



Adoption England

regional adoption agencies working together

Annual report
2024/25





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Foreword

As I reflect on the past year, I am pleased to present this Annual Report, which highlights the extensive work undertaken, celebrates key achievements, addresses ongoing challenges, and outlines the progress made across our strategic priorities.

The adoption landscape continues to evolve, with systemic pressures adding complexity to an already challenging environment. In this context, I welcome the government's renewed commitment to strengthening adoption services and its recognition of the vital role adoption plays in providing permanence for children who are unable to remain with their birth or extended families.

A central focus for us this year has been expanding and deepening our work on voice and influence across England. We are committed to ensuring that the perspectives of adopters, birth parents, and adopted people shape the direction of our strategy and services.



One of the most inspiring events of the year was our Youth Voice event, which brought together around 150 young people and professionals to discuss Youth Voice in adoption. The young people shared their experiences, presented their projects, and offered powerful insights into the issues that matter most to them.

Their priorities were clear: the need for more peer-led support groups, improved understanding and support within schools, and greater opportunities to influence the policies and practices that affect their lives. These messages are a call to action. We all share a responsibility to listen to experts by experience, respond to their views, and design services that truly meet their needs. Ensuring that young people are active partners in shaping today's services must remain a key priority for us all as we move forward.

Sarah Johal MBE

National Adoption Strategic Lead
Adoption England

Adoption England Programme Overview

Key Achievements

Maintaining relationships and Culture Change



230+

champions have been recruited across England, as a result of the relaunch of the Culture Change Champions project in January 2025.

This exceeded the number recruited in 2023/24 and reflects growing cross-sector support. Champions include professionals from regional and voluntary adoption agencies, local authorities, Cafcass, and the charity sector, providing a strong foundation for continued systemic change.

The Culture Change Champions project has since received national recognition, winning the Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Achievement at the University of East Anglia's annual Innovation and Impact Awards in May 2025.

“Maintaining Birth Family Contact for Adopted Children has transformed UK adoption services, ensuring children can maintain meaningful connections with birth families where appropriate. With over 5,000 adoption professionals trained, this project has created vital resources, influenced national policy, and helped embed compassionate, child-centred approaches into adoption services.”

2025 UEA Innovation and Impact Awards

Adopter Journey

In autumn 2024, Adoption England, in consultation with a range of partners, developed and launched the Adopter Journey National Practice Standards. This significant development will help provide consistency for the adopter experience, ensuring fairness and quality throughout the process. A series of virtual workshops were delivered to support adoption agencies in implementing the standards.



500+

professionals in total attended these, and are still available to view on the Adoption England website: <https://adoptionengland.co.uk/training-and-webinars>

Matching Learning Programme

Following the launch of the National Matching Practice Standards in May 2024, the Matching Learning Programme was introduced. Ten sessions addressed key aspects of family finding and matching. Each session integrated professional experience, research, and lived experience insights.



250

people attended each session, on average (range of 150 - 430).

Feedback has been positive, particularly around children's life story and preparation for adoption.

Plans are underway to formally develop this life story work for national roll-out to social work practitioners.

Anti-Racist Framework for Decision-Making (AFDiT)

In collaboration with the University of Sussex and The British Academy, and developed with experts by experience, Adoption England launched the AFDiT Framework – an Anti-Racist Framework for Decision-Making and Transitioning Children from Minoritised Racial and Ethnic Groups into Transracial Adoptive Families. The framework has been embedded in the new Child Permanence Report (CPR) template provided by CoramBAAF.

This ongoing programme provides training and peer support to embed anti-racist, culturally responsive practice

in adoption services. It aims to foster continuous professional development and collaboration across agencies, supporting better outcomes for children and families.



45

people are currently actively participating in the programme, and all Regional Adoption Agencies have nominated at least one AFDiT Champion.

Birth Family Mapping Service

In May 2024, Family Rights Group launched a new tool to map the support services available to birth families affected by adoption in England. Adoption England funded the tool to help birth families have better access to much needed support and information. Any birth relative of children who have been adopted, are in the process of being adopted, or adoption is a potential possibility for, can use the service.



6,033

people have used the map to date, and feedback has been positive. Adoption England has commissioned Family Rights Group to undertake a deep dive into the data collected from the map, which will be used to shape future projects and identify where support is most needed.

Early Permanence

The number of children placed through Early Permanence (EP) arrangements has increased for the third consecutive year. There has been notable growth in the number of EP placements for older children, which supports our vision that all children – regardless of age – should have access to the benefits of EP.



34%

of all EP arrangements were for children aged two and above at the time of their Adoption Order (as of December 2024/25). As of December 2024, the percentage of EP arrangements for children aged two and above has more than doubled since 2021, from 7% to 15%.

Adoption Support – Becoming a Family Framework

The Becoming a Family Framework is designed to ensure that, by the time an Adoption Order is granted, the adoptive family has become an established and resilient unit, with the right support in place from family, community and relevant agencies. The framework is a structured support model that aims to ensure that families are equipped to support their child's identity, feel confident in seeking future support, and have developed knowledge and resilience to guide them throughout their adoption journey.

A pilot of the framework commenced in January 2025 and is being delivered across seven agencies (RAAs and VAAs).



50

families to date have received support through it. Practitioners have responded positively, noting improvements in both family engagement and professional practice.

FamilyConnect Service

FamilyConnect was launched by national charity Family Action in 2020 and is delivered by its adoption support agency, PAC-UK. The resource was developed to help adopted adults find out about their history, their family members, and to gain understanding about why they were separated from their birth family.

In April 2024, Adoption England commissioned PAC-UK to deliver an 18-month pilot to provide a funded intermediary service for adult adoptees and birth families who were affected by adoption pre-1976, who wish to reconnect with each other. The FamilyConnect service has also been expanded to offer a specialist telephone advice line and additional online resources for birth families and professionals. They now have a dedicated webpage: <https://family-action.org.uk/services/pac-uk-familyconnect-and-intermediary-service>



990

FamilyConnect Advice Line enquiries received to date, covering over 130 different local authorities across England and beyond, as well as 734 requests from people for the intermediary services.

Outcome 1



Outcome 1

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

Adopter Journey

Adoption England's Adopter Journey project continues to drive improvements in experience of prospective adopters, ensuring they are well prepared to meet the needs of children requiring adoption.

In Autumn 2024, Adoption England launched the Adopter Journey National Practice Standards, providing a national framework to encourage consistent practice and relational engagement across adoption agencies. This significant development aims to standardise the adopter experience, ensuring fairness and quality throughout the process.

Following the launch, a series of virtual workshops were delivered to support adoption agencies in implementing the standards. These sessions included contributions from people with lived experience, including adopters and birth parents, enriching the training with authentic insight and real-life perspectives. Each workshop included access to supporting resources and was recorded for future reference, all of which are available at adoptionengland.co.uk.

Key achievements:

- In total, the webinars were attended by over 500 practitioners supporting adopters across all stages of the adopter journey.
- In one session, 83% of participants reported feeling very or somewhat confident in holding difficult conversations with prospective adopters.

- For the remaining 18% who felt less confident, practical tips and resources were shared to support their development in this area.

“Thank you again for such a useful, refreshing session... as a social worker and adoptive parent, I wanted to share that I found it both illuminating and hopeful.”

Social worker and adoptive parent

Mystery Shopping

Two rounds of a comprehensive mystery shopping exercise were conducted across 47 regional and voluntary adoption agencies between late 2024 and early 2025.

This has provided valuable insights into the use of a 'front door script' — assessing how well agencies respond to initial enquiries and address the concerns of prospective adopters – as well as feedback on agency websites and social media materials.

The findings indicated that 90% of agencies provided a polite and friendly initial response, with over 80% demonstrating a consistently professional and empathetic approach throughout their initial engagement. Tailored reports were provided to each agency outlining their strengths and recommended areas for development. This initiative is a significant step in supporting agencies to strengthen their first impressions and ensure a welcoming, inclusive approach from the outset.

"I found X very helpful, friendly and approachable during the call, she is very knowledgeable about all aspects of adoption and was happy to share this with me..... X is a great advocate for adoption, she very obviously loves her job, and she left me feeling very at ease about the process and wanting to use their agency to go through the adoption process."

Mystery shopper

Next steps

The Adopter Journey Working Group has identified several priorities for the coming year, which will further build on the work achieved to date:

- Embedding the findings of the mystery shopping exercise to improve the consistency of experiences at the initial point of contact.
- Undertaking a comprehensive analysis of adopter withdrawals across all stages of the process to better understand underlying causes.
- Developing a suite of resources that support every stage of the adopter journey.
- Producing a self-assessment toolkit for agencies to evaluate their implementation of the Adopter Journey National Practice Standards.

Recruitment marketing

Our 'You Can Adopt' campaign saw some of our most successful results to date in the 2024/25 financial year, in terms of engagement and cost-effectiveness.

Using the theme 'The Journey', we highlighted adoption journeys of all kinds, with the message that the lifelong adoption journey may not always be smooth, but the rewards of giving a child a permanent family are worth it. For the first time, we used the same concept for both a summer campaign and National Adoption Week in October, to sustain our recruitment messages throughout the year.

In addition, we ran 'always on' social media activity to maintain momentum, increasing this in the New Year period.

For National Adoption Week, we adapted our messages to highlight that there is no such thing as a "normal" family and that all family journeys are unique including adoptive families. Again, we showcased a range of different adoption journeys including the people there along the way such as birth families, social workers, foster carers, family and friends.

Key achievements:

Both campaigns saw a huge increase in engagement, compared to the previous year:

- In total, in 2024 we achieved 38,000 You Can Adopt website visitors compared to 26,000 in 2023, and 16,500 outbound agency clicks compared to 5,500 in 2023.
- Our increased activity in the 2025 New Year period resulted in our best results on record, with 23,000 You Can Adopt website visitors and over 11,000 outbound agency clicks in just over two months.
- Early in 2025 we launched our new TikTok channel which has far exceeded expectations. Within the first month of launching, posts gained over 882,000 views with strong engagement, and we gained 5,761 followers in the first three months (to put this into context, it took 10 months to achieve a similar number for Instagram).


Next steps

Despite the success of You Can Adopt, the number of people coming forward to adopt continues to fall. This has been the case since the Covid pandemic, and we know that the impact of the ongoing rise in cost of living and other societal factors are contributing to this.

In 2024 we began collating agency marketing performance data to identify where we need to focus our efforts, and to better measure marketing performance year on year. This new data has given us sharper focus for our 2025/26 strategy. However, to really tackle the issue of hesitancy to adopt, we have commissioned qualitative research to better understand current perceptions and attitudes to adoption, barriers and concerns, and what could encourage people to overcome these. This will help to capitalise on the increased interest in adoption and convert this to more people taking their first step to enquire.



Outcome 2



Outcome 2

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

Adoption England continues to prioritise work that enables adopted people to maintain safe and meaningful connections with those who are significant in their lives. As children grow and mature into adulthood, early support for relational connections allows them greater choice, understanding and emotional security. Supporting these relationships throughout the adoption journey can help prevent unsafe or unsupported connections being made later in life, and contributes to identity formation and an adoptee’s sense of wholeness as an individual who belongs to more than one family.

Culture Change

During 2024/25, the Culture Change project has continued to drive systemic improvement across England. The programme delivered a sustained schedule of webinars and Communities of Practice (CoPs). These sessions placed lived experience at the centre of delivery and discussion, ensuring that adopted people, birth families and adopters were heard and their insights acted upon.

New resources were developed by editing webinar content into short, digestible training videos. A total of 14 films were produced and made available on the Adoption England website to support agency-level training and practice development. Each film includes the voices of adopted young people and adults, birth families and adopters. Feedback from the sector has been overwhelmingly positive, with many professionals describing the videos as extremely useful tools to support local change.

The webinars and training videos are available the Adoption England website: <https://adoptionengland.co.uk/maintaining-relationships-adoption-resources>

“The resources on Adoption England’s website to support agencies in culture change are great –we use them in our preparation training and other training events.”

Practitioner

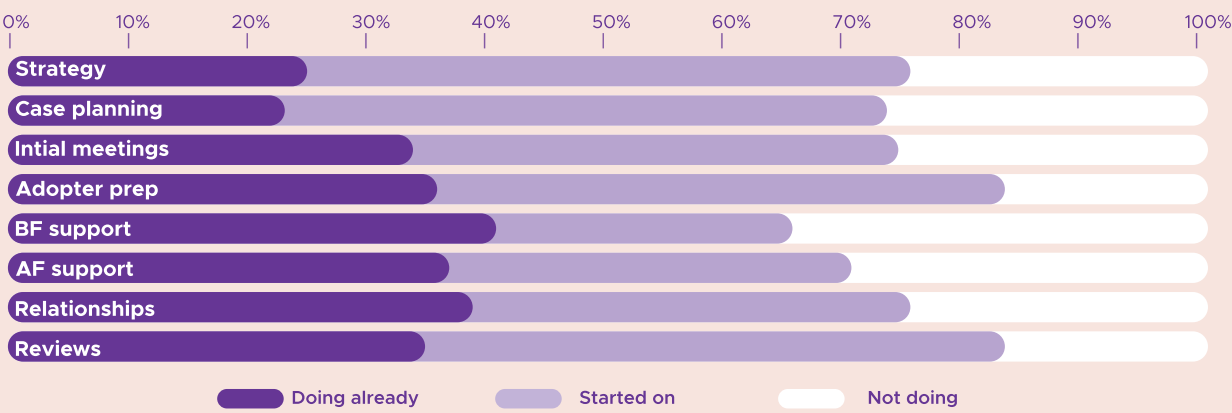
“I really enjoyed being part of the Communities of Practice. It is important to share my experience and support change.”

Birth parent

In addition, targeted training was delivered by Professor Beth Neil and Julie Young from the University of East Anglia (UEA) to Principal Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, and Cafcass Guardians. These sessions have been positively received.

Data was collected from champions to assess the practical impact of the programme. The findings highlighted clear improvements across eight practice areas: strategy, case planning, initial meetings, adopter preparation training, birth family support, adoptive family support, relationships, and reviews of staying in touch arrangements.

The volume and breadth of activity taking place across the country is captured in this dashboard.



The Culture Change Champions project was relaunched in January 2025, recruiting champions from regional and voluntary adoption agencies, local authorities, Cafcass, and the charity sector, providing a strong foundation for continued systemic change.

Key achievements:

- Strong engagement in webinars from across the sector – several sessions were attended by more than 500 delegates.
- Over 230 Culture Change Champions recruited across England – this exceeded the number recruited in 2023/24 and reflects growing cross-sector support.
- The project has since received national recognition, winning the Chancellor’s Award for Outstanding Achievement at the University of East Anglia’s (UEA) annual Innovation and Impact Awards.

Next steps:

- Continuing webinars and Communities of Practice.
- Promoting the resources already produced.
- Offering in-person, pan-regional training to RAAs and partners to support system-wide change.
- Addressing challenges related to limited resources and knowledge gaps in local authorities, particularly where social work turnover is high and adoption forms a small part of wider roles.

Maintaining Relationships – Training Films

Adoption England partnered with the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) to develop two new training films during 2024/25. Young people and adoptive parents were recruited to take part in these resources, which are designed to bring the voice of lived experience into the training and development of adoption professionals.

The first film features adopted young people speaking directly to adults about the importance of staying in touch with their birth families and what professionals need to consider. The second film showcases adoptive parents describing different ways they stay in touch with various members of their children’s birth families.

These films have been welcomed by the sector, who described them as much-needed additions to the existing training offer. The films will be premiered on 14 May 2025 and made available as training resources on Adoption England’s website: <https://adoptionengland.co.uk/maintaining-relationship-films>

“I enjoyed being part of the training film and I hope it supports with change in the sector.”

Adopter

Lifelong Links – Birth Family Mapping Service

The Lifelong Links (LLL) pilot, delivered in partnership with the Family Rights Group, has progressed positively during 2024/25. Ten families have been successfully recruited into the pilot, and the model is now actively supporting adopted young people to reconnect with birth relatives and other significant people from whom they lost contact after adoption.

Early outcomes are promising. In one case, an adoptive family that had been approaching breakdown reported significant improvements in stability and wellbeing following engagement with the LLL model. The young person involved is now making safe and meaningful connections with their birth family. The outcomes of the pilot will be shared in late 2025 by Dr Tam Cane of the University of Sussex.

In May 2024, Family Rights Group launched a new tool to map the support services available to birth families affected by adoption in England. Adoption England funded the tool to help birth families have better access to much needed support and information. Any birth relative of children who have been adopted, are in the process of being adopted, or adoption is a potential possibility for, can use the service. Feedback has been positive, with 6,033 unique visitors using the map to date. Adoption England has commissioned Family Rights Group to undertake a deep dive into the data collected from the map, which will be used to shape future projects and identify where support is most needed.

Next steps:

- Gathering further evidence on the strengths and challenges of using the LLL model.
- Exploring ways to scale the model beyond the current 10-family pilot.
- Analysing the geographical distribution of map usage to determine where additional support for birth families is required.
- Addressing the challenge that the map relies on survey responses from agencies to ensure accuracy and coverage.

Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA)

Work has continued throughout 2024/25 to update the 2005 Practice Guidance on Access to Records and Intermediary Services. The IASA team has engaged extensively with sector professionals and individuals with lived experience to ensure the updated guidance is relevant, practical, and inclusive. The new guidance is due to launch in May 2025.

In addition, a legal briefing outlining the legislative changes required to improve support for adopted adults was submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in July 2024. The DfE has indicated that while some of the proposed changes may take time to progress, there may be scope for shorter-term amendments.

FamilyConnect

FamilyConnect was launched by Family Action in 2020 and is delivered by its adoption support agency, PAC-UK. The resource was developed to help adopted adults find out about their history, their family members, and to gain understanding about why they were separated from their birth family.

In April 2024, Adoption England commissioned PAC-UK to deliver an 18-month pilot to provide a funded intermediary service for adult adoptees and birth families who were affected by adoption pre-1976, who wish to reconnect with each other. The FamilyConnect service has also been expanded to offer a specialist telephone advice line and additional online resources for birth families and professionals.

As of April 2025, 990 FamilyConnect Advice Line enquiries had been received, covering over 130 different local authorities across England and beyond, as well as 734 expressions of interest from people for the intermediary services.

For more information, including current advice line opening times, visit www.familyconnect.org.uk

“I just wanted to say how much I have appreciated your work over the last few months in tracking down my half sibling. The result was much more than I ever could have wished for and during the process you have both been very supportive and kept me up to date with developments.”

“The advisor I spoke to was extremely caring and knowledgeable and really took the time to listen to me and answer all my questions. I felt in very safe hands.”

PAC-UK FamilyConnect users

Next steps:

- Working with PAC-UK to deliver in-person, pan-regional training events using a train-the-trainer model for the practice guide, following its launch

- Embedding the revised guidance within the adoption workforce.
- Continuing to promote the FamilyConnects website reviewing the need as the pilot comes to an end.
- Overcoming the legal complexities and continuing to highlight the ongoing needs of adopted adults and their birth relatives to help them to access appropriate support.


Staying in Touch: Contact After Adoption website

Adoption England commissioned Research in Practice and the University of East Anglia to develop this new website. It launched in January 2025 and provides a range of materials and resources for use in the training and supervision of social workers and contact supervisors, as well as in the preparation training of adopters.

At the heart of these resources is the voice of adopted young people and birth families. It has some excellent practical resources to help think about assessing, planning and preparing for contact. Visit www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children



Outcome 3



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

Reference groups

Adoption England meet quarterly with the Department for Education Adopter Reference Group and continue to share the progress of the programme of work, seeking views and engagement on a range of topics.

The reference group gave specific feedback to assist a piece of work mapping adopter engagement across the RAAs. The goal was to identify effective practices and provide recommendations on how successful methods could be implemented to influence the agencies and the wider system. Adoption UK have since been commissioned to deliver this work in two phases: phone or video interviews, and adopter focus groups.

The report is currently being finalised and the learning from this will be shared with the sector in the summer term, with the aim to increase the voice and influence of adoptive parents in the development and delivery of services, locally and nationally.

The Adopted Persons Reference Group and Birth Parents Reference Group continue to meet four times a year. These meetings provide the opportunity for group members to hear about work that Adoption England is undertaking, offer feedback and suggestions, and discuss their key priorities for change. Several group members are involved in work and projects to improve adoption.

“Being part of the (birth parent) reference group gives us a voice and a place where we are heard and not judged. It gives us hope that change is happening and brings me joy about the amazing work we are each doing.”

Birth Parents Reference Group member

National Adoption Week

During National Adoption Week in October 2024, Adoption England commissioned PAC-UK and Adoption UK to deliver several online workshops, highlighting issues important to those affected by adoption and to help build connectivity within adoption communities.

PAC-UK delivered five events on a range of issues important to adoptees and birth families, including adoption and adolescence, and birth family perspectives on maintaining sibling relationships. In total, over 500 people joined the events in person, and over 1,300 online. In addition, 9,800 people have since viewed a film which was a focal point for one event: Adopted in school – understanding the needs of adopted people.

This film and all the online events are available to view on PAC-UK’s You Tube channel: www.youtube.com/user/PACAdoptionSupport

Adoption Journey Network

Adoption England has been supporting this network since May 2024. The network aims to support professionals working with birth families, providing a sense of community and additional support to those workers whilst promoting the sharing of resources and good practice. Guest speakers also attend, sharing their research and knowledge to encourage learning and development. The network continues to grow, with now over 40 members.

Support for birth families

In February 2025, Adoption England’s Voice and Influence practitioner, Denise Smalley, began working with a small group of RAA practitioners wanting to develop their support for birth families. Meetings will take place monthly for six months before a new cohort is developed to ensure the opportunity is available to all RAAs. For more information, contact Denise.Smalley@adoptionengland.gov.uk

Voice and Influence – Young people

National Youth Forum

Adoption England established the national Youth Forum in September 2024. Members meet regularly and take part in a range of voice and influence activities. We will be commissioning a new organisation to support and further develop the forum, and its members will be involved in this process.

Youth Voice Event

In October 2024, Adoption England held a Youth Voice event in Leeds. The event brought together around 150 professionals from the adoption and wider sector to hear directly from adopted young people. The young people presented on recent projects and activities, to share good practice and to inspire and motivate others to develop their own youth voice opportunities.

Young adoptees spoke about the issues which impact them the most. Issues they prioritised included building more peer groups, improving understanding and support within schools, and more opportunities for young people to influence sector policies and procedures.

Feedback from professionals who attended the event referenced the power of hearing the voices of young adoptees, the need to involve young people in strategic decision making, and enthusiasm for developing more opportunities for this.

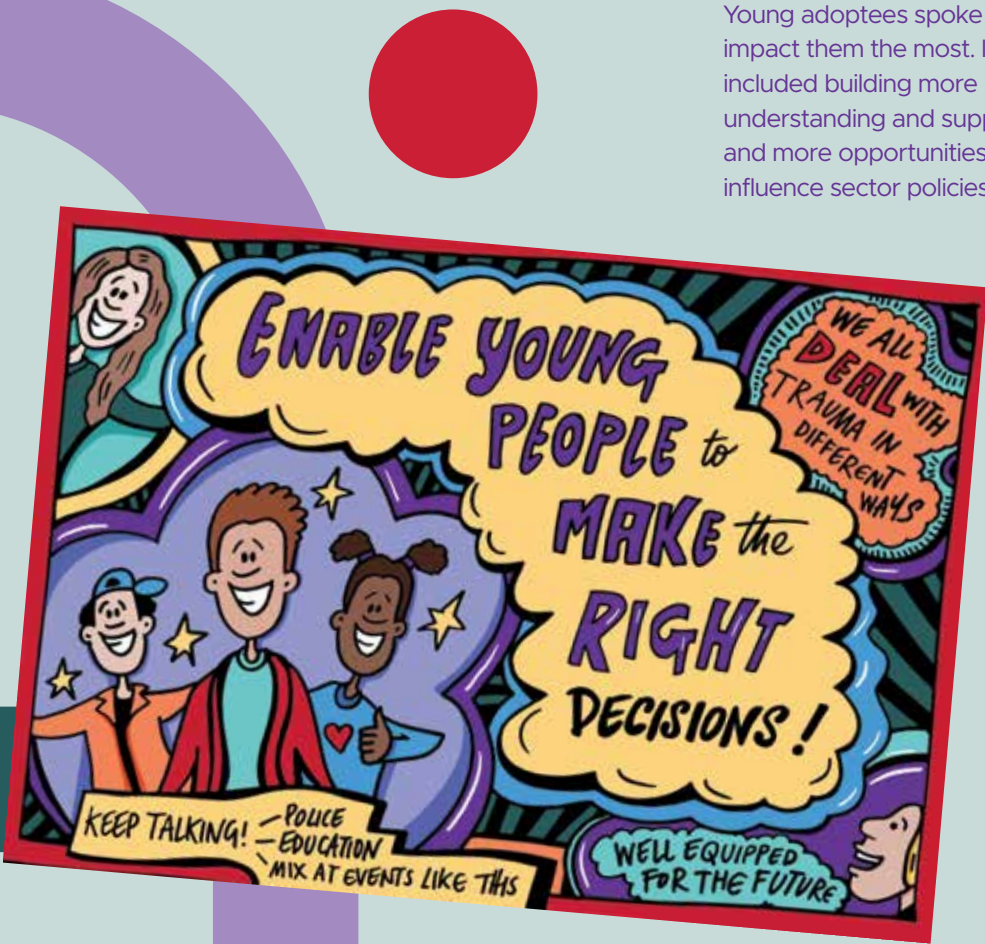


Illustration capturing young people’s voices. Credit: Beci Ward.

Voice and Influence Practice Network

The Voice and Influence Practice Network is now well established. The network provides opportunities for RAA members to give updates on their voice and influence activities with young people and share good practice.

While there are some great examples of young people's voice and influence work happening, many RAAs have faced challenges, predominantly around time and resource. Most of the work is still developing therefore while a range of activities have been put in place, they have not yet progressed to influencing service design, planning and delivery.

Next steps

- Continuing to develop the practice network to support agencies develop this work.
- Giving RAAs the opportunity to develop this work through grant funding.
- Commissioning an organisation to support and further develop the Youth Forum.

Outcome 4



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

Activity and Fun Days

Adoption England has continued to fund national adoption activity days and pan-regional fun days throughout 2024/25. These events remain a vital family finding tool, particularly for children with complex needs and sibling groups. Feedback collected from prospective adopters, foster carers and social workers has been overwhelmingly positive.

Key achievements:

- 82% of prospective adopters rated the events as excellent.
- 336 children attended, including 86 sibling groups.
- 203 adoptive households participated.
- 145 expressions of interest were generated.

An independent evaluation of these events can be found on Adoption England's website: www.adoptionengland.co.uk/research

Agency Decision Maker Training

Adoption England continued to commission CoramBAAF to deliver Agency Decision Maker (ADM) training for local authorities. Recognising that many ADMs describe their role as isolating and lacking sufficient

support, the training is designed to equip them with the confidence and knowledge required for this pivotal function in ensuring children's permanence.

This year's training included sessions specifically targeted at ADMs for adopter applications, including those from Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Resources have also been developed for ADMs as part of an induction pack. These can be found on Adoption England's website: www.adoptionengland.co.uk/agency-decision-maker-resources

Key achievements:

- Six sessions delivered to 93 ADMs (61 children's ADMs and 32 adopter ADMs).
- 89% found the content very useful or useful.
- 97% stated that the training met or strongly met learning objectives.

"Fantastic mix of legal and real-life information and examples."

Children's ADM

"Informative, insightful, and great to have reflective discussions with others."

Adopter ADM

Just Home Programme

Adoption England continued to commission The Staff College to deliver the Just Home programme to Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). The programme focuses on the needs, lived experiences and outcomes of global majority children in care, offering a safe and supportive space to explore identity, trauma and cultural belonging.

To date, five RAAs have participated in the programme, with 96 professionals attending training sessions.

“The importance of always learning, having uncomfortable conversations and keeping the child’s identity and culture at the forefront.”

“The real-life experiences shared, brought to life the challenges people experience.”

Participants

Black and Asian Leadership Initiative (BALI)

Adoption England commissioned further training for 20 global majority professionals from adoption agencies, to help them on their personal leadership journey. This is due to conclude in May 2025.

“I’ve really enjoyed the course, and feel cared for and inspired by both the facilitators and my fellow delegates.”

Participant

* Global majority includes those people who identify as Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab, mixed heritage, are indigenous to the Global South, and or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’.

Matching Projects

Funded in 2022/23, 10 matching projects have continued into 2024/25, focusing on improving matching practices for priority children. These initiatives are monitored regularly, and an independent evaluation will conclude in Summer 2025.

Key achievements:

- Over 80 expressions of interest generated.
- 114 children matched through project activity.
- Publication of Placing Children with Disabilities research report. This can be viewed on Adoption England’s website: adoptionengland.co.uk/matching/placing-children-disabilities-adoptive-families
- Enhancements to child profiles on Linkmaker to centre the child’s personality over health needs, receiving positive feedback from practitioners.
- 20% increase in local matches in one pan-regional area.
- Delivery of bespoke family finding events.
- 67 clinical psychologist consultations delivered to RAA and local authority staff and foster carers, with positive feedback on the value of this support in building confidence around transitions and understanding children’s needs.

“We think we have actually found a match and have been in further meetings regarding siblings.”

“We were able to find out more about two little girls and are now in discussions.”

Family finding event participants

“Highly innovative practice ensures that children, who may be harder to place, are successfully matched and placed with adopters... including the use of early permanence.”

Ofsted, September 2024

Black Adoption Project

Adoption England provided grant funding to support the Black Adoption Project (BAP), a collaboration between Adopt London and Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy. The initiative explores long-term structural barriers and opportunities in the adoption of Black children.

Funding is supporting work in these areas:

- Understanding the family finding journey of Black children and Black adopters.
- Improving retention of Black adopters during assessment.
- Developing tailored enquiry and follow-up pathways.
- Exploring socio-economic barriers to adoption.
- Creating peer support, social, and educational groups for Black adopted children and young people.

Understanding the ‘Story Behind the Data’

To complement the quarterly RAA snapshot data, Adoption England introduced a qualitative layer – ‘the story behind the data’ – in 2024. This initiative provides context around children with prolonged family finding activity, deepening the sector’s understanding of delays in adoption.

The focus is on children subject to Placement Orders for 12–18 months and those over 18 months or more, particularly those without active family finding or links. RAAs have engaged positively, sharing insights with the National Family Finding Lead each quarter.

This approach has proven valuable in reassuring stakeholders that every child has a clear narrative and is being actively considered. Moreover, it has helped identify emerging systemic themes behind delays, enabling informed and strategic responses.



Matching Practice Development Group

The Matching Practice Development Group (MPDG), chaired by National Family Finding Lead Ruby Shah, is a bi-monthly forum for sharing knowledge among family finding managers and practitioners. The group now has 55 members and continues to grow.

The group has begun drafting national good practice guidance on the theme of 'meet before match', with the aim of supporting more effective and timely matches.

National Matching Practice Standards and learning programme

In May 2024, Adoption England launched the National Matching Practice Standards at a virtual event attended by over 500 people. The standards aim to reduce variation in matching practices across agencies. Many RAAs have since used the framework to develop aligned internal guidance, driving greater consistency across the country.

Following the launch of the standards, the Matching Learning Programme was introduced. 10 monthly sessions, held from June 2024 to April 2025, addressed key aspects of family finding and matching. Each session integrated professional experience, research, and insights from people with lived experience.

Key achievements:

- Average attendance of 250 per session, ranging from 150 – 430.
- Positive feedback, particularly around a session on children's life stories and preparation for adoption, with plans underway to formally develop this life story work for national roll-out to social work practitioners.

AFDiT

In May 2024, Adoption England, in collaboration with the University of Sussex, The British Academy, and experts with lived experience, launched AFDiT – Anti-Racist Framework for Decision-Making and Transitioning Children from Minoritised Racial and Ethnic Groups into Transracial Adoptive Families.

Following this, a comprehensive suite of Transracial Adoption Resources were developed by Dr Tam Cane, founder of AFDiT. These tools help guide culturally-sensitive and identity-aware practice.

The resources are available on Adoption England's website: adoptionengland.co.uk/afdit-transracial-adoption-framework

In January 2025, the AFDiT Champions Programme was launched. The programme provides training and peer support to embed anti-racist, culturally-responsive practice in adoption services. It aims to foster continuous professional development and collaboration across agencies, supporting better outcomes for children and families.

Key achievements:

- AFDiT Champions Programme launch attended by 52 adoption professionals.
- All RAAs have nominated at least one AFDiT Champion, with 45 people currently actively participating.
- The framework has been embedded in the new Child Permanence Report (CPR) template provided by CoramBAAF.

Early Permanence

Early Permanence (EP) continues to offer a critical opportunity to reduce delay and uncertainty for children. According to Adoption and Special Guardianship data, as of October 2024, the average time from entry into care to adoption was 20 months. For children placed through an EP arrangement, this was nine months quicker than for those in standard adoption arrangements.

As well as reducing the time children spend in care and the number of moves they experience, EP can foster early and meaningful relationships. It also enables positive engagement between birth parents and EP carers, many of whom go on to become the child's adoptive parents.

During 2024/25, Adoption England expanded its collection of EP resources. This included a new animation, inspired by children's experiences of early permanence, created through a collaboration between Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agencies in the North East.

All EP resources are available on Adoption England's website: www.adoptionengland.co.uk/early-permanence-adoption-resources

Adoption England has worked closely with the Birth Parents Reference Group and third sector colleagues to ensure



the voices of birth parents remain central to the EP vision and delivery. This year, a birth father co-delivered a webinar focused on supporting fathers, exemplifying our commitment to lived experience shaping practice.

The benefits of EP were also presented to the Chairs of Local Family Justice Boards. This collaboration with the judiciary and wider stakeholders will continue into 2025/26, strengthening alignment between court processes and EP planning.

The EP project in the North West was showcased at the Manchester Local Family Justice Board Conference, where it received praise from the President of the Family Division for its focus on EP for older children.

A series of successful EP workshops were held across the country, bringing together children's social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, legal representatives, Guardians and adoption social workers.

"Great conference, varied speakers, and I enjoyed the involvement of adopters."

"I feel more confident in talking to prospective adopters in Stage 2 about EP and the benefits."

"I'm going to be asking for EP placements in the first instance during initial care planning."

Conference attendees

Key achievements:

- The number of children placed through EP and the proportion of EP adoptions have increased from 14% in 2020/21 to 24% in 2024/25 Q2. (Adoption and Special Guardianship Data)
- Notable growth in the number of EP placements for older children. As of December 2024, the percentage of EP arrangements for children aged two and above has more than doubled since 2021, from 7% to 15%.

- One RAA recorded the same number of EP placements in the first six months of 2024/25 as in the entire previous year.

The increase in EP placements is testament to the growing confidence of practitioners and carers, supported by strategic messaging and collaborative working across the sector.

Grant-funded EP projects ended in March 2025. An independent evaluation is currently being undertaken by the Institute of Public Care and the University of East Anglia. The findings will provide insight into the conditions and approaches that have led to growth in EP arrangements across various projects, and how this success can be shared and sustained nationally.

Next steps:

- Continuing working with the judiciary at national and local levels to promote EP and improve consistency of practice across England.
- Ensuring the voices of those with lived experience – birth parents, adoptees, and EP carers – remain central to EP policy and practice development.
- Reviewing how the EP national standards are being embedded and use a 'Champions' approach to build workforce confidence.
- Identifying baseline training needs for EP carers during the fostering phase.
- Sharing learning from across the grant-funded EP projects, highlighting effective and innovative practice.

Outcome 5



Outcome 5

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

Adoption Support Practice and Development

Adoption England's Adoption Support Practice and Development work continues to focus on strengthening the early support offer for adoptive families. This includes the development and testing of new tools, frameworks, and targeted learning programmes that help embed sustainable, consistent, and evidence-informed support across England. From the earliest days of family formation through to post-adoption life, this work aims to ensure families are equipped with the tools, confidence and professional support they need to thrive.

Becoming a Family Framework

The Becoming a Family Framework is designed to ensure that, by the time an Adoption Order is granted, the adoptive family has become an established and resilient unit, with the right support in place from family, community and relevant agencies. The framework aims to ensure that families are equipped to support their child's identity, feel confident in seeking future support, and have developed knowledge and resilience to guide them throughout their adoption journey.

The core principles of the framework are to:

- Be preventative and support the foundational building blocks of parenting in adoption.
- Enable adoptive parents to begin developing confidence as therapeutic parents.
- Build resilience through strong social networks and peer support.
- Respond to individual needs with access to a wide range of multi-agency services.
- Offer consistency in support across England, particularly for families adopting a child from another region.

A pilot of the framework began in January 2025 and is being delivered across seven agencies, both Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). The pilot will run until April 2026. An evaluation is being conducted by the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University to assess the framework's feasibility, effectiveness, and overall impact ahead of wider implementation.

Key achievements:

- To date, over 50 families have received support through the framework.
- Practitioners have responded positively, noting improvements in both family engagement and professional practice.

Next steps:

- Continuing to explore the barriers and challenges associated with integrating the pilot into wider family services.
- Identifying ways to further develop the framework to ensure it can be smoothly incorporated into the overall adoption journey.

Adoption Support Plan

In January 2025, a new Adoption Support Plan was formally published by CoramBaaf (licence holders for the document). This followed a culmination of work to review and update the existing Adoption Support Plan, to enhance it and align it with the Early Support offer for families and the Becoming a Family Framework. The work was led by Adoption England in collaboration with practitioners and stakeholders from across the adoption sector.

The revised plan was piloted across four RAAs over several months and is now fully implemented, with detailed guidance documents to support practitioners, Independent Reviewing Officers, and adoptive families. CoramBAAF also delivered a series of professional development webinars to support its implementation.

Adoption England will continue to promote the use of the new plan and integrate its use across relevant workstreams.

Video Feedback Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting – Family Placement (VIPP-FP)

As part of the early help offer, Adoption England commissioned The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust to deliver a learning programme in Video Feedback Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting (VIPP-FP). This evidence based, short-term, and preventative intervention is aimed at caregivers of children under six years old.

Delivered in the adoptive family's home, VIPP-FP comprises seven sessions of approximately two hours each, spaced two

to four weeks apart. The intervention focuses on enhancing the caregiver-child relationship and promoting reflective parenting skills.

The learning programme will train 50 practitioners over the course of three years, with a number of those progressing to become VIPP supervisors. The first training cohort began in February 2025., with ten practitioners enrolled. These practitioners are currently undergoing observation and supervision as they begin working with their first four families in early placement.

Next steps:

- Developing an implementation plan to support agencies in embedding VIPP learning across regions.
- Training an additional 40 practitioners in VIPP-FP.
- Training the first cohort of learners to become VIPP supervisors, ensuring a sustainable delivery model.
- Integrating the programme within the Becoming a Family Framework.

Education – Virtual Schools

Adoption England has worked collaboratively with Virtual School Heads to explore how best to meet the educational needs of adopted children.

A comprehensive survey was distributed to all RAAs to gather data on educational offerings, relationships and service needs from the perspective of adoptive families. In parallel, Virtual Schools carried out their own survey to capture a broader view of practice.

A total of 23 responses were received, covering the support offered by 98 Virtual Schools nationwide. The survey has also captured recurring themes and identified gaps in the support families report when approaching their RAAs for educational advice.

Next steps:

- Cleansing and analysing the survey data.
- Reviewing findings with Virtual School Heads and defining the scope of a targeted project.

- Hosting a theory of change workshop in October 2025 with education stakeholders, based on the survey results.

National Adoption Support Dataset

Adoption England is leading the development of a national adoption support dataset, aimed at improving consistency and transparency in how data is collected and used across Regional Adoption Agencies.

Working in close partnership with local authority stakeholders and case management system providers, the team has developed a framework to support more robust data collection. A guidance document has been finalised to support implementation and will be shared with data analysts across the sector.

To date, 17 child-level data points have been agreed, and a formal data collection template has been designed by Coram-i. Data will be submitted annually, with the first test submission due in October 2025, followed by full annual collection each April.

Next steps:

- Continuing working with local authorities and system providers to prepare for the October test submission.
- Supporting agencies in identifying and addressing any remaining gaps to ensure readiness for the first annual data collection in April 2026.



Developing Multidisciplinary Approaches

During 2024/25, Adoption England collaborated with several regional adoption agencies to develop and embed multidisciplinary and multiagency services for adopted children, young people and their families. Children referred to multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) frequently present with significant emotional challenges, both at home and in school, often within the 'very high' range. Many parents reported longstanding difficulties in accessing appropriate support from health and education services.

These projects brought together the expertise of professionals from across sectors to identify the individual needs of children and enhance both the quality and timeliness of adoption support assessments and provision.

Adoption Partnership South East

This project expanded a previously established model from one local authority across the entire region, ensuring equitable access to services through a clearly defined access model. Collaboration between the adoption agency and other professionals, such as CAMHS and virtual schools, improved significantly. As a result, professionals now have a better understanding of the needs of adopted children and are using this knowledge to improve the quality and availability of services across the region.

Adopt South

Adopt South developed a new multidisciplinary service designed to provide families with the right support at the right time. The needs of children are now better understood, and the agency has introduced innovative and creative solutions to deliver streamlined specialist support to families.

Adoption East Midlands

The project established a dedicated multidisciplinary team and restructured adoption support services to provide more timely, informed and relevant support.

Families now have quicker and more direct access to the help they need, with parents reporting that they feel more listened to and better supported. The multidisciplinary team also provides wider support to professionals in the region.

The project also introduced a youth work model delivered in schools and youth clubs, providing early and targeted support to children and young people. This model promotes inclusion, strengthens peer relationships, and enhances the connection between families and educational staff. A 'whole school approach' was also developed to unite youth, health, and education services in addressing the holistic needs of young people within school settings.

One Adoption South Yorkshire

This project focused on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), a condition affecting many children in the region. Bespoke training was developed for key professionals including school staff, virtual schools, social workers, educational psychologists and adopters to improve their understanding of FASD. The project established three multiagency working groups, each focusing on different aspects: prevention and awareness, support, and assessment and diagnosis.

Adopt Thames Valley

Adopt Thames Valley successfully recruited a highly skilled multidisciplinary team and introduced a needs-led, responsive and preventative therapeutic service. Since April 2024, this team has supported over 100 families, delivering improved outcomes in areas such as health, education, development, family stability, and attachment. The model has increased the agency's capacity to provide direct support, reduced waiting lists, and delivered cost-effective outcomes.

In addition to direct services, the model now offers tailored training packages, specialist consultations and reflective space for staff, promoting psychologically and trauma-informed practices. Stronger partnerships have also been established between the adoption agency, health and education services.

North East

A regional multidisciplinary team was established to provide adoptive families in the North East with timely and holistic assessments. These assessments allow for support to be tailored to each child's specific needs. Parents have gained a better understanding of their children's needs and feel more confident in meeting them.

Evaluation

The Institute of Public Care (IPC) was commissioned to evaluate the implementation of these multidisciplinary approaches. The evaluation included both existing operational sites and newly developed projects.

Early findings from the evaluation indicate that embedding multidisciplinary teams is both feasible and beneficial. Parental feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Key achievements:

- The average rating for MDT support by parents was 8.6 out of 10.
- Parents described clear benefits, including increased use of therapeutic parenting, strategies, deeper understanding of their child's needs, and greater confidence when explaining these needs to schools or extended family.
- Positive changes were reported in areas such as child emotional wellbeing, sibling relationships, overall family functioning, and the quality of parent-child relationships.
- In 39% of cases, parents described the support as "transformational", noting that it stabilised their families and significantly reduced the risk of placement breakdown.
- Parents also valued feeling less isolated, highlighting the importance of peer and professional support and the ability to practise self-care more effectively.

Full details of the projects and the evaluation are available on Adoption England's website: www.adoptionengland.co.uk/professionals/multidisciplinary-approaches



National Adoption Commissioning Programme

The National Adoption Commissioning Programme is an initiative funded by the Department for Education (DfE), designed to explore national and pan-regional adoption agency commissioning arrangements. Its overarching aim is to improve value for money in commissioning adoption support services, while enhancing the speed, quality and consistency of support provided to adoptive families across England.

In the second year of the programme, Adoption England successfully completed eight pan-RAA commissioning needs assessments. These assessments contributed to the publication of the National Picture of Adoption Support Commissioning, which offers a comprehensive overview of the current commissioning landscape and emerging needs across regions.

The report is available on Adoption England’s website: www.adoptionengland.co.uk/professionals/commissioning

To promote the findings, a webinar was held in November 2024, attended by nearly 400 delegates. Participants included social workers and other adoption agency professionals, independent therapeutic support providers, and key stakeholders from both the education and health sectors.

Six pan-regional commissioning innovation projects were delivered during the year, each designed in response to identified needs and co-produced with adoptive families. These projects include:

- The procurement of peer support service where adopters can call up and be partnered up with a peer mentor to have a conversation with as a first-line response to adoption support queries.
- The development of a ‘Checking In and Staying Connected’ service, designed to provide ongoing support to adoptive parents.
- A sustainable social work practice model, focused on delivering therapeutic interventions to families in need.
- The design and testing of a new short break offer, aimed at supporting family wellbeing and resilience.

To support the development of consistent commissioning practice, Adoption England established a dedicated Commissioning Group on the Knowledge Hub platform. This space enables co-production of national commissioning resources, including a guidance document on commissioning principles. The guidance outlines processes for identifying, delivering and reviewing adoption support.

Key achievements:

- The programme has also successfully promoted and encouraged pan-regional working, which is increasingly being viewed as the preferred approach by many RAAs.
- As a result, pan-regions have reported improved inter-agency relationships, enhanced learning opportunities, and broader applicability of insights across various aspects of adoption practice.
- There is now a more comprehensive understanding of the support needs of adoptive families.
- RAAs are becoming more confident and strategic in their commissioning approaches, including through internal capacity building.

Next steps:

- Continuing to strengthen pan-regional working arrangements.
- Implementing recommendations arising from the pan-regional Strategic Commissioning Needs Assessments and the National Picture for Adoption Support Commissioning to inform future planning.
- Further improving regional commissioning practices.
- Rolling out resources and training to develop shared understanding, embed consistency, and drive best practice in the commissioning of adoption support services.

Budget and Forward Planning

The work detailed in this report is funded and supported by the Department for Education.

Please see a breakdown of annual funds below.

DfE Funding 2024/25

| DfE GRANT | AMOUNT AWARDED |
|--|----------------|
| National Team | £500,000 |
| Early Permanence | £1,000,000 |
| Adoption Recruitment | £500,000 |
| Matching | £2,000,000 |
| National Commissioning Centres of Excellence | £2,000,000 |
| | £3,000,000 |
| Total | £9,000,000 |

DfE Funding 2025/26

| DfE GRANT | AMOUNT AWARDED |
|----------------------|----------------|
| National Team | £500,000 |
| Early Permanence | £250,000 |
| Adoption Recruitment | £1,000,000 |
| Matching | £1,500,000 |
| Adoption support | £5,529,070 |
| Total | £8,779,070 |

Projects highlights for 2025/26:

- National innovation projects
- Multi-disciplinary projects
- Activity days and pan-regional play days
- National and pan-regional commissioning projects
- Amplifying the voices of experts by experience
- Research and evaluation activity
- Recruitment campaign activity



regional adoption agencies working together

