



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

# Mid-Year Review 2019/20



Mabwysiadu  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru  
Adoption  
Mid & West Wales



Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Adoption Service  
Gogledd Cymru



South East Wales Adoption Service  
Achieving More Together  
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu De-ddwyrain Cymru  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADI  
Bae'r Gorllewin



Vale, Valleys  
and Cardiff  
Adoption  
Mabwysiadu  
yn y Fro, y Cymoedd  
a Chaerdydd



St David's Children Society

**adoptionuk**

or gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu  
for every adoptive family



Credwch  
mewn plant  
Believe in  
children

Barnardo's  
Cymru

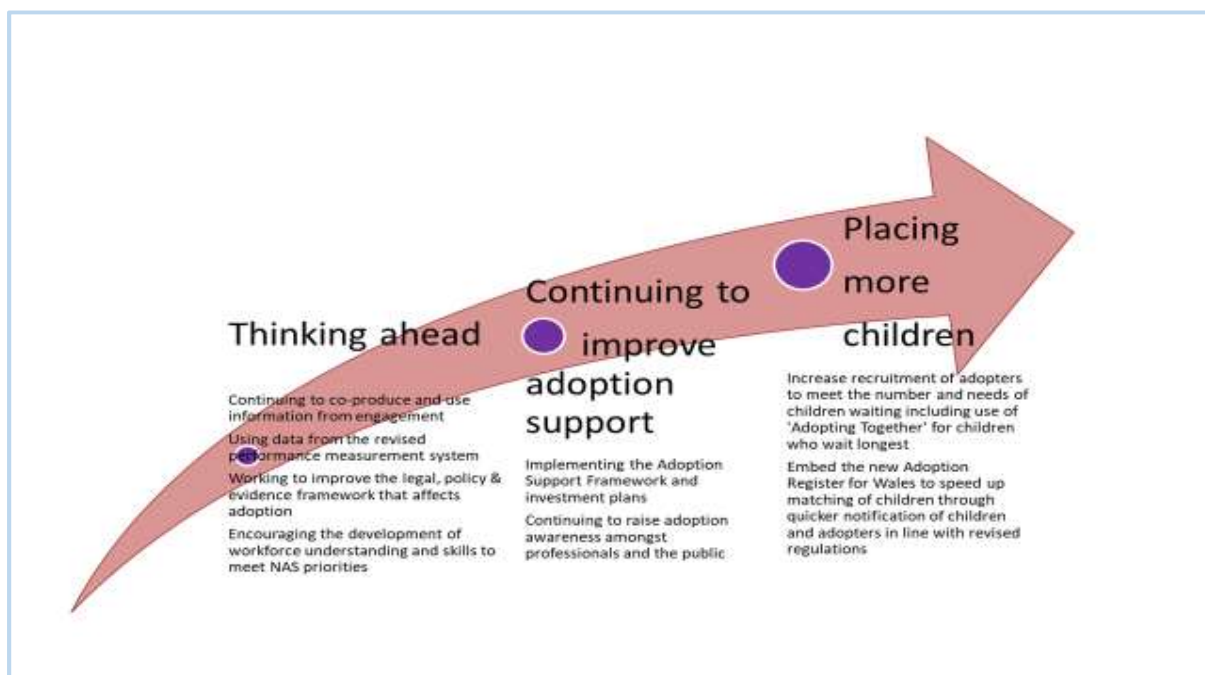


association for fostering and adoption  
cymdeithas ar gyfer maethu a mabwysiadu

## Introduction

The National Adoption Service (NAS) is the Wales wide collaborative for the provision of adoption services; its role is to improve adoption services for the benefit of all those affected by adoption in Wales.

Through its national / regional / local structure for Local Authority adoption services and its partnership with Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Health, Education and others, NAS has been improving services since 2014. Our current priorities are set out below.



Written with an input from services and stakeholders across Wales, this report provides an update on our work and this year's priorities.

We hope the report will be informative for those who use our services, professionals as well as Welsh Government and Ministers.



*Geraint Hyskin*

Governance Board  
Chair



*Philip T. Hobson*

Independent Chair of  
Advisory Group



*Suzanne Eiffoth*

Director

## Priority 1: Placing more Children

### *Increase recruitment of adopters*

The ambition of NAS is to ensure that all children with an adoption plan can be placed with their new adoptive family in a timely way – ideally within six months of the placement order being granted. In order to do this NAS regions and agencies are aiming to increase the number of adoptive families being approved.

Since NAS was formed there has been, on average, a need for 500 families per year to place the children waiting at the start of each year as well as those with new placement orders granted during the year. The NAS recruitment strategy is asking agencies to set realistic recruitment goals that enable the service to incrementally increase recruitment and reduce the gap between need and availability of adopters in the short term. After this we anticipate that the overall need for placements will reduce to 300/350 families a year if levels of demand remain the same.

The longer term trend for approval of adopters is downward but it stabilised between 2017/18 and 2018/19 and levels of approval are now beginning to rise again. We aim to consolidate and make more consistent these signs of improvement in order to close the gap between demand and availability of placements thus improving timeframes and outcomes for children.



Levels of new enquiries have increased; 849 enquiries were received during the first half of this year; the highest level in this time period since NAS was formed.



At mid-year point 123 new adoptive families had been approved in Wales, a higher level than in the first half of the previous three years.



We have maintained good performance by approving many new adopters in the recommended six months from receipt of their formal application; the average for Wales is 6.3 months with 73% of approvals within that timeframe.



At 144, there is a small overall increase in new assessments commenced by mid-year compared to previous years leading to a small projected increase for the year. However the numbers of new assessments commenced each quarter has started to fall which has implications for approvals in the medium term.

This indicates that our plans are starting to have an impact

#### What have we done?

- ❖ Engaged a professional PR company, supported by our recruitment and marketing group, for a more integrated approach including:
  - Working together to attend national events such as the

#### What next?

Continue to embed the integrated approach

National Eisteddfod or other promotional activities such as national adverts.

- Supporting regional activity and events e.g. local PRIDE days
- Developing and issuing a social media toolkit for Regions, LA's and agencies
- Creating a new campaign '*Become the parent only you can be*' via #YouCanAdopt

Roll out of the new campaign during National Adoption Week and throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year

We've agreed that we want to have a specialist recruitment officer in each of the regional adoption services because this has worked well in North Wales and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff.

By the end of the year all 5 regions will have this capacity in their service.

We've implemented a good practice guide for staff to change how we deal with enquiries and the early stage of the assessment process so that information and messages are current, accurate and consistent across Wales.

This is being developed into information for prospective adopters.

We've developed guidelines and provided training for staff ready for the implementation of the new '2 Stage' process for assessing prospective adopters which Welsh Government is implementing.

We are ready to implement this although it has now been delayed a little in Welsh Government

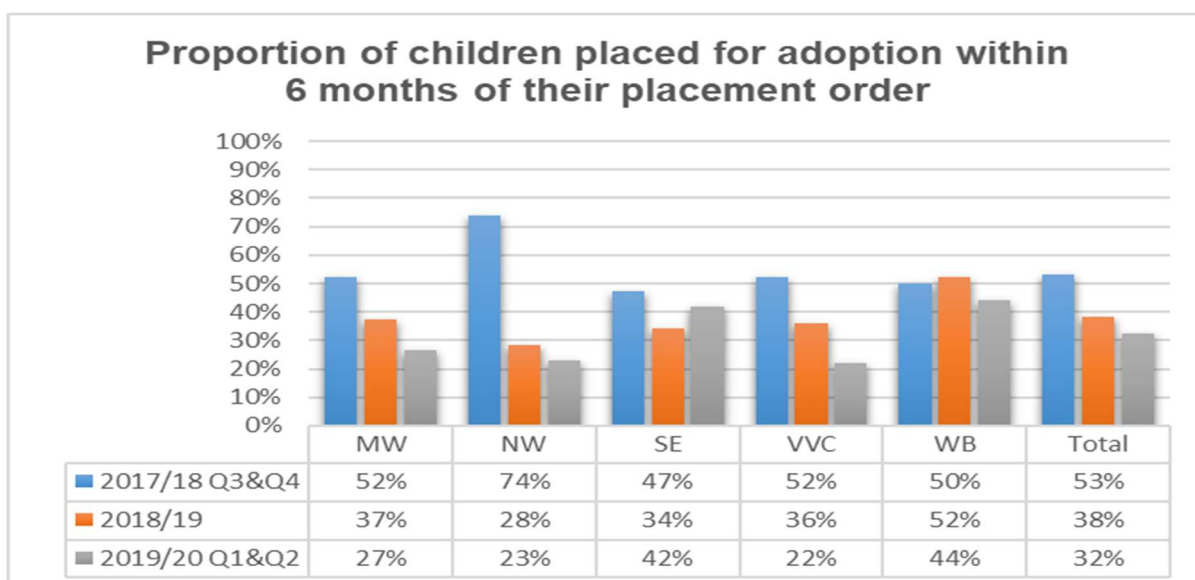
We've revised our recruitment strategy so that we are clearer about what we need to do and how we will do it.

We are working on creating further consistency in our services through an 'Optimal Model' approach i.e. agreeing key features of our recruitment service and all regions working towards this.

### *Place children in a timely way*

So far this year, 32% of the children placed have been placed within 6 months of their placement order being granted compared to an overall 38% during the 2018/19 business year, with highest quarterly figure to date being 47%. On a regional level currently this ranges from 44% in Western Bay to 22% in Vale Valleys and Cardiff. Additionally having fewer adopters available is having an impact on timeframes.

The children who take longer to be placed inevitably influence the average timeframe to placement. The impact on timeframes is moderated by the very positive fact that regions have been successful in placing more complex children.



More generally the following characterises situations where placements take longer:

- Complex children, particularly those with significant health needs, older children and sibling groups;
- Foster carer assessments to adopt the child they had been caring for commencing late in the process; and
- Prolonged court proceedings, increasingly linked to appeals by birth parents or to revocation applications at the point of placement.

Our core activity data for the first half of the year shows that there has been a small decline in both the level of placement orders made so far this year and the number of children being considered for adoption at 'should be placed for adoption' stage which is prior to this. This is unlikely to have a significant impact on overall demand for adoptive placements in the short term.

- 280 children have been referred to regional adoption services,;
- 164 new 'should be placed for adoption' decisions have been made by local authorities;
- 160 new Placement Orders have been granted by Welsh courts.

Alongside this

- 164 children have been placed with their adoptive family, a higher level than at the same stage in the last 3 years;
- There has also been a rise in children having their plans for adoption changed which we have started to monitor. Early analysis of the data indicates that placement availability is the main reason in more than 80% of the instances where this happened.

### *Children waiting*

Overall at mid-year (30/09/19) there were just under 298 children, subject to a Placement Order but not yet matched, waiting. Within this circa 20%, or more than 60 children, also have firm move on plans that are awaiting formal agreement. The actual number of children waiting for a placement to be identified at end Q2 / mid-

year was circa 236. In addition we anticipate in the region of 170 new placement orders being granted in the second half of the year.

Services are working hard and collaboratively to recruit more adopters and to place children waiting including by using the new Adoption Register for Wales and the Adopting Together Service.



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu Cymru  
Adoption Register Wales

## Adoption Register for Wales

This is the first six months of the new Adoption Register for Wales which is powered by the 'Link Maker' data base. This has provided a new way of working for staff who are 'family finding' for children across Wales. The new service also provides managed access for adoptive families so, those families that want to be more active in their own family finding activity, can be.

During the first half of this year:

- In excess of 1,300 expressions of interests have been made or received about children;
- In excess of 100 families have been active on the service making their own enquiries;
- 38 children have been matched through the service; and
- 5 families have been matched through the service.



adopting together | mabwysiadu  
gyda'n gilydd

## Adopting Together

The 'Adopting Together' service is a collaborative, partnership project which NAS asked the Welsh Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) to develop so that the most complex children who wait longest for a placement could be more easily placed for adoption with guaranteed support.

Led by St David's Children Society it is delivered by the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales and supported by the National Adoption Service at regional and national levels. It brings together theoretical knowledge and UK wide best practice into one distinct model. The service began in October 2018 and overall has placed 13 children in its first year of operation. Of these children 70% are boys and the average age of the children placed is 4 years and 8 months.

Seven of these children have been placed during the 2019/20 business year so far comprising of 2 sibling groups and 2 single children.

## Priority 2: Continuing to Improve Adoption Support

### *Implementing the NAS Adoption Support Framework*

In 2016 NAS developed its strategic plan for the development of adoption support services in Wales.



With its distinctive umbrella symbol, the vision over time was to guarantee a 'Core Offer' of support for all Welsh adopted children and young people and their parents as well as to others affected by adoption.



It was intended that this 'Core Offer' would:

- equip adoptive families at the start and support their early days to encourage healthy and confident families;
- provide effective information, advice or support as and when families need it and in a timely way so any issues that arise are less likely to escalate into more serious issues; and
- provide ongoing support or easy re-entry to services where it is needed.

Realising this vision was given a huge boost when Welsh Government announced a £2.3m investment package from April 2019.

Inevitably the first 6 months of this year has been a foundation phase and across Wales we have been putting things in place to create new and improved services. We have been finalising service design, setting services up, creating posts and recruiting to them as well as awarding contracts through normal business and procurement processes.

However, as this year progresses we are confident that we will start to see some impact in terms of numbers of children and families supported.

## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?



Early support to families with emerging needs through the AUK TESSA programme to include:

- Trained parent-partners, with psychology assessment, for adoptive families;
- A parent partner co-ordinator in each region / agency to recruit, complement duty services and support a revised ASSA; and
- A range of universal / targeted provision developed through TESSA.

The funding became available in April and much has been done to establish the service:

- AUK has recruited and trained 11 parent partners;
- Psychology contract in place;
- AUK national co-ordinator appointed;
- 4 of the 5 regional co-ordinators appointed; and
- Referral processes in place.

The service will start accepting referrals in November

## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?



A new support and information service for children and young people, part of the new national service, operating in each adoption region.

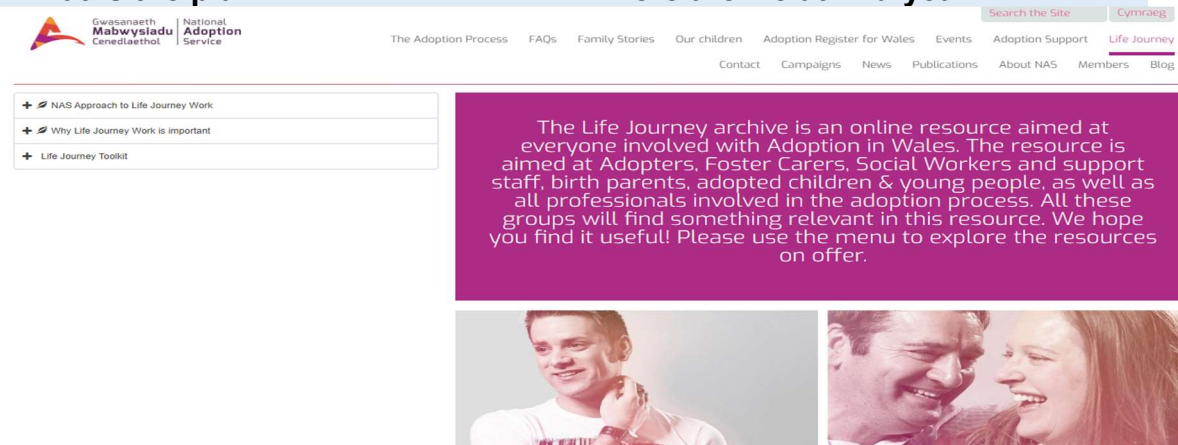
Connected service established to replace 'Talk Adoption'

- 100 children and young people offered transfer to new service / 63 currently registered
- Contract for national development officer in place and appointment made
- 3<sup>rd</sup> sector bid made to fund infrastructure
- 4 of 5 regional staff in place.



## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?



The screenshot shows the National Adoption Service website. The header includes the logo for Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol (National Adoption Service) and navigation links: The Adoption Process, FAQs, Family Stories, Our children, Adoption Register for Wales, Events, Adoption Support, Life Journey, Contact, Campaigns, News, Publications, About NAS, Members, and Blog. A search bar is also present. On the left, there is a sidebar with links: + NAS Approach to Life Journey Work, + Why Life Journey Work is important, and + Life Journey Toolkit. The main content area features a purple box with text about the Life Journey archive, followed by two photographs of smiling people.

The Life Journey archive is an online resource aimed at everyone involved with Adoption in Wales. The resource is aimed at Adopters, Foster Carers, Social Workers and support staff, birth parents, adopted children & young people, as well as all professionals involved in the adoption process. All these groups will find something relevant in this resource. We hope you find it useful! Please use the menu to explore the resources on offer.

Embed the new life journey materials framework with a named person in each region to oversee quality /availability at matching and placement.

AFA Cymru is continuing to support us with this project

- 4 of 5 regions have appointed staff.

## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?



Implement individualised plans for adopter post approval training / development.

- Pre- approval preparation has been revised
- The 13 post approval modules finalised and 14<sup>th</sup> commissioned
- A brochure for the post approval offer finalised
- 2 regions are beginning delivery.

## What is the plan?

Improving the range of targeted / specialist therapeutic support available through health, social care and education.

## Where are we at mid-year?

The TESSA service (above) is part of this, linked to which we have been working to increase the psychology support to all regions modelled on the service available in South East Wales.

- Each region has made a bid into the Intermediate Care Fund for funds to create psychology support for adopted children.

## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?



**AFA CYMRU**  
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A new best practice framework and approach to:

- placing children and providing early support (including Adopting Together);
- contact which is effectively facilitated by regional services / agencies;
- adoption support assessment, planning and review for all children; and
- working with birth parents incl. links to Reflect projects.

AFA Cymru have been commissioned as our strategic partner for this work

- Contract in place
- Work underway on 2 of the 4 work streams.

Alongside this central team have

- Collaborated with the children's legal centre for Wales and published an advice sheet on contact for children and young people
- Collaborated with Voices from Care Cymru to promote the importance of sibling contact including a practitioner event.

## What is the plan?

## Where are we at mid-year?

Evaluation of the change and improvement programme

This is currently being procured.

Alongside the above regions and agencies continue to provide a range of support services and access to more specialist services where there is a need. All of the regions and agencies provide support groups and family fun days for adopters and Adoption UK (AUK) has increased the number of support groups it provides to 13 across Wales including some for more specialist groups for parents of teenagers, single parents, LGBT parents, Dad's, Adult adoptees, Grandparents etc.

*Continuing to raise adoption awareness amongst professionals and the public.*

We've continued to support AUK as the lead partner working to improve **adoption awareness in education services**. AUK have once again attracted a grant from the Welsh Government to continue this work which this year is focusing on improving adopted children's transition from primary to secondary school. So far this year they have

- Developed a video involving adopted children and young people
- Surveyed children and young people about their experiences to inform a
- Training module.

AUK will be training a trainer from each of the education consortia areas who will deliver this to schools in their area as the year progresses.

More generally over the past 12 months, AUK in Wales has run 40 training days attended by 322 adoptive parents and 349 practitioners on a wide range of topics including education issues, managing behaviour, health and well-being as well as many other topics of interest to adoptive parents and professionals. This has benefitted at least 437 children whose parents have attended courses as well as numerous more adopted children whose teachers and teaching assistants attended the education courses.

The central team and AUK have worked together to continue to influence Welsh Government strategy for vulnerable learners including being part of the strategy group overseeing the production of revised Welsh Government Strategic Plan.

NAS has also launched its awareness raising **information leaflets for health professionals**. These have already been distributed to all Health Boards and GP surgeries across Wales and follow up is planned to ensure they are promoted with adopters and reach specific services such as CAMHS and Children's Centres.

Central team has also continued to be involved in improving the response for **children with emotional well-being needs** including the response to 'Mind over Matter' and the 'Together for Children and Young People' strategy by attendance at the 'Early intervention and Resilience' sub group. It is pleasing to hear that the latter, which will be considering the needs of adopted children within a range of vulnerable groups, is likely to continue.

## Priority 3: Forward Thinking

### *Continuing to co-produce and use information from engagement*

We ran the Adoption Voices programme early in the year which showed us the following as well as some suggestions as to what adopters might want done to improve them

- New adopters are more satisfied with life journey work and the general adoption support position although there is still work to do
- Continued concern about contact with things agreed at court / placement quickly becoming unworkable. Most adopters want this to work for their child but they are not being encouraged by staff. (Contact is a priority this year)
- Continued concern about help with emotional wellbeing of children from health and support in education.

We worked with AUK to design the Wales questions for the Adoption Barometer which was done over the end last / start this business year. The overall outcome was that the findings for Wales compared well with England despite the differential in focus and investment that England have had over many years. The findings included that:

- Welsh adopters were considerably more likely to have received life journey materials
- 62% agreed that post-adoption support they received had a positive impact on their child
- 84% felt that despite the challenges they would encourage others to consider adopting
- Twice as likely to have made a definite choice not to meet birth family members (social worker influence)
- Very high level of need amongst adopted children. 26% had statements compared to 5% of children in Wales generally
- Just under half considered the range of support interventions on offer to be too limited

NAS has commissioned the publication of a Wales only report and AUK is working with regions to present the findings.

We can feel confidence that what we are doing is having a positive impact on many families and that there are improvements to the pre NAS position.

We are delighted that the new 'Connected' service for children and young people has carried on where the former 'Talk Adoption' service ended and continues to provide a service for numerous children and young people across Wales. We are excited about the development of this into a truly Wales-wide service.

### *Using data from the revised performance measurement system*

We have completed the change project and now have a steering group focusing on full implementation. The new system has provided us with the data for quarterly reporting and for this report.

Alongside this we are working to improve the reporting from the new Adoption Register for Wales.

Regions and VAA's are actively engaged with both of the above with their own local actions to ensure that we continue to effectively use data at all levels.

### *Working to improve the legal, policy and evidence framework that affects adoption*

We have worked collaboratively across Wales, through the Policy and Best Practice subgroup to develop the guidance and operational policies to introduce the new **2 stage process for the approval of adopters**. There is a programme of work in place for the remainder of the year.

More generally all of the regions are working with relevant operational staff from their local authorities to improve links and embed various ways of working.

The **NAS 'Review of Arrangements'** has continued looking at implementing changes resulting from the agreement by the Governance Board during 2018/19 that it wished NAS to move towards a different, commissioning based model for NAS. The work this year has led to the merging of the NAS Advisory Group and Governance Board into a 'Combined Governance Board' as well as a programme of work with local government stakeholders to consider the commissioning model concept and developed a revised functional model.

One region has reviewed its **partnership agreement**.

NAS has an important contribution to make to the **Safe Children Looked after Reduction and Re-balancing Care Work** that is being led by the Welsh Government.

Since NAS was created circa 2,300 Adoption Orders have been granted. On average over the last 5 years 17% of all the children who ceased to be looked after during the year leave by becoming adopted.

These children are removed from the looked after system permanently into families that provide very good outcomes for them. Whilst there is a need for the investment in adoption support the resource for this is very small compared to that of a child remaining looked after. The numbers of breakdowns and children returned to care are very low in comparison to the numbers who are successfully placed. There is, therefore, a clear financial business case to ensuring all children with an adoption plan are adopted. This is informing our recruitment activity.

*Encouraging the development of workforce understanding and skills to meet NAS priorities.*

All regions and agencies have plans in place to continue to develop their staff, provide learning opportunities for panels and for adopters. This includes specific therapeutic interventions such as Non Violent Resistance (NVR), Theraplay® and relational play, attachment and Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP). NAS has funded one place on a DDP course for all regions / agencies this year.

NAS contributed to the Social Care Wales consultation on the new Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy.



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