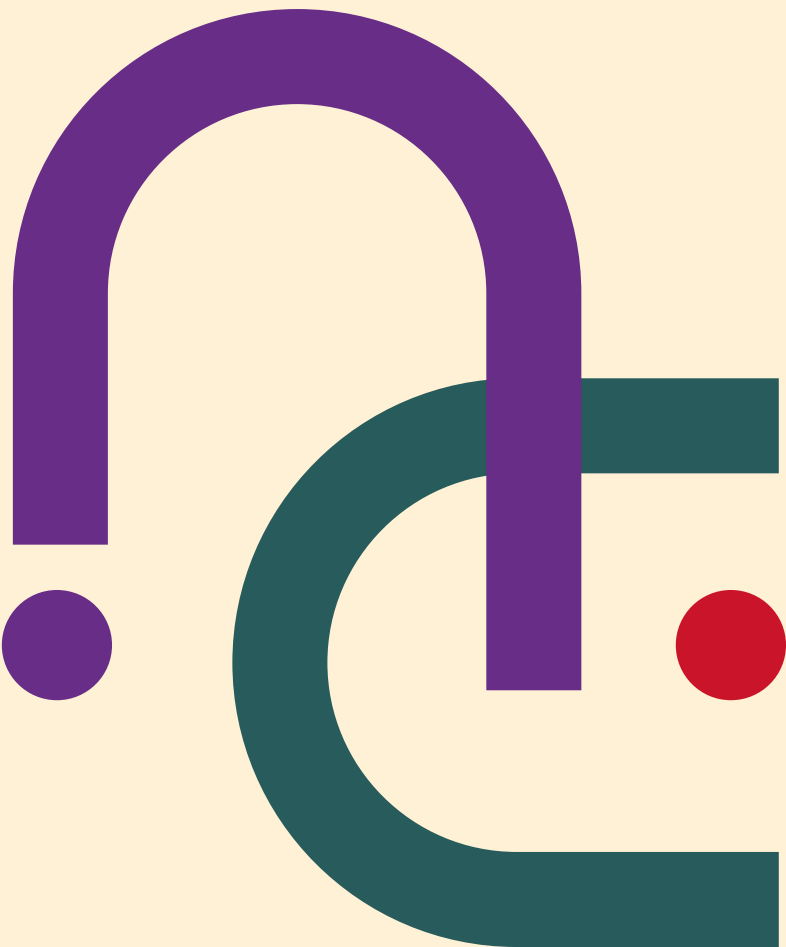




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Foreword

It is a privilege to introduce this year's Adoption England Annual Report. It highlights just some of the progress being made to improve adoption practice and services across the country, driven by partnership, innovation and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and families.

This progress comes in the context of a challenging year. The reduction in the Fair Access Limit at the start of the year had a significant impact on many adoptive families, alongside continued pressures in adopter recruitment. While these challenges remain, it is encouraging that the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund has been extended and that a national consultation on adoption support is underway — both important steps towards strengthening and modernising the system.

'Adoption—moving forwards' was the theme of our national conference held in London on 29th April. The event, co-hosted with members of the Youth Forum, brought together professionals, researchers, and those with lived experience to contribute to discussions about the future of adoption in England. Topics covered included: the role of early permanence and birth family contact in building children's resilience; a holistic approach to youth and education in adoption; the Black Adoption Project; birth mothers' perspectives; the Becoming a Family Framework; young people's voices; engagement with the adopter community; and collaborative efforts to establish an adopted adults group. The passion from all attendees was inspirational and has helped shape the future of our work moving forwards.

A strong focus over the past year has been adoption support, including testing new approaches to early support, encouraging innovation and building a clearer understanding of what works for families. This has been underpinned by an emphasis on research, evaluation and strengthening the evidence base to inform practice and future development. A key strength of this progress is that it is shaped by people with lived experience. Adopted people, birth parents, adoptive families and young people are actively influencing how services are designed and delivered, helping to ensure support reflects real experiences and responds to lifelong needs. The introduction of National Practice Standards for Staying in Touch marks a significant step forward in supporting safe, meaningful relationships with birth families, recognising the importance of identity, belonging and connection for children.

We have also continued to strengthen the workforce and wider system. Programmes such as Culture Change and Family Connect are building confidence, improving understanding and providing practical support to adopted adults and birth relatives, particularly at a time when the legacy of historical adoption practices is increasingly recognised.

Alongside this, there has been continued innovation, including the development of multidisciplinary models, new approaches to commissioning and pilots testing more flexible and preventative use of funding. Together, these are helping to shift the system towards earlier, more coordinated and evidence-informed support for families.

Looking ahead, the focus remains on improving consistency, strengthening support and continuing to innovate. We look forward to working with Government and partners to build a coherent national adoption support model that strengthens stability and improves outcomes for children.

I sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to this progress.

For more information about the work highlighted in this report, please visit: adoptionengland.co.uk

Sarah Johal MBE

National Adoption Strategic Lead,
Adoption England



Annual Report Programme Overview

Key Achievements

Maintaining Relationships and Culture Change

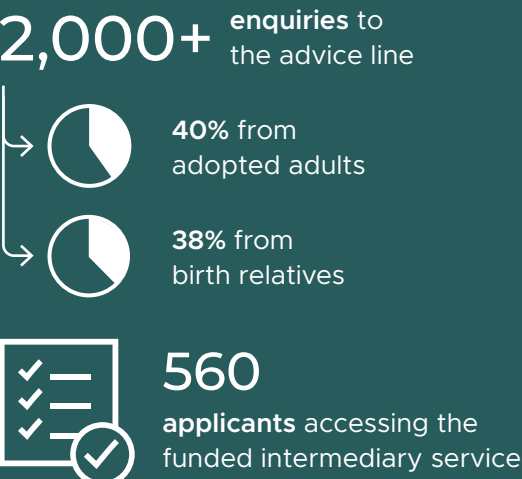


A major milestone this year was the launch of the **National Practice Standards for Staying in Touch**, providing clear, consistent guidance to support lifelong, child centred relationships.

Helping to translate standards into operational practice, the **Culture Change programme**, delivered by the University of East Anglia, expanded its national reach:

-  **11** open access webinars, including one attended by **320 participants**
-  **170** practitioners received in-person, pan-regional training
-  **A new national Community of Practice** established

The **Family Connect pilot** continued to deliver vital intermediary support for adopted adults and birth relatives from pre 1976 adoptions:



Average satisfaction scores above



The **Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA)** programme launched the Access to Information and Intermediary Services guide, supported by PAC-UK training:

-  **67** practitioners from **31 RAAs** reached
-  **100%** satisfaction
-  **A new professional network** established

Voice and Influence

The Adopted Persons Reference Group (APRG), Birth Parents Reference Group (BPRG) and Youth Forum have each played a significant role in shaping national developments.

The APRG and BPRG co-produced the Involving People with Lived Experience guide for practitioners and leaders, and APRG members also contributed to Adoption England’s national conference, the Improving Adoption Services for Adults programme, the Voice of the Baby project and the Giving HOPE project.

BPRG members influenced updates to the Child Permanence Report, contributed to national training on maintaining significant relationships and supported practitioner development through the Building Support for Birth Parents and Relatives work.

The Youth Forum’s influence has continued to grow with young people playing a central role in commissioning a new provider, Adoption UK, by shaping the service specification, developing scoring criteria and participating in provider assessments.

Early Permanence

Early Permanence (EP) remains a priority to provide stability for adoptive children and young people at the earliest point possible, and reduce the number of moves a child experiences.

-  The average time from entry to care to adoption was 19 months, **one month quicker than in 2024/25**, and **ten months faster** than for those in standard adoption arrangements.

Linking and Matching

 Membership of the Matching Practice Development Group has grown from 33 to 65 members.

 The AFDiT Champions Programme network has **grown from 45 participants to 77 Champions** nationally across RAAs, VAAs and LAs.

(Anti-racist Framework for Decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into Transracial adoptive families).

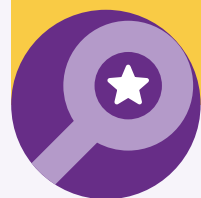
Nine RAAs and partnerships have now completed the Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home training, including 150 leaders and practitioners from agencies with the highest proportion of global majority children.

The programme focuses on the needs, lived experiences and outcomes of global majority children in care, creating a safe space to explore identity, trauma and cultural belonging.

Overall

National forums, Communities of Practice and strategic leadership from Adoption England has strengthened workforce development by supporting consistent practice across RAAs and partner organisations.

Across all programmes, thousands of practitioners have accessed training, guidance and shared learning, building skills, confidence and a more connected workforce.



Outcome 1:

Adopters from diverse communities are recruited, prepared and supported to meet children's needs

Recruitment Marketing

The You Can Adopt campaign is a cross sector initiative to support adopter recruitment across RAAs and VAAs. It continues to encourage people to consider adoption by tackling myths, reducing barriers, and increasing understanding of modern adoption. It also promotes adoption within diverse communities, particularly among Black and Black Mixed Heritage adults, as these children spend longer in care before being matched.

The 2025/26 strategy was informed by market research with diverse groups of people at the early stage of considering adoption. This insight supported a more targeted “nudge” to build on increased engagement from recent campaigns and drive more enquiries to adoption agencies. This is vital given wider societal factors affecting attitudes to family life and adoption specifically, contributing to a declining group of adopters.

This year's theme, Perfectly imperfect, aimed to reduce concerns among prospective adopters that they need to be “perfect”. Activity ran across the year through social and digital channels, with increased activity during key times including a major campaign PR moment during National Adoption Week in October 2025. This included tailored content for channels aimed at Black communities.

Key Achievements:

Recruitment marketing through the **You Can Adopt** campaign achieved record engagement including:

- **Over 13,000 agency website visits from YCA** during the October campaign, up from 2,690 the previous year.
- Engagement with 'Black adopters' website content quadrupled as a result of National Adoption Week.
- Importantly, following a year-on-year reduction in adopters coming forward since 2020/21, in 2025/26 we achieved:
 - 20% increase in adopter registrations compared to 2024/25.
 - 16% increase in adopter approvals compared to 2024/25.

Next Steps:

Despite these results, adopter sufficiency remains a critical challenge and increasing the number of people entering the adoption journey is a priority.

While the You Can Adopt campaign will continue, in 2026/27 Adoption England will use agency-level data and in-depth research to better understand barriers and identify effective practice to reduce early drop-out. This will build on work to improve the 'front door' experience, with a focus on user journeys, routes to enquire, and the process between enquiry and registration of interest.

Adopter Journey

As part of Adoption England's Adopter Journey project and following the initial round of 'front door' mystery shopping in 2024/25, a Task and Finish Group refreshed the original guidance co-created with Adoption UK.

The updated guidance reflects current adoption practice across RAAs and VAAs, and incorporates feedback from mystery shoppers to support greater consistency at the first point of contact. It provides practical advice on building rapport, enabling relational conversations and creating positive first impressions, helping ensure a welcoming and inclusive approach. The guidance sits alongside the Adopter Journey National Practice Standards on the Adoption England website.



Agencies also received personalised reports outlining strengths and areas for development, alongside a national overview report. Examples of good practice include:

“It didn’t feel like a checklist or scripted script. It felt like a genuine two-way conversation.”

“I felt listened to and reassured, especially when discussing my health issue.”

“I came away with a really positive feeling about the agency... informed, reassured, and more confident about the process and my own situation.”

A final round of mystery shopping took place in spring 2026 to assess the impact of the updated guidance and feedback on individual reports. Findings show an overall improvement, with full results to be shared with agencies.

In 2024/25, 264 adopter families withdrew from their adopter journey post-approval. To better understand the reasons, a Task and Finish Group worked with Coram to analyse the data. The most common reasons for withdrawal for both RAA and VAA adopters were ‘ill health’ and ‘adoption no longer the right choice’.

No clear patterns were identified by adopter characteristics, suggesting these withdrawals were unlikely to have been prevented through changes to agency practice.

Key Achievements:

- Development of ‘front door’ guidance to support a welcoming and inclusive first contact.
- Improved understanding of adopter withdrawals post-approval.
- Establishment of a community of practitioners focused on strengthening adopter preparation and sharing good practice.

Next Steps:

Over the next year, Adoption England will consult on the potential benefits of a core national preparation training programme and continue to grow the practitioner community committed to improving the adopter journey.

In 2024/25 Adoption England also developed a self-assessment toolkit to help agencies identify strengths and areas for development against the National Adopter Journey Practice Standards. Over the next twelve months the team will work with agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of the tool and identify any additional resources or support required.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

During the early part of 2026 we began a review of Phase 1 of the Adoption England EDI strategy (2024-27) that prioritises a need to address racial disparities, alongside wider EDI activity including LGBTQ+, disability and socio-economic inclusion, particularly in relation to adoption recruitment and matching of children. The findings from this review are informing the development of a national EDI progress and impact dashboard. This will provide a shared framework for measuring progress, strengthening collective accountability at both local and national level, and supporting RAAs to deliver against agreed priorities.

Adoption England will work in partnership with RAAs to co-develop and embed this approach, enabling more consistent monitoring, clearer shared expectations, and a stronger focus on outcomes as part of a coordinated and evidence-led system.





Outcome 2:

Adopted people maintain relationships with people important to them and have a good understanding of the reasons why they were adopted

Maintaining Relationships

Adoption England prioritises enabling adopted people to maintain safe, meaningful relationships with those who are important to them throughout their lives. As children grow, questions about identity, family and belonging become more significant. Early and ongoing support helps adopted children to develop into adults who feel secure in their identity and understanding of their life history. It also helps adoptive parents to navigate relationships safely and openly.

Culture Change

The Culture Change programme, led by the University of East Anglia, continued throughout 2025/26. Eleven free, open-access webinars reached a wide national audience with one session attracting 320 participants. All webinars are now available on the [Adoption England website](#) as ongoing learning resources.

Communities of Practice brought together Culture Change champions from across England, enabling shared learning, discussions of challenges and the exchange of practice. The programme delivered in-person, pan-regional training, extending its reach beyond RAAs and supported greater understanding of maintaining relationships and connections. While consistency across England remains a challenge, the programme contributed to greater alignment through national training, shared learning and collaboration.

Key Achievements:

- High level of satisfaction by participants, particularly the value of shared learning.
- Eleven webinars delivered, reaching thousands of professionals and others interested in adoption.
- 170 practitioners participated in in-person, pan-regional training.
- Increased confidence, motivation and connection across the adoption sector.

“The whole Culture Change Programme makes me feel so positive and energised about my role managing adoption support and keeping connections services—it’s great to connect with other areas.”

Culture Change Programme participant

Next Steps:

- Continue delivering open-access webinars and Communities of Practice to support shared learning and consistent messaging.
- Develop targeted webinars for groups requiring additional support, including new practitioners, solicitors and the judiciary.
- Provide bespoke training to RAAs based on identified local need while supporting national consistency.
- Complete research into the experiences of children, young people, adoptive families, birth families and professionals, to inform future policy and practice.

Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA)

The Access to Information and Intermediary Services guide was launched in May 2025, supported by a recorded webinar available on the Adoption England website. The guide provides clear, practical support for professionals working with adults affected by adoption.

IASA also produced a final report outlining recommendations to strengthen practice, policy and legislation for adults affected by adoption and this continues to be discussed with the Department for Education regarding potential policy and legislative changes needed.

PAC-UK (Family Action), as project partners, delivered in-person, pan-regional training across England on the updated guidance. The training was attended by practitioners from multiple RAAs. PAC-UK also established a professional network and continues to facilitate Communities of Practice in this specialist area.

Key Achievements:

- Training reached 67 practitioners from 31 RAAs across the country.
- Training achieved a 100% satisfaction rate.

Next Steps:

- Establish a Task and Finish Group to review the report’s recommendations and bring together national data.
- Continue Communities of Practice to strengthen learning and professional connection.
- Share good practice and address challenges to improve consistency across services.



Family Connect

Adoption England commissioned PAC-UK to deliver an 18-month pilot of the [Family Connect service](#) (to be extended until April 2027). The pilot provides a funded intermediary service for adopted adults and birth families affected by adoption prior to 1976 who wish to reconnect.

The service has expanded to include a specialist telephone advice line and additional online resources for birth families and professionals.

Key Achievements:

- The advice line has supported over 2,000 enquiries.
- 40% were from adopted adults, 38% from birth relatives, with the remainder from professionals or other descendants.
- High satisfaction levels were reported, with average scores exceeding 9/10 for response time and relevance of information.
- Across PAC-UK and other providers, 560 individuals have accessed the funded intermediary service.

Next Steps:

- Maintain access to the Family Connect helpline and increase awareness of available support.
- Expand funding to enable more people to access the funded intermediary service.
- Continue working with PAC-UK and partners to strengthen delivery and extend reach.

Family Rights Group Lifelong Links and Birth Families Map

During 2025/26, the Lifelong Links (LLL) pilot continued to progress, building on work from the previous year. The model has now been fully piloted with RAAs, and the outcomes are currently being prepared for publication by Dr Tam Cane (University of Sussex). The final evaluation report is expected in early summer 2026.

Feedback from participating RAAs pilots has been positive, with early indications of improved stability, wellbeing and safer connections for adopted young people.

“We see the Lifelong Links intervention as similar to a therapeutic intervention funded through the Adoption Support Fund.”

RAA participant

Active delivery of the model has been paused while findings are finalised and next steps considered.

The [Birth Families Map](#) continues to be a valuable national resource helping birth families access support services. During 2025/26, it was updated to improve coverage and access whilst also highlighting areas of strongest provision and gaps.

Key Achievements:

- Updated Birth Families Map reflecting current provision.
- Lifelong Links model supported 10 adopted children and their families to maintain safe connections with birth relatives.

National Practice Standards for Staying In Touch

During 2025/26, Adoption England launched the [National Practice Standards for Staying in Touch](#). These provide clear, consistent guidance to support adopted children and young people to maintain safe, meaningful relationships with birth family members and others important to them.

The standards promote a child-centred, flexible approach recognising staying in touch as a lifelong process, shaped by a child's evolving needs. They support more thoughtful and planned decision-making, including the use of digital methods, and aim to improve consistency across England.

Next Steps:

- Embed the standards across RAAs and partner organisations.
- Promote shared understanding across the wider system, including courts and legal professionals.
- Support agencies to align local policy and practice.
- Gather sector feedback to inform ongoing development.

HOPE Box (for separated families)

HOPE stands for Hold On, Pain Eases. These are therapeutic resources given to mothers and newborns who have to be separated close to birth due to safeguarding or child protection concerns. The program, co-designed by midwives, social workers, and mothers with lived experience, provides two identical boxes (one for the mother, one for the baby) to minimise trauma and maintain a connection through physical items.

During 2025/26, Adoption England commissioned the HOPE Box project to strengthen the role of children's voices in adoption practice. The work focused on ensuring HOPE Boxes support identity, belonging and emotional wellbeing at key stages of the adoption journey.

Consultation with people with lived experience, including adoptees, birth parents and adopters, informed the development of a clear trauma informed pathway for using HOPE Boxes. This reflects Giving HOPE's emphasis on dignity, sensitivity and co-production.

A supporting video resource will be developed to guide practitioners in using HOPE Boxes as a transition tool between birth relatives and adoptive parents. This will be hosted on the Adoption England website, to support national consistent practice.

Next Steps:

- Publish and promote the HOPE Box video resource.
- Share the HOPE Box pathway with RAAs and partners.
- Support practitioners to embed children's voices through learning and shared best practice.



Outcome 3:

Children and young people, adopted adults, adoptive and birth families are listened to and have an influence on the practice and the services provided nationally and regionally

Voice and Influence

Adopted adults and birth parents

Adopted Persons Reference Group (APRG)

Over the past year, APRG members, supported by PAC-UK (Family Action), have contributed to a wide range of strategic activity including participation in Adoption England's national conference in April 2025, input into the Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA) programme, involvement in the Voice of the Baby project, and the development of lived experience content for publication.

"Being able to share other adoptees' stories puts my own into context. There is a common thread which, by sharing, means we are able to support each other... As a reference group, we can create proposals for easing the predicaments in which people in our situation find themselves – within an organisation that can make change happen."

APRG member

Birth Parents Reference Group (BPRG)

Over the past year, members, supported by PAC-UK (Family Action), have contributed both independently and alongside the APRG to inform policy, practice development, and practitioner learning.

Key Achievements:

- Child Permanence Report (CPR) — members contributed to the updated CPR, launched by Coram in April 2025, highlighting experiences during and after care proceedings, gaps in support, and improvements needed to better reflect birth parents' perspectives.
- Maintaining Significant Relationships — in March 2026, members contributed to national sharing insights on recovery after adoption, emotional wellbeing, and supporting relationships.
- Supporting Practitioner Development — members supported learning through the 'Building Support for Birth Parents and Relatives' work, shaping more effective and meaningful support approaches.

"Being part of the Birth Parents Reference Group is rewarding in many ways... we are asked our opinions and see how they influence what happens. Most importantly, we are truly seen and heard as experts in our own right."

BPRG member

Joint Work of the APRG and BPRG

Collaboration between the two groups has been a significant strength this year, bringing together different lived experience to inform national work. Joint activity has included:

- Speaking at the Family Adoption Links conference (Lincolnshire).
- Contributing to National Adoption Week 2025, including the first in-person birth parent conference in Manchester.
- Participating in the Adoption Forum event in London to inform developments in staying in touch contact arrangements.
- Being part of delivering workshops at the Adoption England conference.
- Contributing to Adoption England consultations on adoption support.
- Completion of the [Involving People with Lived Experience](#) guide for practitioners and leaders.

This joint work has strengthened the focus on identity, continuity, and lifelong relationships, ensuring that policy and practice reflect the realities of adoption across the lifespan.

Input from both reference groups has directly influenced key national outputs, including National Practice Standards for Staying in Touch, pan-regional training for practitioners, and strategic development within the Maintaining Significant Relationships programme and the document [Involving People with Lived Experience](#).

"The most impactful part was hearing from someone with lived experience."

Feedback from training participant



Voice and Influence and Social and Peer Support Young people

Adoption England Youth Forum

The Adoption England Youth Forum has continued to develop over the past year as a key national structure for embedding the voices of adopted young people in policy and practice.

In 2025/26, the Forum included a small but committed group of highly active young people from diverse backgrounds across England. Despite its size, the Forum has made a significant impact, contributing to national developments and demonstrating the value of sustained youth engagement.

Key Achievements:

- In April 2025, members co-hosted Adoption England's national conference, sharing lived experiences and participating in panel discussions.
- Co-produced the commissioning of a new provider to develop and deliver the Youth Forum.
- Contributed to the recruitment of the National Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead, embedding lived experience in organisational leadership.
- Supported wider engagement and awareness activity, including a You Can Adopt podcast and an online screening of Belonging, a film exploring care experience.

"It was really good to raise the profile of the Youth Forum."

"I was buzzing afterwards and couldn't wait to tell my parents."

Youth Forum members

Voice and Influence Practice Network Young people

The Voice and Influence Practice Network is facilitated by Adoption England and brings together practitioners and managers from RAAs and partner organisations who are engaged in or developing Voice and Influence work with young people. The membership has continued to grow and by March 2026, there were 74 members with representatives from 91% of RAAs. This has been a helpful forum for shared learning, training and peer support, and aims to increase confidence and knowledge in developing this work.

Adopter Engagement "Mapping and best practice across Regional Adoption Agencies"

Adoption England attends the Department for Education Reference Group who meet quarterly, to gain their views on the programme of work across Adoption England. Their views continue to be important in shaping the development of work across the programme. In April 2025, Adoption England published a report by Adoption UK mapping the extent of adopter engagement across RAAs.

The report identifies effective approaches to ensuring adoptive parents' views and experiences inform the development of practice and services, and sets out recommendations for how these approaches can be strengthened across RAAs, the wider system and the DfE reference group.

It also highlights ongoing challenges and barriers, while recognising strong examples of effective engagement that demonstrate good practice across England. [The report can be found on the Adoption England website.](#)





Outcome 4:

Children are matched and move in with their permanent family in a timely way. Their needs are understood and met, and their feelings are held in mind and responded to sensitively

Linking and Matching

Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home

The Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home initiative, delivered by The Staff College and funded by Adoption England, continued in 2025/26 reaching three additional cohorts: Adoption Central England, Adoption @ Heart and Adopt East.

The programme focuses on the needs, lived experiences and outcomes of global majority children in care, creating a safe space to explore identity, trauma and cultural belonging. It also supports professionals to engage in collective reflection and drive organisational change. Participants describe the training as deeply reflective and impactful, with many highlighting the power of lived experience in shaping their learning.

“So powerful and an important reminder of why we have to think so carefully about a child’s racial and cultural history.”

Participant

Key Achievements:

- Nine RAAs and partnerships received the training, including 150 leaders and practitioners from agencies with the highest proportion of global majority children.

Black Adoption Project

Adoption England provides grant funding to support the [Black Adoption Project](#) — a collaboration across Adopt London ‘creating better futures for Black adopted children in London’.

The project is rooted in co-production with people who have lived experience, driving improvements in systems and practice. Funding supports a range of initiatives designed to address structural barriers and improve outcomes for Black children including:

- ‘Exploring My Black Identity’ — a Black history programme for adopted young people.
- ‘Let’s Talk About Adoption’ — improving the retention of Black prospective adopters.
- A tailored enquiry process for Black prospective adopters.
- Social spaces for Black adopted young people.
- Reflective development for recruitment and assessment social workers.
- Social spaces for Black adoptive parents.

Evaluation and dissemination of learning is embedded across all aspects of the programme to ensure the wider adoption sector can benefit from the learning.

South West Permanence Project

Adoption England has continued to fund the South West Permanence Project (SWPP), a pioneering initiative aimed at improving permanence for children with disabilities across the South West of England. These children, particularly for those with complex health needs, are among the least likely to be matched promptly, due to uncertainty, inconsistent practice, and limited understanding among prospective adopters.

Delivered collaboratively by Adoption West, Adopt South West and Aspire Adoption, the project spans 13 local authorities, introducing new approaches to improve outcomes including:

- Early and holistic assessment, including detailed ecomaps of each child’s support network.
- Improved collaboration between the child’s Social Care team and adoption services.
- Specialist adopter preparation, focused on disability understanding and long term support.
- Honest, comprehensive child Link Maker profiles, ensuring families understand each child’s strengths and needs.

Key Achievements:

- Increased consistency across the region: RAAs are applying shared approaches to assessment, family finding, and practice standards, reducing variation and improving fairness.
- Stronger professional collaboration: Practitioners report clearer roles, improved communication and strengthening decision-making.

- Enhanced support for prospective adopters: early assessments are now in place and are available across the three RAAs involved in the project. They will also be available to others commissioned to work alongside the Child Wellbeing Clinic.
- Informing national practice: Early findings suggest the SWPP model could support more inclusive, evidence-informed adoption practice nationally.

Next Steps:

- Continue delivery whilst trialling an Enhanced Family Finding approach to improve timeliness.
- Continue the project until the end of September 2026 when an evaluation report will be published to inform next steps.



Disruptions Research

Adoption England commissioned the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes) and the University of East Anglia to undertake two pieces of research in 2025/26.

The first explored disruptions occurring prior to the Adoption Order and sheds light on the transition from foster care to an adoptive home. While around 3,000 children are adopted in England, approximately 2.5% of these disrupt before the Adoption Order, affecting around 479 children and families since 2019. Although relatively low, the emotional impact on all involved can be significant.

The research highlights the complexity of these transitions, identifying key challenges such as communication breakdowns between adopters, foster carers and professionals. The findings aim to improve practice and reduce disruption by strengthening communication, support and collaboration.

Change of Plan Research

This research examined when and why some children's care plans move away from adoption. Each year, hundreds of children with an initial plan for adoption move to other forms of permanence such as long-term foster care or kinship arrangements.

While national data identifies broad reasons, this research provides deeper insight into the day-to-day decision-making behind them. It highlights the complexity of such decisions, influenced by factors including the availability of adoptive families, court processes, timeframes, and children's views.

Importantly, the findings emphasise that changes of plan should not be seen as failures, but as part of a responsive system seeking the best possible outcomes for each child. In many cases, children remained with stable, long-term foster carers that met their needs.

Next Steps:

Adoption England is hosting webinars in June 2026 to share learning and implications from both studies, and these will be made available on the Adoption England website.

Matching Practice Development Group

The Matching Practice Development Group (MPDG) continues to grow as a valued national network for Family Finding Managers. Meeting regularly, the group offers strong opportunities for collaboration, shared learning and professional development.

Key Achievements:

- Membership has grown from initially 33 to 65, reflecting increased engagement across the sector.
- Members benefit from greater peer support, sharing knowledge, expertise and effective practice. This creates more consistent approaches to family finding and matching nationally.

AFDiT Champions Programme

(Anti-racist Framework for Decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into Transracial adoptive families).

The AFDiT Champions Programme, led by Dr Tam Cane (University of Sussex) and Adoption England, has continued to grow as a valued network promoting anti-racist and culturally responsive practice in adoption services across England.

Since its launch in January 2025, AFDiT Champions have worked in their agencies to embed the AFDiT Framework into everyday practice. Their leadership has strengthened culturally informed and reflective approaches to transracial adoption decision-making.

The group meets monthly, with strong engagement and consistent attendance of 35–40 participants. These sessions provide a space for shared learning, reflection, peer support, and discussion of practice developments and challenges.

In January 2026, the champions group came together for an in-person event, featuring powerful contributions from people with lived experience. Feedback highlighted the impact of these perspectives and the importance of continuing to centre lived experience within adoption practice.

Key Achievements:

- The network has grown from 45 participants in 2024/25 to 77 champions nationally across RAAs, VAAs and LAs, demonstrating strong sector engagement.
- Champions report increased confidence and progress within agencies in relation to transracial and transcultural adoption decision-making and practice, with the framework increasingly informing decision-making, adoption assessments and Child Permanence Reports.

Next Steps:

- Develop a family finding practice network for adoption social workers.
- Launch of Meet before Match guidance.
- Launch of the AFDiT Practitioners Network (APN) in June 2026.



National Adoption Activity Days and Pan-Regional Family Finding Events

Adoption England has continued to support National Adoption Activity Days, delivered in partnership with Coram, alongside pan-regional family finding events across England. These events remain a valuable part of family finding activity, offering creative and meaningful opportunities for children and prospective adopters to connect.

Agencies have continued to adapt and develop their events to maximise opportunities for linking and matching, with positive outcomes reported nationally. Over the past year, more than 20 links made through these events have led to successful matches for children.

Early Permanence

Early Permanence (EP) remains a priority area of work to provide stability for adoptive children and young people at the earliest point possible and reduce the number of moves a child experiences.

Adoption England has commissioned the HOPE Boxes Project to strengthen the voice of the baby in HOPE Boxes, through work with those with lived experience of adoption and EP. They will develop a co-produced HOPE Boxes pathway for EP and traditional adoption routes, and develop training resources to support the use of the HOPE Boxes in EP and adoption.

"I think having the items in the HOPE Boxes would have helped me with difficult conversations with X as she grew up."

Adopter

"I have nothing from my earliest days and moments in this world. it makes me wonder...."

Adoptee

"It would really have helped us all keep focussed on Z and his journey, that we are all part of that whatever the outcome."

EP carer

In early Spring 2025 Adoption England launched the EP self-assessment tool for agencies to measure how well they are delivering against the EP National Practice Standards. All agencies reported that the National Practice Standards were beneficial.

"Nationally agreed practice standards are helpful in outlining expectations to the LAs. It's helpful in shaping future practice and understanding where gaps are in the service."

Next steps:

- In 2026/27 Adoption England will work with PAC-UK (Family Action) and birth parents with lived experience of EP to develop a series of accessible leaflets outlining key information about the EP process, addressing a gap identified by the lived experience Task and Finish Group.
- Adoption England will work with the Ministry of Justice and Local Family Justice Boards (LFJB) to produce dashboards for all 44 LFJBs, sharing key adoption and EP data and ensuring adoption agency leaders are represented locally.
- In 2026/27 we aim to launch online training modules to support carers during the fostering phase of the EP arrangement.



Outcome 5:

Adopted people and their families get tailored help and support when they need it

National Adoption Dataset

Adoption England is leading the development of a national adoption support dataset to improve consistency and transparency in how RAAs collect data on support provided to adopted children and their families. This work will help map adoption support activity nationally, enabling better planning and faster access to services.

Working in close partnership with Coram, a data collection process and template have been developed, alongside guidance to support implementation. This has been shared with data analysts across the sector. Data will be submitted annually, with the first data collection taking place between April and July 2026.

Key Achievements:

- The data collection process was successfully piloted in late 2025 with strong involvement.
- A Community of Practice for data analysts working in adoption has been established to support shared learning and implementation.

Next Steps:

- Complete first full-year data return, led by Coram.
- Support agencies to identify and address gaps, ensuring consistent data collection and analysis.

Adoption Support Practice and Development

Adoption England's Adoption Support Practice and Development work has continued to strengthen early support, ensuring families have the tools, confidence and support needed to thrive.

Adoption Support The Becoming a Family Framework

The Becoming a Family framework aims to ensure that by the time an Adoption Order is granted, families are well established, supported by their networks and services and confident in meeting their child's identity and support needs. The framework is preventative, builds therapeutic parenting foundations, strengthens peer and community support, and promotes consistency across England.

The pilot continued across several RAAs and VAAs throughout 2025/26, with ongoing learning supported by an independent evaluation from the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes University).

Key Achievements:

- Feedback indicates the framework supports reflective, family focused practice and increases confidence in therapeutic parenting.

Next Steps:

- Complete evaluation analysis and implementation learning.
- Clarify expectations and support required for wider rollout.
- Strengthen alignment with education and multi-agency pathways to ensure joined up support.



Adoption Support Plan

A revised [Adoption Support Plan](#), developed with CoramBaaf, was introduced to strengthen early support planning, anticipate future needs, and provide a shared framework for families, practitioners and partner agencies.

During 2025/26, Adoption England promoted and reviewed its use including usability, duplication, child specificity and review processes.

Key Achievements:

- Increased consistency in early support conversations.
- Identified the need to embed the plan as a 'living' document throughout the adoption journey.

Next Steps:

- Refine guidance to improve child specific planning.
- Support regional implementation through practice development.
- Align Adoption Support Plans more clearly with the review process as children's needs change and evolve.

Education and Adoption

Adoption England has strengthened the partnership with Virtual Schools and wider education partners to improve understanding, consistency and support for children across early years, primary and secondary education. This builds on earlier survey work exploring provision, relationships and gaps. A key focus has been the development of a coherent adoption aware programme, with an emphasis on transitions, emotional wellbeing and stability.

In October 2025, Adoption England held a workshop facilitated by the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes University). This brought partners together to clarify assumptions, agree shared outcomes and shape routes for improvement. The workshop, attended by Children's Minister, Josh MacAlister MP, also helped to secure funding for work on transitions in education in 2026/27.

Key Achievements:

- Established a clearer shared understanding of systemic challenges in education for adopted children.
- Strengthened cross-sector relationships and agreed priorities, including improving decision-making and support at key transition points.

Next Steps:

Deliver and align this work through the transitions programme.

Collaborative Pathways

During 2025/26, Adoption England focused on strengthening the interface between adoption support and children's social care, working with RAAs and system partners to improve how families experience support across the wider system.

In October 2025, this was supported by a workshop focused on local authority support for adoption, facilitated by the Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brookes University). The session brought stakeholders together to agree shared outcomes, test assumptions and identify priorities for improvement across the system.

Building on this, Adoption England worked with partners to define and test key elements of a collaborative pathways approach. This included mapping family journeys, clarifying roles and thresholds across services, and identifying where earlier, relational intervention could reduce escalation and duplication.

The overall aim is to ensure families experience coordinated, timely and relational support, rather than fragmented or episodic services.

Key Achievements:

- Strengthened shared understanding of how adoption support interfaces children's social care and the wider system.
- Established clearer language around pathways, highlighting the importance of earlier multi-agency collaboration to reduce escalation and prevent families being passed between services.

Next Steps:

- Consolidate collaborative pathway principles into a clear national model.
- Support regions to embed the model within local pathways and practice.
- Strengthen links between collaborative pathways, education and health.



Developing Multidisciplinary Approaches

During 2025/26, Adoption England worked with several RAAs to develop and embed multidisciplinary team (MDT) services for adopted children and their families. These models bring together expertise across health, social care, education and youth work, providing timelier, coordinated support through a single point of access. Early feedback shows improved family experiences and greater professional confidence in decision-making.

Adopt South

Adopt South's MDT is now a core part of preventative support, offering a trauma-informed, psychologically led service across the adoption journey. With over 100 referrals this year, it has delivered consultations, assessments and targeted interventions, responding quickly with no waiting list. This has reduced stress, prevented escalation and supported placement stability. The MDT has also contributed to wider system learning through resources, training and innovative partnerships, including work with universities and the development of shared education planning across local authorities.

Adoption East Midlands

Adoption East Midlands has strengthened its MDT approach through the Attachment and Education Model, focusing on whole-school, relationship-based practice. In 2025/26, the model evolved to embed trauma-informed approaches across school cultures, with strong engagement from young people through group-based support.

The programme now runs over 12 months to support sustained change and aligns with Ofsted and SEND priorities. Early evidence shows positive feedback and progress in supporting children's engagement in education.

Adopt Thames Valley

Adopt Thames Valley's Anchor MDT delivers a comprehensive, needs-led therapeutic service, reducing fragmentation and waiting times. Through a single access point, families receive coordinated multidisciplinary support, with early intervention helping to prevent escalation and maintain stability. Alongside direct work, Anchor builds system capacity through training, consultation and partnership working. Outcome data shows improvements in wellbeing, relationships and stability, with strong family feedback and clear value for money. The model is now well placed to inform national MDT development.

Next Steps:

- Adopt South and Adopt Thames Valley will test core MDT models through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) pilot in 2026/27.
- Adoption East Midlands will further refine its whole-school and youth-focused MDT approach.
- New MDT models will be established in Adoption West, Adopt London and the North West through grant funding from Adoption England in 2026/27.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund Pilots

During 2025/26, the Department for Education (DfE) and Adoption England launched pilot programmes to test new delivery models for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF). A portion of funding was devolved to pan-regions and in-house teams to improve access to high-quality support, strengthen understanding of effective services and enabling earlier, preventative intervention.

Although both pilots launched in July 2025 following funding delays, reducing the initial timeframe from twelve to nine months, they have since been extended into 2026/27. The Institute for Public Care (Oxford Brookes University) was commissioned to evaluate the programme.

1 Pilot 1: Pan-Regional Core Offer

Funding was devolved to pan-regions to develop and deliver a core offer of early support for adoptive families and special guardians (including Adopt East and Yorkshire and Humber regions).

The pilot aims to:

- Test whether pan-regional commissioning improves outcomes and value for money.
- Embed ASGSF within core adoption support practice, rather than as a separate funding route.
- Enable more preventative, tiered support and reduce reliance on reactive interventions.
- Improve timeliness of support and reduce escalation.

2 Pilot 2: In-House MDT Delivery

Funding was allocated to existing in-house multidisciplinary teams (including Adoption Partnership South East, Adopt North East and Coram Ambitious for Adoption) to deliver a core therapeutic offer.

The pilot aims to:

- Test whether in-house MDTs improve access, outcomes and value for money.
- Strengthen partnerships, particularly with health services.
- Build evidence of effective interventions and test funding approaches.

Key Achievements:

- Enabled greater flexibility and innovation in meeting family needs.
- Improved integration of adoption support, including smoother delivery of group programmes.
- Faster access to support, with fewer delays linked to individual applications.
- Stronger relationships with families through more coordinated and responsive services.
- Increased focus on early and preventative support, including MDT involvement from matching and transition.

Next Steps:

- Continue and evaluate pilots through 2026/27 following Government agreement in February 2026.

National Commissioning Programme

In 2025/26, the commissioning programme has focused on strengthening national and pan-regional approaches to understanding need and delivering adoption support. Family Connects represents the first example of a nationally commissioned service delivered through Adoption England.

A key element of this work has been the use of pan-regional innovation funding to test how RAAs can work more effectively to build a clearer picture of need, commission services and develop consistent, high-quality support.

RAAs have developed or refreshed strategic commissioning needs assessments for adoption support, with most pan-regions now having a dedicated Regional Commissioning lead. These leads support local delivery while meeting monthly to share learning and contribute to national priorities.

The [Principles of Commissioning Adoption Support guidance](#) has been published, as has guidance on procurement routes and contracting arrangements. New guidance on pan-regional strategic needs assessments is due shortly. The Institute of Public Care also designed and delivered a bespoke training pilot on commissioning principles for RAAs. Feedback has been very positive, and Adoption England is now rolling out phase two including a Level 4 distance learning course launched in March 2026.

Next Steps:

- Develop quality standards for adoption support providers.
- Establish minimum provider standards, including due diligence and consistent monitoring.
- Introduce clear reporting and review processes for commissioned services.
- Create consistent tools and templates for service monitoring.
- Implement a regular review cycle to assess effectiveness and impact.
- Develop a consistent cost framework to inform needs assessments.

Pan-Regional Innovation

The Pan-Regional Innovation Grant supports transformational change by enabling RAAs to test new approaches to commissioning and delivering adoption support at scale. It provides flexibility for regions to respond to local need while building shared learning across the system.

In 2025/26, all 10 pan-regions used the funding to explore priority areas aligned to commissioning development, including:

- Strengthening understanding of services for children and young people, including voice and influence.
- Developing a consistent pan-regional core offer of adoption support, including group and peer support.

Key Achievements:

- **South East:** Embedded a high-engagement Catch-Up Calls service, providing proactive early support with potential for wider rollout.
- **North East:** Delivered a pan-regional digital offer for Life Story Work and indirect contact, improving engagement, quality and efficiency.
- **London:** Invested in therapeutic training and practice development, progressing a London-wide model informed by DDP and evidence-based approaches.
- **West Midlands:** Tested short activity break models, demonstrating positive impact on wellbeing, reduced isolation and strong demand for expansion.

Next Steps:

- Continue innovation funding for 2026–28, building on progress towards a more consistent national adoption support model.
- Launch a new “early support” innovation fund for VAAs to support more collaborative and preventative approaches.



Community Development Fund

In April 2025, Adoption England funded 11 community-led, grass roots adoption support organisations across the country. The fund is designed to help those with lived experience to grow community and peer groups that provide vital support to adopted adults, adoptive families, young people and birth families.

Key Achievements

End of grant project reports demonstrated the positive impact of this fund including:

- Increased engagement from underrepresented LGBTQ+ adopters.
- Improved children’s social confidence, identity affirmation and emotional wellbeing.
- Sense of validation, identity and belonging.
- Improved adoptive parents’ confidence and resilience for supporting their children during their teenage years.

“It is such a relief to feel that we aren’t alone in our experience of adoptive parenting and to be able to have the understanding and conversations that you just can’t have with many other people.”

Adoptive parent

“Such a valuable opportunity — nowhere else could we feel as safe, accepted and understood... the consequence of this was relaxed, regulated and very happy children who had an absolute blast being their fantastic true selves.”

Adoptive parent

Next Steps:

A new round of funding has been allocated to 23 initiatives for 2026/27.

Budget and Project Highlights

The work detailed in this report is funded and supported by the Department for Education. Please see a breakdown of annual funds below.

Annual Budget from DfE Funding (2025/26)

National Team	£500,000
Early Permanence	£250,000
Adoption Recruitment	£1,000,000
Matching	£1,500,000
Adoption Support:	
National Commissioning	£2,550,000
Multidisciplinary Approaches	£2,979,070
Total	£8,779,070

Project highlights for this year:

- National innovation projects
- Multidisciplinary projects
- Maintaining relationships
- Activity days and pan-regional play days
- National and pan-regional commissioning projects
- Amplifying the voices of experts by lived experience
- Research and evaluation activity
- Recruitment activity

Forward Planning from DfE Funding (2026/27)

Adoption Support Practice	£103,122
Multidisciplinary Approaches	£ 1,818,918.34
Commissioning	£3,337,867.45
Early Permanence	£150,073.51
Maintaining Relationships	£350,272
Matching	£909,865.29
National Team	£589,727.64
Recruitment	£1,535,762.27
Voice & Influence	£149,391.50
Transitions Programme	£325,000
Voluntary Adoption Agencies Early Support	£300,000
Total	£9,573,000



