for disappointment, particularly in birth records counselling and intermediary services.

Good

75. The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, service users is likely to be good where the criteria below best describe the experiences of children and young people:
- People, irrespective of ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, language, religious belief or sexual orientation, receiving an adoption support service influence the delivery of the services that they receive, which leads to positive changes in their circumstances. They may not achieve their desired outcome but, if this is the case, they are very carefully supported to understand why. The adoption support overall meets their needs and leaves people feeling positive about the service and that they have been helped and supported.

Outstanding

- The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, those using the service is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if it is evident that they are making exceptional progress in having their needs met. In addition, the characteristics of a 'good' judgement must be met.

Requires improvement

- The agency is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in people using the service not having their needs met. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate

- There are widespread or serious failures that result people using the service being put at risk. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on outcomes.

Quality of service provision

Good

76. The quality of service in a voluntary adoption agency branch is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe the service provided:
- There is a prompt, welcoming, professional, person-centred service that is accessible to all irrespective of age, ability, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and religious belief.
 - The branch has a detailed strategy and clear plans to achieve the desired outcomes for each service user. The branch works together with the service user and, where involved, with the local authority, to ensure that support meets the demands of commissioners and is individually designed, enabling people using the service to progress at their own pace.
 - The manager and staff are very well trained, demonstrating an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of adoption issues relating to the services they provide. Their knowledge and training have a positive impact on relationships with, and outcomes for, service users. They provide a prompt, professional and highly sensitive service, which makes a difference to people's lives and results in people using the service developing an improved understanding of issues affecting them and an ability to deal with any difficulties that may arise.
 - Service users are helped to understand the possible effects of adoption on themselves and their family and, if appropriate, the potential outcomes of a search and/or a reunion with a member of their birth family.

Outstanding

- The quality of service provision is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, there is evidence that professional practice exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained improvement to the lives of people receiving an adoption support service. Research informs practice, some of which will be innovative, and makes an exceptional difference to people using the service.

Requires improvement

- The quality of service provision is likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate

- The quality of service provision is likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Safeguarding children, young people, adults and families

77. This judgement focuses on whether the branch puts safeguarding at the centre of all it does and ensures that all those receiving a service and their families are safe and benefit from effective safeguarding and child protection procedures. This includes procedures for handling disclosures of historic abuse from adults and children and young people.

Good

78. Safeguarding is likely to be judged good if the following criteria best describe the agency's practice:
- The agency is able to demonstrate a deep and effective knowledge about child protection, the relative roles of the agency and local authorities, and the action to take where there are concerns or actual harm to a child or adult.
 - There is evidence of high-quality training for staff and adopters in respect of child protection procedures and the minimisation of risk to children. This includes action to take where children are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
 - Staff display high levels of expertise in, and awareness of, child protection. They demonstrate an understanding of the implications of historic abuse and neglect. They are supported by an open culture where leaders and managers constantly strive to improve safeguarding practice. Before work commences, service users are told of the branch approach to child protection and historic abuse. Where relevant, adopters are helped to understand the impact of children's past experiences and this has a positive effect on their child's behaviour and/or on their parenting.
 - Children, young people and adult service users know who they can talk to if they have concerns or complaints and have confidence that they are taken seriously. The agency learns from complaints and feedback from children and adults and there is evidence that improvements are made in response.
 - Current or historic allegations or suspicions of harm are handled sensitively and in accordance with procedures, including, where appropriate, vulnerable adult procedures. All relevant agencies are involved, staff understand their roles and know what to do, and children and young people and/or adult service users know what to expect.

- The agency maintains contact with local authority child protection teams, adult safeguarding services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer, as appropriate. This leads to easily accessible and effective liaison on any concerns about children and promotes a safe service. The agency's safeguarding policy is submitted to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer located in the area of the registered branch.
- Staff recruitment and vetting are thorough and conform to safer recruitment practices.

Outstanding

- Safeguarding is likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, the agency's safeguarding practice is informed by research and developments in the area of safeguarding and child protection. This results in those who receive adoption support benefiting from highly effective safeguarding practice, for example:
 - adopters who demonstrate a comprehensive and impressive understanding of safeguarding and of the impact of abuse on children, young people and adults
 - adults understanding how abuse may have affected them in their past and being very effectively helped to cope with the impact.

Requires improvement

- Safeguarding is likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service.

Inadequate

- Safeguarding is likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result in people's welfare being at risk. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the adoption support service.

Leadership and management

79. The judgement of leadership and management is focused on the voluntary adoption agency's contribution to securing good outcomes for those receiving adoption support. Effective partnerships with all those involved with service users are essential to deliver best outcomes. These include partnerships with service users themselves, adopters, foster carers, looked after children's teams, education and health services.
80. Leaders and managers must demonstrate clear vision and ambition for all those receiving adoption support through their agency. They must monitor all areas of the service and demonstrate continuous improvement.

Good

81. Leadership and management is likely to be judged good if the following characteristics best describe agency practice:
 - Senior managers, leaders and trustees show a strong commitment to adoption support and deliver an ambitious service to children and young people, adults affected by adoption, adopters and birth families. They develop, or are working to develop, highly effective working relationships with commissioners, partner organisations and with other adoption agencies. This improves the experience and progress of children, young people and adults who are receiving adoption support. Prompt and effective action is taken if children are unhappy or unsafe. With the agreement of people using their service, they update the commissioners about their progress.
 - Leaders and managers monitor service delivery and conduct a thorough and insightful review of the branch at the frequency set out in the national minimum standards. The views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders inform this review; as do complaints, which are welcomed as an opportunity to learn and develop. Leaders and managers use the results of the review to drive continuous improvement in the services that are provided. Annual quality and performance data forms are promptly completed and submitted to Ofsted.
 - The branch manages its resources effectively to meet the needs of the children, young people, adoptive families and adults affected by adoption. Their work promotes family stability and supports people to understand the effect of adoption on their lives.
 - The statement of purpose and children's guide, if required, are clear, accessible and comprehensive. This enables service users and staff to be clear about the aims and objectives of the branch and the services available.

- Staff and managers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They have regular supervision and receive up-to-date relevant training to enable them to work effectively with service users. Staff appraisals are held on time and take into account the views of service users, as appropriate. Appraisals clearly link to improved staff performance.
- Records are clear, up to date and are stored securely. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and effective administrative systems are in place.
- Regulatory notifications are made as required by regulations and the branch can demonstrate that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.
- There is evidence that effective action has been taken in relation to any requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are likely to be judged outstanding if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a good judgement, there is evidence that leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious, innovative and influential in improving the lives of people who receive an adoption support service. Professional relationships between the agency and the local authority and other partner organisations are highly effective. The agency can demonstrate that it makes an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of people using the service.

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management are likely to require improvement when the characteristics of good are not in place. It therefore requires improvement to be good. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on people using the service.

Inadequate

- Leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people receiving an adoption support service not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Fitness and conditions of registration

82. Inspectors consider whether:
- the registered persons remain fit for registration
 - the branch is operating in accordance with any conditions placed on its registration.
83. Inspectors report any concerns they identify relating to the registered person's 'fitness' or to whether the conditions of registration are being met. They consult the Social Care Compliance team as appropriate.

Annex A: Part one. Headline outcome statements from the national minimum standards for voluntary adoption agencies that offer the full range of adoption services

These standards apply to voluntary adoption agencies that offer the full range of adoption services. For voluntary adoption agency branches that only offer adoption support please see Annex A: Part two.

Please note that individual standards may be taken into account and lead to recommendations under any of the judgement areas.

Outcomes for children and young people

- Children know that their wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care, are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases and know how to obtain support and make a complaint (NMS 1).
- Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background (NMS 2).
- Children enjoy sound relationships with their prospective adopters, interact positively with others and behave appropriately (NMS 3).
- Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted (NMS 5).
- Children are able to enjoy their interests and develop confidence in their skills (NMS 6).
- Children achieve their educational potential (NMS 7).
- Contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others is arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child (NMS 8).
- Children live with prospective adopters whose home provides adequate space, to a suitable standard; the child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote their development (NMS 9).
- Children benefit from stable placements and are matched and placed with prospective adopters who can meet most, if not all, of their assessed needs (NMS 13).
- Children feel loved, safe and secure with their prospective adoptive parents with whom they were originally placed; these children were placed within 12 months of the decision of the agency's decision maker that they should be placed for adoption (NMS 13).
- Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met, or meets, their assessed needs (NMS 15).

Quality of service provision

- The adoption agency approves prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of looked after children who are to be placed for adoption and who can provide them with a home where the child will be able to recover from the impact of their early life experience of loss and trauma, feel loved, safe and secure (NMS 10).
- People who are interested in becoming adoptive parents, and prospective adopters, are treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect (NMS 10.2).
- The adoption agency provides prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of children who live outside the British Islands and who can provide them with a home where the child will feel loved, safe and secure (NMS 11).
- Children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families and life before their adoption (NMS 12).
- Birth parents and birth families take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption (NMS 12).
- Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want (NMS 16).
- The adoption panel and decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives (NMS 17).

Safeguarding children and young people

- Children feel safe and are safe; children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm including neglect, abuse and accident (NMS 4).
- The agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service (NMS 19).
- There is careful selection of all staff, volunteers and persons on the central list and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and service users (NMS 21).
- Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation (NMS 22).

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management ensures that the agency promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination (NMS 2).
- Children, service users and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency/adoption support agency, and what services and facilities it provides (NMS 18).
- The adoption agency/adoption support agency meets the aims and objectives in the statement of purpose (NMS 18).
- The voluntary adoption agency is financially sound (NMS 20).
- Children and service users receive a service from staff, volunteers, panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs (NMS 23).
- Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children and service users (NMS 24).
- The agency is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently and delivering a good quality service which meets the needs of children and other service users, taking into account whether there is a strategic approach to the recruitment of adopters to ensure that children's needs can be met through appropriate and prompt placements and whether working relationships are established with other organisations, including other adoption agencies, health services, the courts and Cafcass to help reduce delay in adoption processes (NMS 25).
- Records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of the child's life (NMS 27).
- The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the agency to meet its statement of purpose (NMS 28).
- All significant events relating to the protection of children are notified to the appropriate authorities (NMS 29).

Annex A: Part two. Headline outcome statements from the national minimum standards for voluntary adoption agency branches that only provide adoption support

These standards apply to voluntary adoption agency branches that only provide adoption support. For voluntary adoption agencies that offer the full range of adoption services please see Annex A: Part one.

Please note that individual standards may be taken into account and lead to recommendations under any of the judgement areas.

These headline outcomes are taken from the national minimum standards and vary in their application depending on the nature of adoption support services provided.

Outcomes

- Children know that their wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care, are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases and know how to obtain support and make a complaint (NMS 1).
- Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background (NMS 2).
- Children enjoy sound relationships with their prospective adopters, interact positively with others and behave appropriately (NMS 3).
- Children are able to enjoy their interests and develop confidence in their skills (NMS 6).
- Children are supported to achieve their educational potential (NMS 7).
- Contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others is arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child (NMS 8).
- Children live with prospective adopters whose home provides adequate space, to a suitable standard; the child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote their development (NMS 9).
- Children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families and life before their adoption (NMS 12).
- Birth parent and birth families take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption (NMS 12).
- Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met, or is meeting, their assessed needs (NMS 15).
- Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption where appropriate and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want (NMS 16).

- Children, service users and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency/adoption support agency, and what services and facilities it provides. The adoption agency/adoption support agency meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose (NMS 18).

Quality of service provision

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential (NMS 7).
- The adoption agency approves prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of looked after children who are to be placed for adoption and who can provide them with a home where the child will be able to recover from the impact of their early life experience of loss and trauma, feel loved, safe and secure (NMS 10).
- The adoption agency provides prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of children who live outside the British Islands and who can provide them with a home where the child will feel loved, safe and secure (NMS 11).
- Children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families and life before their adoption (NMS 12).
- Birth parents and birth families take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption (NMS 12).
- Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want (NMS 16).
- Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met or are meeting their assessed needs (NMS 15).

Safeguarding

- Children feel safe and are safe; children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm including neglect, abuse and accident (NMS 4).
- The agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service (NMS 19).
- There is careful selection of all staff, volunteers and persons on the central list and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and service users (NMS 21).

- Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation (NMS 22).

Leadership and management

- Children, service users and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency/adoption support agency, and what services and facilities it provides. The adoption agency/adoption support agency meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose (NMS 18).
- The agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service (NMS 19).
- Children and service users receive a service from staff, volunteers, panel members and decision-makers who have the competence to meet their needs (NMS 23).
- Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children and service users (NMS 24).
- The agency is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently and delivering a good quality service which meets the needs of children and other service users (NMS 25).
- The registered provider manages the agency effectively and efficiently and is suitable to work with the agency's service users. They are trained to ensure the best possible outcomes for service users (NMS 26).
- Records are clear, accurate and up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of the child's life (NMS 27).
- All significant events relating to the protection of children are notified to the appropriate authorities (NMS 29).

Annex B: National minimum standards, regulations and adoption guidance relevant to the evaluation schedule

- *Adoption: national minimum standards*, Department for Education, 2013;
<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/a0075229/adoption-services-national-minimum-standards> .
- *Adoption statutory guidance: the Adoption and Children Act 2002* (second revision), Department for Education, 2013;
<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/g0072314/guidance> .
- Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/924/contents/made>.
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/389/contents/made>.
- The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/392/contents/made>.
- The Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/888/contents/made>.
- The Electronic Commerce Directive (Adoption and Children Act 2002) Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/3222/contents/made>.
- The Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/395/contents/made>.
- The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1711/contents/made>.
- The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1712/contents/made>.
- The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/367/contents/made>.