



**Post Adoption Services
to Adopted Adults and
Birth Relatives in England
& Wales:
Report of the BAAF Survey**

Introduction

BAAF's Adoption Search Reunion website (ASR) is a valuable free resource for adopted people, birth relatives and adoptive parents as well as adoption professionals. It has been running since December 2005 and provides a wide range of information and resources on adoption, search and reunion issues, as well as two searchable databases which help to locate adoption records and find agencies offering support, counselling and intermediary services. Last year the website received around 68,000 unique visitors.

During 2012 BAAF undertook the task of updating the contact details for all the local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies that are listed on the ASR website to ensure the data is as current as possible, and we also thought that it would be helpful to conduct a survey to try and gain a snapshot of what adoption support services for adopted adults and birth relatives are currently being provided in England and Wales, and to which groups.

This report describes the findings from this online survey and explores how the information that has been gathered could be used to improve practice, policy and services. The survey was sent to agencies that provide adoption support services, including Local Authorities (LAs), Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and Adoption Support Agencies (ASAs). We asked a range of questions to gather information about the services that were being provided and the waiting times. We also asked for feedback about the ASR website so that we can make informed decisions in the future about how it could be improved, should resources and funding become available.

How the survey was conducted and who responded

The survey was conducted online using a website called Survey Monkey, and was live between 22nd May and 9th August 2012.

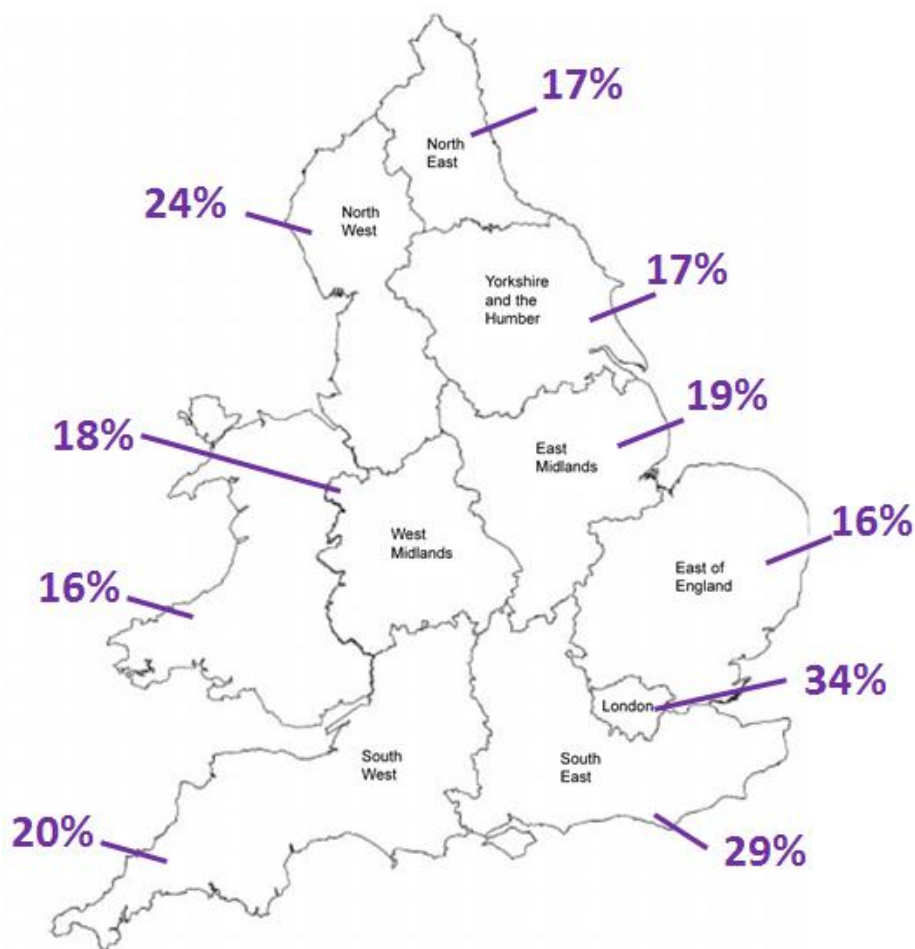
The recently updated database on the Adoption Search Reunion website was used to provide contact details and 161 local authorities (LAs) and adoption agencies in England and Wales were invited to take part. The initial invitation went out by email on 22nd May and a follow up reminder was sent. We became aware that as a result of some emails going to an email address for a central office within the local authority, a number of adoption teams did not receive the invitation to participate in this online survey. Unfortunately due to lack of resources we were not able to follow up with all of these local authorities.

We were however pleased with the response rate as 112 of the agencies and LAs responded to at least one question (70% response rate) and 90 of these completed the survey (56% response rate).

The percentages cited in this report relate to *respondents* rather than *agencies* as it is possible that more than one person from an agency could have completed the survey, though we believe that the majority of responses were from individual authorities/agencies. Included in this report is the sample size for each question which is indicated by 'n'.

75% of respondents were from Local Authorities, 13% from Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and 13% from Adoption Support Agencies (ASAs).

The agencies provided services in the following regions:

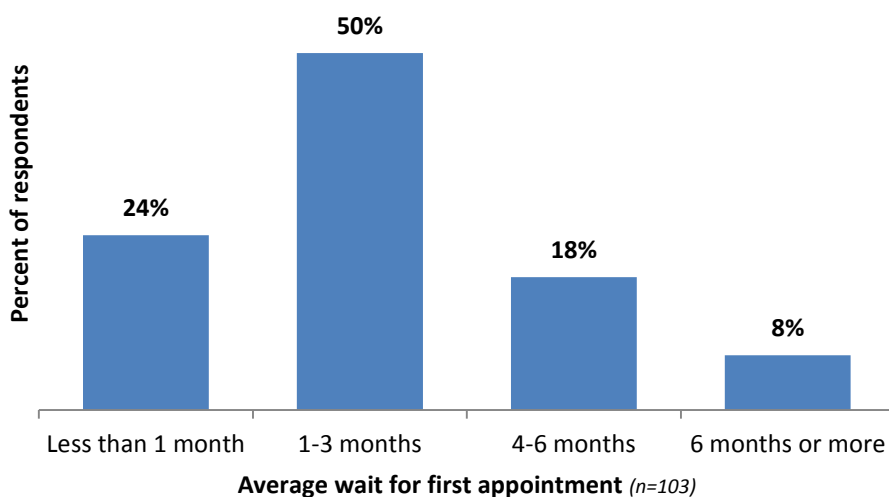


Note that the percentages above do not add up to 100 because agencies services can cover more than one region. ($n=90$)

Accessing Birth Records Services

94% of the respondents told us that their agency provides access to birth records (Sch 2) to adopted people. 5% do not provide this service, and 1% of respondents do not know.

As the table below shows, 24% of agencies reported that an adopted person seeking access to birth records would wait for less than a month for a first appointment, and a further 50% of agencies have an average wait time for a first appointment of 1-3 months. However, in 8% of agencies the adopted person would wait for 6 months or more.



Outsourcing/Commissioning Services to Another Agency

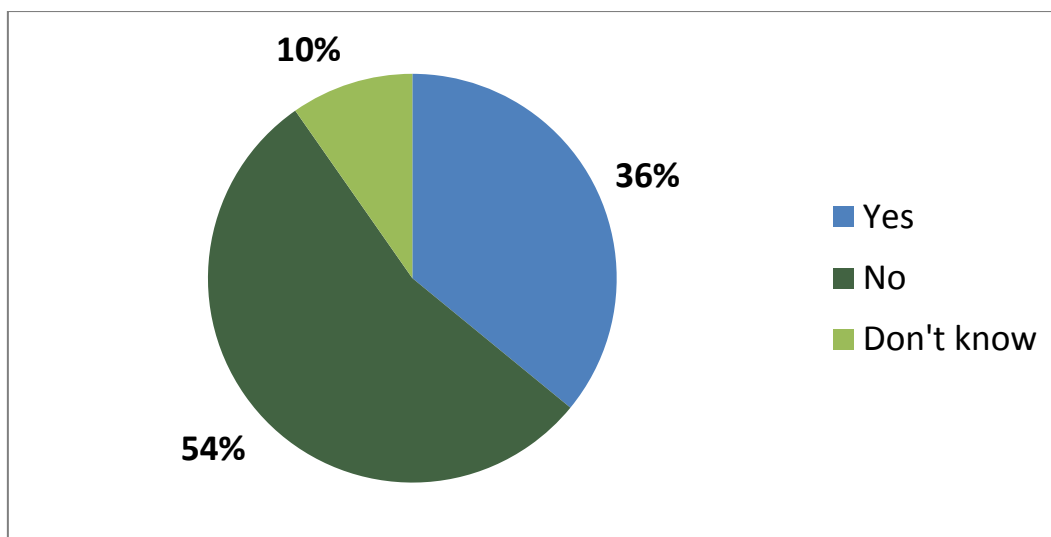
We asked how many agencies commission the service of providing access to birth records to another agency and the average time an adopted person would normally have to wait for a first appointment with that agency.

17% of respondents reported that they outsource the service of providing access to birth records to another agency, while 80% provide the service in-house, and 3% said that they did not know.

67% of the (18) outsourcing agencies report that the adopted person waits for less than 3 months for an initial appointment with the agency they commission to, with 17% waiting for less than 1 month. Although the sample size is too small to make concrete conclusions, this suggests that the waiting times for initial appointments are very similar whether the services are provided in-house or outsourced.

Recording Vetoes

As the chart below reflects, 36% of agencies maintain a central register for vetoes that have been made by adopted people, but more than half do not. Some agencies reported that the reason that they do not have a central register is because they have no need for one, because to date they have not had a request from an adopted person wanting to register a veto.



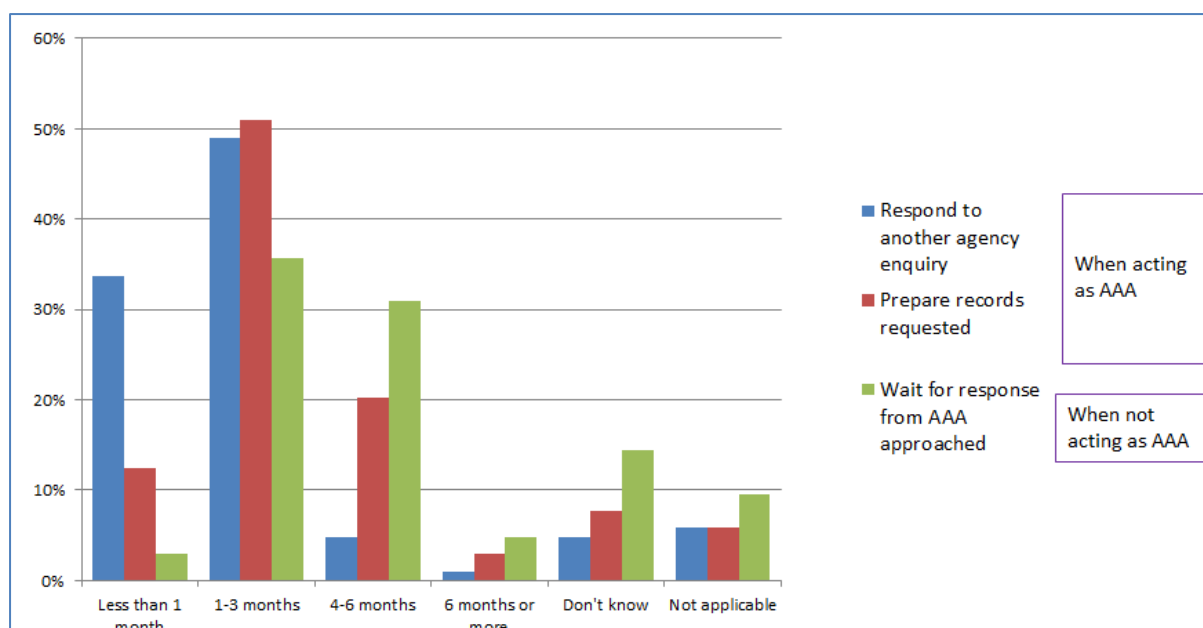
Maintaining a central register for vetoes made by adopted people (*n=103*)

Responses from the Appropriate Adoption Agency (AAA)

Since the Adoption and Children Act 2002 was implemented in 2005, there have been new procedures that intermediary agencies (when not the AAA) have to follow before an intermediary service can be provided in relation to adopted adults and birth relatives. The intermediary agency has to ask the AAA for its views before an intermediary service can be provided. There has been much debate about this, and concern that in some cases, it has had a negative impact on adopted people because of the waiting times involved. It is acknowledged that it can be particularly frustrating for an adopted person who already has identifying information and has located the birth relative they are looking for, to wait an excessive amount of time for the AAA to respond to the intermediary agencies request. In view of this we were particularly interested to find out what the average waiting time was and asked the AAA how long it took them to respond to the intermediary agency with their view. We also asked the intermediary agency for their perception of how long it took the AAA to respond to the request.

When acting as the Appropriate Adoption Agency (AAA) a high proportion (83%) of agencies report that they provide a view to the referring agency within 3 months (34% respond within 1 month and 49% between 1 and 3 months). However, the perspective of the referring agency differs, with only 39% reporting that they receive an initial response from the AAA within 3 months (3% within 1 month, and 36% between 1 and 3 months).

64% of agencies say that when acting as the AAA they prepare the requested records within 3 months (13% provide records within 1 month and 51% between 1 and 3 months).



Responses from AAAs (n=102)

Provision of Intermediary Services

Agencies were asked whether they provided intermediary services to adopted people, birth relatives or descendants of adopted people and whether this differed according to the date the adoption took place. As the table below shows over three quarters of agencies offer intermediary services to adopted people, but only two thirds offer services to birth relatives and just over half offer services to descendants of adopted people. However, the figures are remarkably similar whether the adoption took place before or after 1975.

	Adopted People	Birth Relatives	Descendants of Adopted people
For adoptions BEFORE 1975	77%	67%	53%
For adoptions AFTER 1975	79%	67%	54%

% of respondents whose agencies provide intermediary services to these groups of people (n=95)

In situations where the adoption agency or LA did not provide intermediary services it was generally reported that they would signpost the enquirer to another agency that could

provide this service. The majority said that they would refer to AAA NORCAP, After Adoption, or Caritas.

A few agencies also made comments about the provision of intermediary services, a selection of which are shown here:

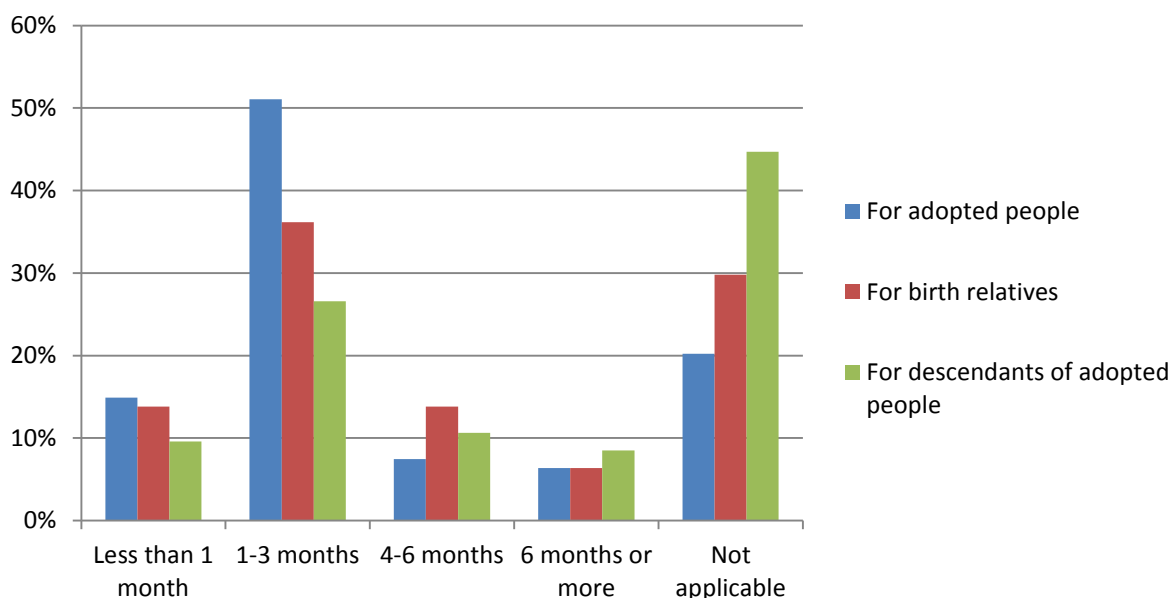
“We do not always offer an intermediary service to adopted people, it depends on where they live and likely whereabouts of birth family, etc. If people live outside of the region we may refer them to a local agency.”

“We are advised by our legal advisor that we are unable under the terms of the current adoption legislation to provide any service to the descendants of adopted people so reluctantly are unable to provide a service or to refer on to other agencies - e.g. we would also be unable to provide information to other agencies. We are not happy with this situation and would like to see the law amended.”

“We only offer limited intermediary services for birth relatives. We have not been asked about descendants of adopted people but would consider the service.”

Waiting Times for Intermediary Services

Agencies were then asked about the current waiting times for adopted people, birth relatives and descendants of adopted people who requested intermediary services. As the graph below shows, adopted people are likely to receive intermediary services sooner than the other groups of service users, with 66% receiving the service within 3 months, compared to 50% for birth relatives and 37% for descendants of adopted people.

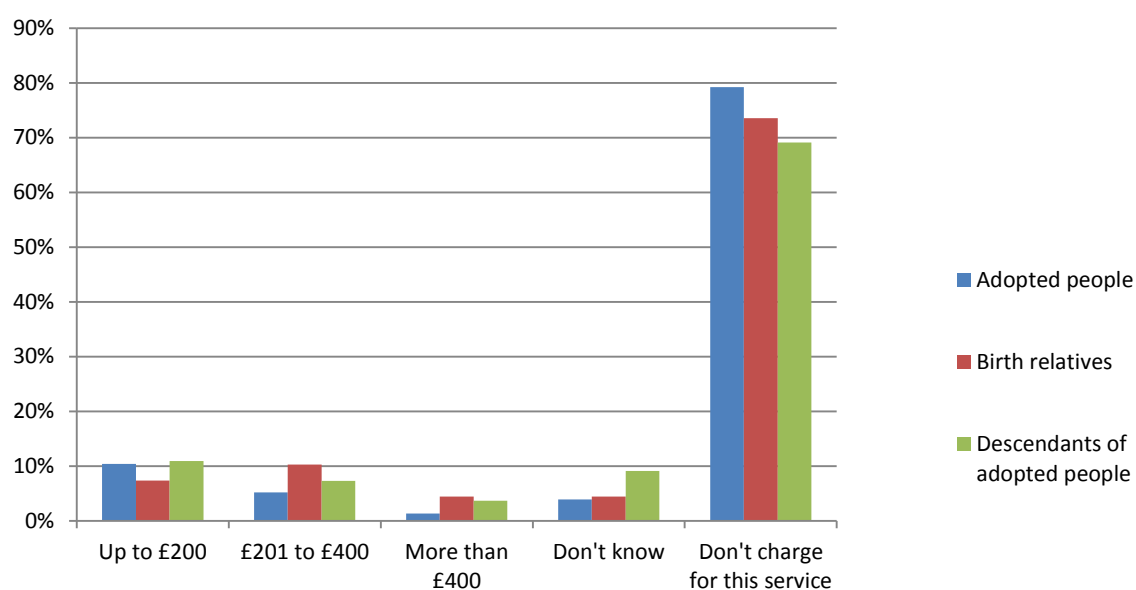


Current waiting times for Intermediary Services (n=94)

Charging for Services

Since the Adoption and Children Act 2002 was implemented, agencies may charge a fee for services in relation to the provision of an intermediary, for example tracing the relative being sought. However as stated in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 Practitioner Workbook¹ and the DCSF Practice Guidance on Access to Information and Intermediary Services² adopted people cannot be charged a fee for receiving birth records counselling and information. Nonetheless, adopted people like birth relatives, can be charged for tracing and intermediary services.

As the chart below shows, in this survey the majority of agencies who provide **intermediary services** said that they do not charge any group of people for this service.

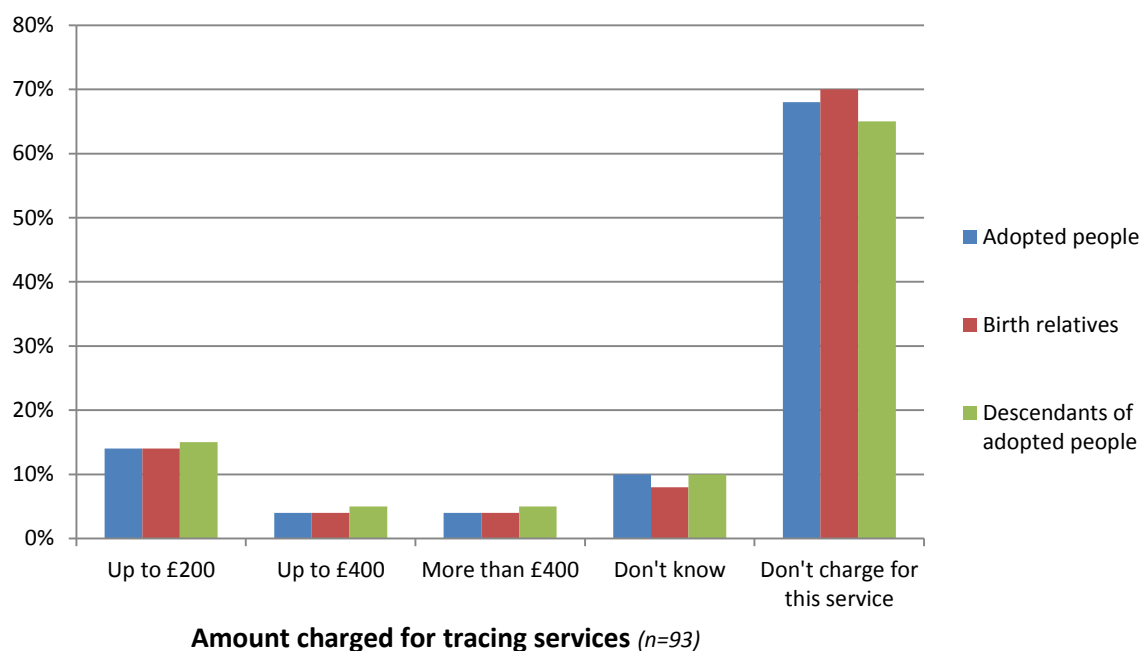


Amount charged for intermediary services (n=93)

¹ Adoption and Children Act 2002 Training: Practitioner Workbook (2005) Department for Education and Skills, Chapter 8, p13

² Adoption: Access to Information and Intermediary Services, Practice Guidance (2008) Department for Children, Schools and Families, p10

Again, the majority of agencies who provide **tracing services** said that they do not charge any group of people, although more agencies do charge for tracing than for intermediary services.



Just 8% of agencies charge for other services in relation to access to records, in addition to tracing and intermediary services. (88% do not and 4% don't know), and these services include:

- Responding to initial enquiry
- Preparing records to be sent out
- Preparing a summary
- Passing on GRO costs or administration fees

A number of agencies made further comments about charging for services and a sample are shown below:

Intermediary Services:

“Our commission [sic] agency charges for searching and mediation. They also have an administration charge of £35” [LA]

“Generally there is no charge however in some circumstances there would be and this may be something that will become more prevalent in the future due to limited resources” [LA]

“We plan to review services being provided due to long waiting lists” [LA]

“May need to charge in the future” [VAA]

Tracing Services

*“In some circumstances we will provide volunteer tracing help for adopted adults”
[LA]*

“If we are able to trace it is free, but time is such that if it is not possible to locate quickly we advise of a suitable researcher who will charge” [LA]

“We provide a combined search and intermediary service to Birth Family - so just the one charge of £35” [VAA]






“Very basic tracing service offered at no charge” [VAA]

“We do not charge separately for tracing so above charges represent proportion of intermediary fee, that is for the tracing element.” [ASA]

Tracing Resources/Facilities

Search Tools

Agencies that said they provided tracing services were asked which of the search tools listed they used to help them locate the adopted person or birth relative, and the charts below show that many are using a number of these services, as well as a wide range of other online and paper resources.

Tracing resource	% of responses
 NHS Alive or Deceased Service	68%
 tracesmart®	51%
 192.com® People, Businesses & Places	42%
 findmypast.co.uk / findmypast.com search with the experts	37%
 facebook	36%
Other (please specify)	54%

(n=76)

The diagram below shows all the ‘other’ resources used, as specified by the respondent.

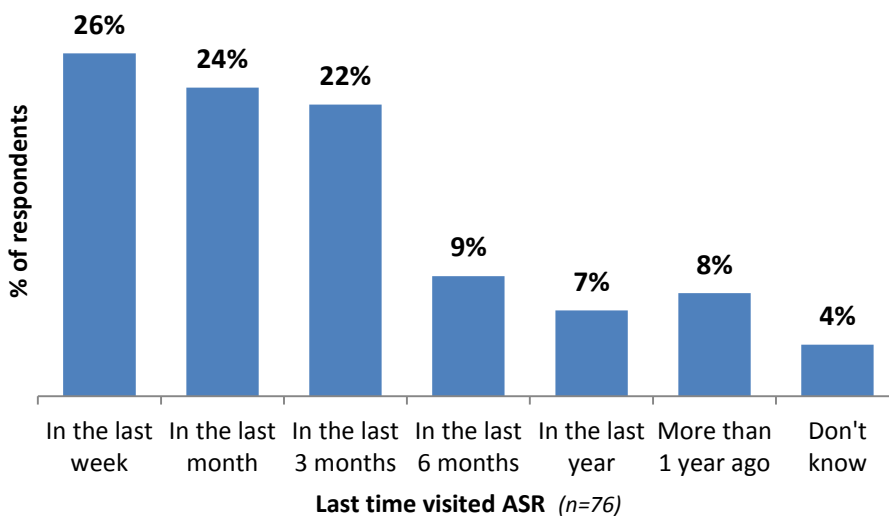


Family Researchers

Around 1 in 5 of the respondents’ agencies use private family researchers (19%) and of those agencies that do, the vast majority of their private family researchers are paid. Very few agencies reported using volunteer private family researchers, or a combination of volunteer and paid researchers.

Use of the Adoption Search Reunion Website

84% of respondents had visited the ASR website whilst 14% had not and 2% were not aware that it existed. The following chart shows that it is visited regularly by professionals and over a quarter had visited in the last week with nearly three quarters having visited in the last 3 months.



As this selection of comments shows, the website is valued by professionals working in this area:

“Excellent resource for professionals and for the public”

“I think it is a fantastic website. It's a really useful resource and I use it myself, often several times a week for various purposes. I also frequently recommend it to people I am working with. The biggest issue I have is in finding sources of support for my service users, e.g. local support groups, suitable therapeutic counselling. There seems to be a dearth of this kind of help”

“I find Adoption Search Reunion an excellent resource for locating records. Also we recommend it to both adopted adults and birth relatives”

“Easy to navigate, needs to be publicised more”

“The Guide for Adopted Adults wanting to search for Birth Relatives is very useful”

“It can be really useful. Sometimes the contact details are out of date but it usually gets you roughly to the right place.”

“Very good-we recommend to people tracing”

“We think it's very good and refer our services users to it - the tracing info and video clips are particularly useful”

Summary and Recommendations

Although we are aware that there were limitations to this survey and that as a result of a lack of resources it may not have reached as many agencies as we would have liked, it nonetheless provides a valuable snapshot of the current situation regarding adoption support services for adopted adults and birth relatives in England and Wales. Below is a summary of some of the key areas addressed and some recommendations for future work and action.

Accessing birth records services

The survey results reported that over 50% of adoption agencies are able to offer a first appointment to an adopted person who has requested access to information within 3 months. It is very encouraging to know that adopted people are not experiencing unacceptable waiting times to access adoption records. However it has to be acknowledged this may not be an entirely accurate picture given that we did not have a 100% response to the survey and it could be that the agencies that did not respond to the survey have greater waiting times.

Outsourcing

We were pleased to see that where access to birth records services are outsourced the waiting times are not markedly different to those for agencies who provide the services in-house. Very few LAs appear to outsource the work, and although we did not ask specific

questions about this, it could be because it is cheaper to run a service in-house and it also provides an opportunity to learn from this area of work and to feed back into current day to day practice.

Vetoos

A surprisingly low number of agencies said that they maintain a central register of vetoos and this may be because very few vetoos have been registered since the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. We know that some agencies said that this was because they had not had requests from an adopted person to register a veto. The survey did not ask specific questions about how many vetoos an agency had received, although through practice experience we understand that the numbers are extremely small. Nevertheless agencies need to be prepared for this possibility and to be able to respond efficiently and effectively to intermediary agencies who are trying to find out if a veto has been registered. Hence it is very important that agencies have a central register for vetoos.

Responses from AAAs

The survey showed a mixed picture about how quickly the AAA is able to respond to requests for their view, before an intermediary service is provided. The Intermediary agencies reported longer waiting times (5% waited six months or more) than those stated by the AAA (where 1% say it takes them 6 months or more).

Many AAA's have to struggle with the unpredictable demands on their services so this may well account for the longer length of times that some agencies require to prepare and send out records.

Intermediary services

It has often been reported that agencies are not responding to requests from birth relatives for an intermediary service where the adoption took place after 12th November 1975. The reason often given for this is that many of the adoptions that took place after this date were much more complex and often involved contested adoption. However the survey results are very encouraging as the agencies which do provide intermediary services show that they provide the same level of services for both pre and post 1975. It would be helpful to have some qualitative information about the dilemmas and challenges for providing intermediary services in adoptions where there have been complex issues to manage.

Charging for Intermediary and Tracing services

Very few agencies who took part in the survey reported that they currently charge for their intermediary and tracing services. However, we are aware that this is an area that may change in the current economic climate and the potential limitation of resources that may be available to agencies that provide intermediary services.

Charging Adopted People for access to Birth Records

The survey did not ask a specific question about whether or not adoption agencies charge adopted people who request access to adoption records. However, since the survey was conducted BAAF has become increasingly aware that a few agencies have begun to ask for a fee when they have received a request for access to adoption records. For example, when

an LA applies to the AAA on behalf of an adopted person they are offering a service to. There is currently a lot of concern about such a move and the impact this will have on an adopted person's rights and needs to access information. It is crucial therefore that clear guidance is issued as a matter of some urgency to reinforce the statements contained in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 Practitioner Workbook³ and the DCSF Practice Guidance on Access to Information and Intermediary Services⁴ where it is clearly stated that an adopted person should not be charged for disclosure of information about their adoption and family history. It is important that the principle and practice that adopted people should not be charged is not undermined.

Adoption Search Reunion website

We were pleased to see that a high proportion of agencies make use of the Adoption Search Reunion website and have done so in the last few months, and that the feedback on the site is very positive. However, as the site is such a key resource we are concerned that as many as 14% of respondents reported that they had never used the website or had not visited it in recent months. Some agencies commented that the contact details in the databases were not always accurate, which is in part a reflection of the lack of resources available for ongoing maintenance of the website. It is important that resources are found to ensure these databases continue to be kept up to date, although we will remain reliant on agencies' cooperation in confirming their details.

We were also concerned to learn that a few agencies were not aware that the ASR website holds much more information and is more up-to-date than the original printed version titled 'Where to Find Adoption Records'. This suggests that more work is needed to raise awareness about this valuable resource so that all adoption support professionals are familiar with the tools and information it provides.

Summary

This survey has provided some useful information about the services that are currently being provided in England and Wales to adopted adults and birth relatives. However this survey has its limitations as we did not achieve a 100% response rate so the results may reflect those agencies that have a high commitment to this area of work and provide good services. Given more resources it would be helpful to report from a survey that includes all LAs, VAAs and ASAs that provide adoption support services to adopted adults and their birth and adoptive relatives. Meanwhile we hope that this survey provides some useful information for managers and practitioners when planning and developing their services.

Julia Feast, Lisa Weintrobe and Katrina Wilson

BAAF, January 2013

³ Adoption and Children Act 2002 Training: Practitioner Workbook (2005) Department for Education and Skills, Chapter 8, p13

⁴ Adoption: Access to Information and Intermediary Services, Practice Guidance (2008) Department for Children, Schools and Families, p10