

Summary of Key Findings of Adopter Access Pilot

The “Adopter Access Pilot” of direct access to secured data on the National Adoption Register by approved adopters ran from July 2016 – March 2017.

This summary reports on the quantitative data, comparing performance in the pilot period against a ‘control’ benchmark of the same period the previous year for the 28 participating agencies. The expanded access by approved adopters and agency practitioners, and use levels were assessed by qualitative review over July-November, informing development of interface enhancements made in February 2017. Direct access to practitioners from all agencies was rolled out in October 2016.

An early report was made to the Department five months ahead of the period defined in order to enable timely decision making to the benefit of children most likely to wait for adoption. The evaluation was based on an estimated 855 users from the 28 agencies taking part in the pilot. It is not an evaluation of the contribution of the Register, which serves all agencies through a range of services in order to ensure national search for children who have not been matched by their agency or any other matching approach.

Outcomes for children

- **Links to families:** The total number of links to families increased in the pilot year by 19.5 per cent over the same period in the same agencies in the previous year. With 865 adopter links and 473 practitioner links made during July- March.
- **Engagement in the pilot:** This is a significant increase given that 53% of adopters pursued their adoption journey without activating their account (which is their prerogative).
- **‘Priority’ groups:** The change to adopter/practitioner access was beneficial for older children and children in sibling groups, in relation to time spent in the system
- **Data quality:** Since some social workers/managers did not engage in the pilot, it is possible that not all of the work by adoption agencies is reflected in the data.
- **Matching:** There were 8 matches via the adopter access pilot; 5 adopter led and 3 practitioner led.

Levels of use

Findings from an online survey of adopters and practitioners representing 23 of the 28 eligible agencies in the pilot achieved a 17% response rate and information to guide further interface and functionality development. It provided the following information on levels of use and benefit.

- **Nearly three-quarters (74%) of adopters reported using the Adopter Access Pilot at least fortnightly,** including 64 per cent who used it at least once a week.
- Roughly the **same proportion of social workers** use it at least fortnightly, although they are less apt to use it more than once a week.
- Well **over half of adopters responding to the survey had made one or more links** using the system and there were no data protection issues from adopter access.
- **Two in five family-finding social workers and one in five child-finding practitioners** reported having made one or more links using the system.
- **Two-thirds of adopters and four out of five social workers** eligible for access had accessed the system since 6th February 2017.

Qualitative learning

Interface and agency responsiveness

A two-stage process to interface development was undertaken with qualitative feedback leading to revisions during the pilot period.

- Approved adopters and social workers expressed **positive views on adopter access to children's profiles**; this was regarded advantageous over the traditional matching approach.
- Benefits of adopter access included **increased privacy** when considering child profiles, reduced pressure on social worker time, adopters giving consideration to a **wider range of children**, adopters making more **informed choices**, and **greater control** for adopters.
- There are indications that the new system has a **positive impact on the relationship between adopters and social workers**.
- Participants spoke of issues they experienced in making links and contacting people through the system and the need for **responsiveness from agencies** with an email notifying them of a potential match, key learning for agencies is that adopters are using the system

System development

This evaluation report identifies that – although improvements in functionality can be made to improve responsiveness - the system is clear and could be used without additional guidance at the end of the pilot evaluation period.

- The new system was described by most staff participants as **favourable to the old portal system of the statutory register with good level of support** in using it, with problems encountered being, wherever possible, swiftly resolved.
- There was recognition and **appreciation that the system is national** rather than a localised database.

The feedback from users indicated a growing engagement, with users seeing what the system *could* offer to them and what it could mean for the matching process.

Profiles of children

Despite legislation permitting more information being shared with adopters, a cautious approach was taken under DfE instruction so that the information adopters could see in the profiles was limited. Only one in three adopters felt that the profiles provided the information they need for deciding whether to make a link and addressing the profiles would therefore be likely to increase links still further especially given that 38% of adopters also believe that, by viewing the profiles of children on the system, approved adopters are more likely to consider a wider range of children.

Conclusion

The numbers of families available fell nationally over the year following the 'control' period making the increase in links more relevant and important for the chances of the children on the Register. As a result of the level of links made for children waiting and the appropriateness of its use, the Adopter Access Pilot was recommended for extension to all agencies.