



Department
for Education

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Policy paper

2010 to 2015 government policy: looked-after children and adoption

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This is a copy of a document that stated a policy of the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government.

The previous URL of this page was

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-the-adoption-system-and-services-for-looked-after-children>. Current policies can be found at the GOV.UK [policies list](#).

Issue

The number of children in care stands at 68,000 and continues to rise. At the end of March 2013, there were around 6,000 children with a placement order waiting to move in with a new family. Our adoption reforms are simplifying the adoption system to encourage more people to adopt and make sure children are placed swiftly with a family where this is in their best interests.

We also want to improve the quality of care and the stability of placements for looked-after children, be they in residential care homes or with a foster family, so that all children can succeed in life.

Actions

Adoption

To encourage more people to adopt and to reduce the time it takes for children to be placed with a loving family, as well as to make sure adoptive families get the support they need, we are:

- introducing the £19.3 million [Adoption Support Fund](#) from spring 2015 to help adoptive families access high-quality support services
- testing proposals to give approved adopters access to the [Adoption Register](#) so they can seek out their own matches with children waiting to be adopted, rather than waiting for a social worker to identify a suitable match
- making sure that, from 2015, employed adopters are entitled to the same pay and leave as birth parents
- providing £16 million of funding to the voluntary adoption sector and £50 million to local authorities over the next 2 years to help them expand and recruit more adopters
- working with local authorities and the voluntary sector through the [adoption leadership board](#), chaired by Sir Martin Narey, to reduce delay for children and recruit more adopters
- making sure children adopted from care get the attention they need at school by:
 - extending the [pupil premium](#)
 - giving them priority in school admissions
 - giving [access to early education from age 2](#) to children adopted from care

Looked-after children

To make sure all looked-after children receive high-quality care, we will:

- maintain the current programme of [evidence-based early interventions](#) for looked-after children and for those on the edge of care
- ensure the [virtual school head \(VSH\)](#) in every council arranges for children in care to get the support they need to succeed at school
- hold quarterly meetings between children in care and ministers to make sure our policies take their views into account

To improve the stability and quality of long-term foster placements, we will:

- give foster carers the training and support they need
- monitor the stability of foster placements by improving the way we collect data from local authorities

To improve the quality of care in children's homes, we will:

- hold local authorities and residential care providers to account by gathering data on their performance and making it available to the public
- explore new ways of commissioning care placements, for example, through the [Innovation Programme](#)

To support children and young people who have left care, we will give young people in foster care the possibility of staying with their foster carers until the age of 21.

Background

Adoption

On 14 March 2012 we published [‘An action plan for adoption: tackling delay’](#), setting out the changes we will introduce to the adoption and care systems. It included proposals to cut the time it takes to become an approved adopter to 6 months and set up a [national gateway for adoption](#) that provides a first point of contact for anyone interested in adopting.

On 24 January 2013, we published [‘Further action on adoption: finding more loving homes’](#). It set out our proposals to attract adopters and to improve the

support available to adoptive families.

The measures we have introduced to encourage more people to adopt and place children with loving families more quickly include:

- introducing a simplified 2-stage process for people who want to adopt a child or children
- establishing [First4Adoption](#), a first point of contact for anyone interested in adopting
- introducing [adoption scorecards](#) that allow a comparison of the delay for placement of children in care in each local authority
- producing an '[adoption passport](#)' that allows adopters to see exactly what support is available to them
- publishing [adoption maps](#) that show the number of children waiting to be adopted in different areas across the country

Foster children

To improve the quality of foster care, we developed a programme of work through discussions with over 300 foster carers, social workers, managers and professionals about what works, what doesn't, and how things can be improved. Our work concentrates on improving 7 areas:

- recruitment and retention of foster carers
- commissioning of fostering services
- the assessment and approval of foster carers
- delegation of authority to foster carers
- long-term foster placements
- supporting children returning home from foster care
- training and support for foster carers and social workers

Children's residential care

On 3 July 2012, we announced our plan to reform children's residential care.

In September 2013 we published the [children's homes datapack](#), which for the first time set out the geographic distribution of children's homes and provided information on Ofsted inspection judgments of large providers (ie those responsible for 16 or more homes). Between them, the 9 largest providers run 385 children's homes.

In January 2014, we introduced changes to the [regulations around safeguarding in residential care settings](#) to increase the accountability for placements outside of the local authority and to improve the qualifications of those working in residential care homes.

Educational attainment of looked-after children

Following the publication of [annual statistics on the educational attainment of children in care in December 2012](#), we announced measures to help looked-after children get better grades at school.

Ofsted has emphasised the significant impact that strong [VSH](#) leadership can have on the attainment of looked-after children. As a result, we have introduced a requirement for all local authorities to have a VSH, making sure children in care get the support they need to succeed at school.



We are also supporting looked-after children at school through the [pupil premium](#). The pupil premium for looked-after children is managed by the VSH.

Who we've consulted

Adoption



The consultation [‘Adoption and fostering: tackling delay’](#) ran from 18 September to 7 December 2012. It was aimed at parents, people who want to adopt or foster, local authorities, adoption and fostering agencies, and the judiciary and legal sectors.

Between 28 February and 11 April 2014 we ran the consultation [‘Adoption: getting it right, making it work’](#). It invited views on proposed changes to adoption regulations and statutory guidance in England as a result of Part 1 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Between 10 April and 29 May 2014 we ran a [consultation](#) on:

- proposals to extend access to intermediary services to the children, grandchildren and other relatives of people adopted before 30 December 2005, so they can contact their birth relatives more easily
- whether people who were adopted before 30 December 2005 should have the right to make an absolute or qualified veto for their children, grandchildren and other relatives to make contact with their birth relatives

Looked-after children

We have carried out a number of consultations to improve the care of looked-after children. We have asked views on:

- [changes to the Children \(Secure Accommodation\) Regulations 1991](#), which relate to 12- to 17-year-olds who have been placed on remand in local authority accommodation
- [changes to regulation 7 of the Care Standards Act 2000 \(Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2010](#) to allow Ofsted to share the names and addresses of children’s homes on their register with the police and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner

- [proposals to change the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010](#), so that they take the circumstances of children who have been remanded into either local authority or youth detention accommodation into account

Between 25 June and 17 September 2013 we ran another 3 consultations on proposals to:

- [amend the children's homes regulations](#), to improve collaboration so that children who live in children's homes are protected effectively
- [amend the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#), to improve how local authorities arrange placements for children in distant out of authority placements
- [revise the statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing](#)



Between 20 September and 29 November 2013, we ran a [consultation on improving the security and stability of placements for looked-after children](#).

Bills and legislation

Adoption

On Thursday 13 March 2014 the [Children and Families Bill](#) received royal assent and became the [Children and Families Act 2014](#). The act mentions many of the reforms we are introducing to the adoption process to reduce delay and encourage more adopters, including:

- making sure court hearings on children in care last no longer than 26 weeks, except in exceptional circumstances

- encouraging 'fostering for adoption', ie placing children with approved adopters who will foster the child while they wait for court approval to adopt
- giving adoptive parents the same pay and leave rights as birth parents from 2015
- reducing delay due to adoption agencies seeking a perfect or partial ethnic match
- allowing prospective adopters to access the [Adoption Register](#) directly

Looked-after children

The Children and Families Act received royal assent on 13 March 2014.

The act:

- provides greater protection for looked-after children
- requires local authorities to support children in foster care placements who wish to continue living with their foster families when they leave care from the age of 18 until the age of 21
- made VSHs statutory for all local councils
- introduced new quality standards for residential children's homes

The reformed process for assessing and approving foster carers is set out in the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#). These regulations also cover local authorities' duties relating to the delegation of authority to foster carers.

Who we're working with

Adoption

We are working with a number of organisations in the development and implementation of our adoption reforms, including:

- the [British Association of Adoption and Fostering](#) _____
- [Coram](#) _____
- [Adoption UK](#) _____
- the [Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd \(ADCS\)](#) _____
- the [Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies](#) _____

We are also working with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) to fund the Adoption Register, whose main purpose is to help agencies find adoptive homes for children in cases where local authorities cannot find a home for them locally.

Looked-after children



We are working with a number of organisations to improve support for children in care and care leavers, including:



- [ADCS](#) _____
- [The Fostering Network](#) _____
- [The Who Cares Trust](#) _____
- [Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers](#) _____
- [Voice](#) _____
- [Local Government Association](#) _____
- the [National Care Advisory Service](#) _____
- [Catch 22](#) _____



[National Children's Bureau](#)



- the
- [Children's Society](#)
 - [Barnardo's](#)
 - [Rees Centre](#)

Appendix 1: First4Adoption

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

First4Adoption will act as the national gateway for adoption, providing authoritative advice and support to people interested in adopting. Its purpose is to make sure all potential adopters feel supported and receive the information they need.



A consortium of Coram Children's Legal Centre, Coram and Adoption UK operates First4Adoption. You can find out more on [First4Adoption's website](#).

Appendix 2: evidence-based interventions for vulnerable children

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.



Evidence-based interventions support children with complex needs. They give children a better chance of staying with their families rather than going into care.



We are providing funding until March 2015 for local authorities who wish to set up evidence-based intervention programmes in their local area.

The programmes we are funding aim to:

- improve parenting skills
- encourage school attendance
- reduce substance misuse
- reduce antisocial behaviour

The schemes are for:

- birth parents
- carers, such as foster carers, adopters and staff in residential units
- children and young people

The schemes we are funding are:

- [Functional family therapy](#)
- [Standard multisystemic therapy](#)
- [Multidimensional treatment foster care](#)
- [AdOpt](#) (designed for adoptive parents)
- [RESuLT](#) (designed for staff in children's homes)
- [KEEP \(Keeping foster and kinship carers supported and trained\)](#)
- [Family drug and alcohol court](#)
- [Family group conferences](#)

You can find more information on the [evidence-based interventions hub](#).

Appendix 3: Adoption Register



This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

The Adoption Register for England is an online database of:

- children waiting to be adopted
- approved adopters waiting to be matched with the right child

The Adoption Register helps agencies find adoptive homes for children where adoption agencies cannot find a home for them locally.

More information is available from the [Adoption Register website](#)_____.

Appendix 4: virtual school heads (VSH)

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

All local authorities must have a virtual school head (VSH) in charge of promoting the educational achievement of the children looked after by the authority that appoints them. Many VSHs are experienced teachers and some have been school heads.



Many schools are likely to have only 1 or 2 children in care on their register, and staff may be unfamiliar with their issues. The VSH's role is to:

- know how the looked-after children are doing
- help school staff and social workers to find out about the extra needs of these children and any additional support available to them

VSHs also work with the children's services department of the local authority and with all schools in the area on initiatives to promote the education of

children in care.

[Guidance for VSHs on managing pupil premium funding for looked-after children](#) is available.

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