

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2016/17 - Revised



Reader Information

Document purpose	This bulletin details statistical information relating to children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2017.
Reporting period	1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017
Authors / statisticians	Heidi Rodgers and Iain Waugh
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- *Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;*
- *to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and*
- *be an expert voice on social care information.*

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About Community Information Branch

The purpose of Community Information Branch (CIB) is to promote effective decision making in children and adult social services by providing quality information and analysis.

We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions.

Information is widely disseminated through a number of regular key statistical publications and ad hoc reports, details of which are available online.

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Key findings

This bulletin details statistical information relating to children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2017, including a range of information about these children and their adopters, and durations between different stages in the adoption process. The bulletin is based on the Department of Health's statistical return AD1 2016/17¹, collected from each of the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

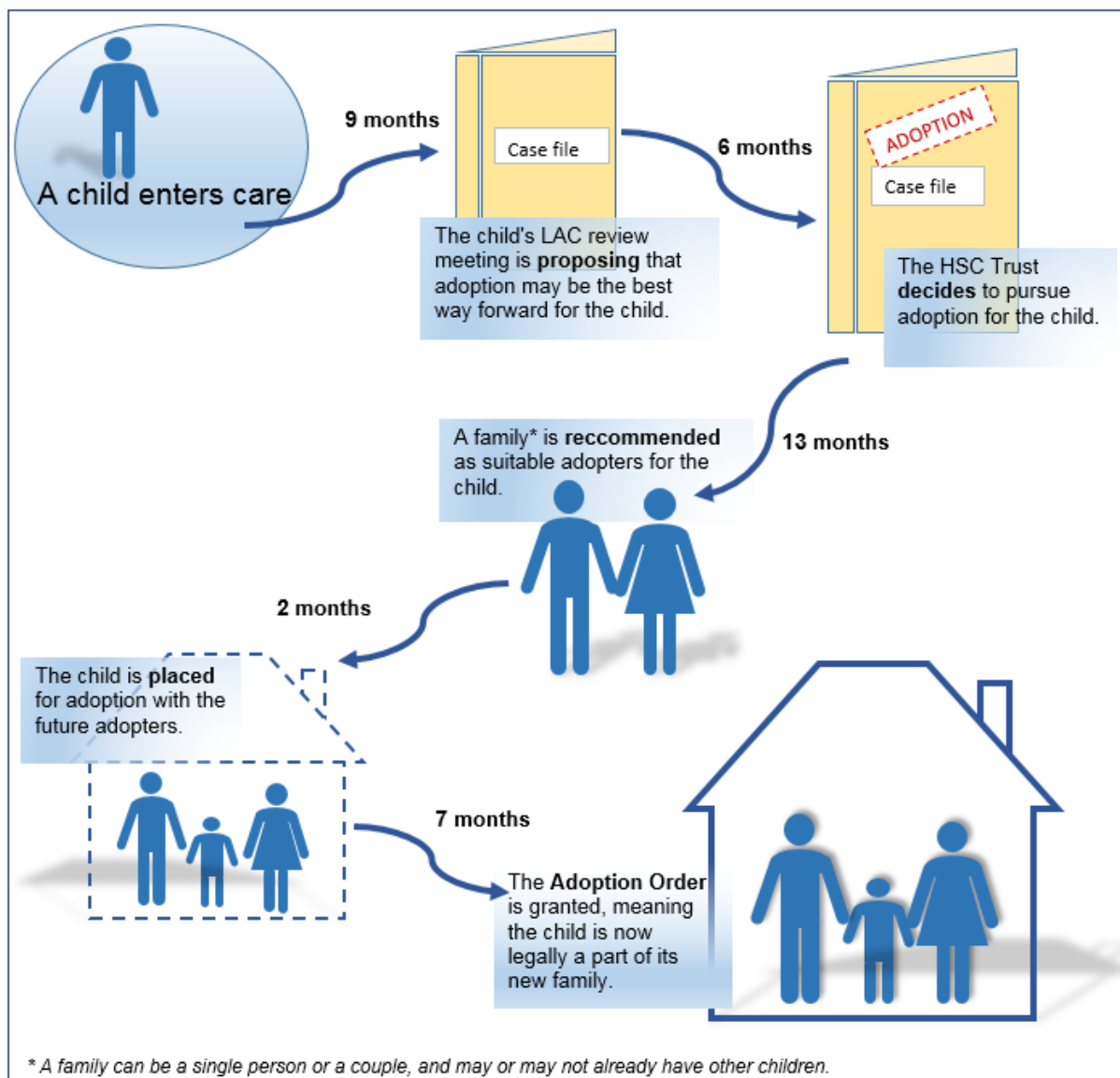
- One hundred and twenty children were adopted from care during the year ending 31 March 2017, the highest number in recent years;
- The average age of children at the time of adoption was 4 years 5 months, the same as the previous year;
- From the child's last entry into care, the average length of time for a child to be adopted in 2016/17 was 3 years. This was 1 month longer than in 2015/16;
- For children adopted in 2016/17, the average duration from the Trust LAC² Best Interest Proposal to Adoption Order was 2 years 4 months, one month longer than in 2015/16;
- Children adopted by Concurrent Carers³ were substantially younger at the time of adoption (2 years 8 months compared with the national average of 4 years and 5 months). They also had a shorter last duration in care (2 years 3 months compared with 3 years).

¹ Please see Appendix for details of the return.

² LAC – Looked After Child

³ A child is placed with Concurrent Carers while the future of the child is decided. Further description of Concurrent Carers and other type of carers/adopters can be found in Chapter 6.

Average duration of different stages of the adoption process 2016/17



Introduction

Adoption, unlike any other permanence option, involves the ending of a child's legal relationship with their birth parents and family and the creation of a lifelong relationship with new parents. The facilities to be provided as part of the adoption service, including arrangements for assessing children and prospective adopters, placing children for adoption, and the particular procedures to be followed before and after a child is placed for adoption are all specified in legislation – the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989.

This legal framework and the processes that Social Workers are expected to adhere to in carrying out their duties in relation to Adoption Services are further explained in the Adoption Regional Policy and Procedures⁴.

As part of review of the adoptive child's Care Plan, where it is decided that adoption is the preferred option for permanence, the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust must follow statutory processes. This includes providing information and counselling to the child and parents, gathering information (including ascertaining the wishes and feelings of the child and parents) and referring a report to the Adoption Panel and the Adoption Agency Decision-maker for consideration of a Best Interests Decision (whether the child should be placed for adoption). Usually the HSC Trust will work to find a suitable match for the child with prospective adopters whilst Freeing Order proceedings are commenced. Following formal placement for adoption of the child with the prospective adopters, the adopters can apply to the Court for an Adoption Order to be made.

In respect of applications by prospective adopters, the Adoption Agency must follow prescribed processes in relation to the applicant, from the Initial Enquiry/ Counselling Interview through to the Preliminary Checks, Preparation Course, Pre-Assessment Checks, the Assessment Process and finally, a consideration by the Adoption Agency's Adoption Panel as to the suitability of the applicant.

Work is currently underway to modernise adoption legislation through the introduction of a new Adoption and Children Bill. It is intended that the Bill will largely replace the 1987 Order, effecting most of the proposals outlined in the Department's draft adoption strategy, *Adopting the Future 2006*. The Bill will also amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which is the primary law relating to the care and protection of children. As most children are adopted from the care system, the amendments are designed to improve planning and permanence for children in care.

**Family and Children's Policy Directorate
Department of Health
November 2017**

⁴ *The Adoption Regional Policy and Procedures Dec 2010*

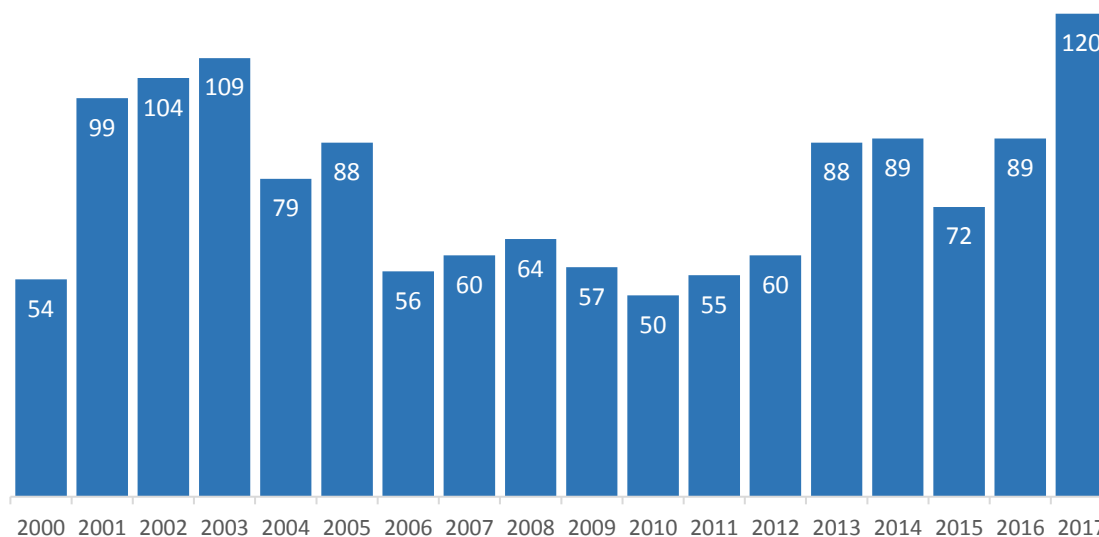
Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2016/17

1. Adoptions from care

During the year ending 31 March 2017, 120 children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland⁵. This was the highest number of adoptions from care in recent years (see Figure 1).

Prior to this, the highest numbers of adoptions occurred between 2001 and 2003. The high adoption figures those years are thought to be due to an emphasis by all Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts on encouraging prospective adopters to register as foster carers, resulting in a placement for children at the earliest juncture with foster carers who would then go on to adopt the child⁶. Between 2006 and 2012, the numbers of adoptions were steady, however somewhat lower (between fifty and just over sixty children a year). The increase from 2013 could be linked with renewed focus on the timeliness of the adoption process, for example with the establishment of Adoption Regional Information System to help identify suitable parents for children in a timely fashion and the introduction of concurrent carers which allows an earlier commencement of the adoption process.

Figure 1 Number of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March)

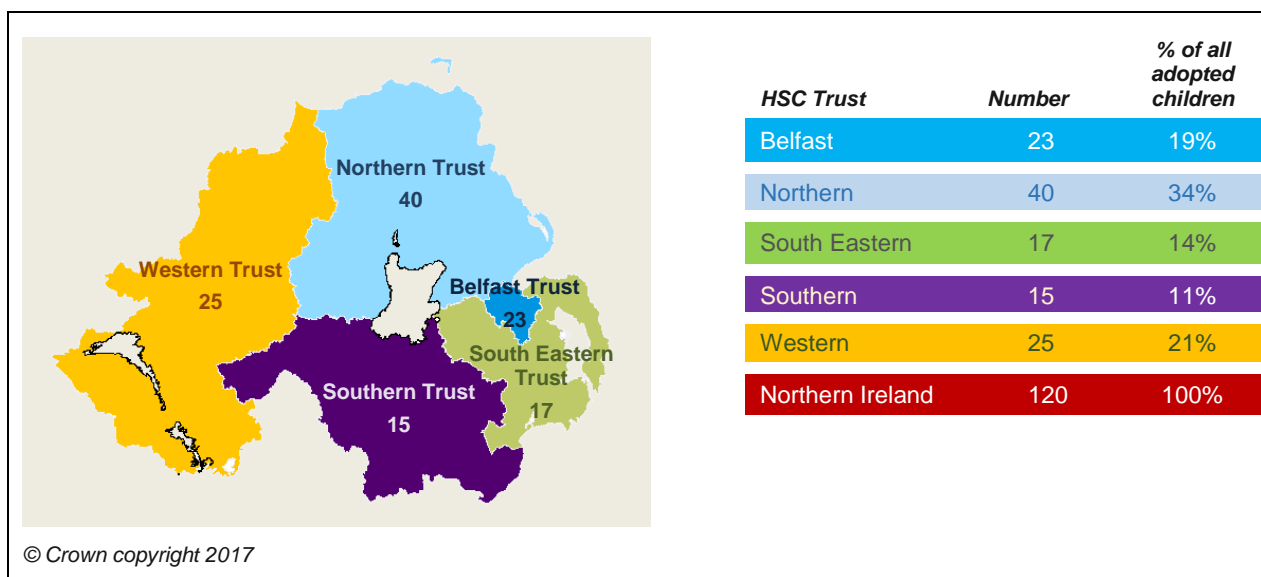


Source for years 2000 and 2001: *Adopting Best Care*, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002
Source from 2003: AD1 Surveys, DoH <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-adopted-care>
Note: Number of adoptions has been estimated for the years 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2011.

⁵ This figure may be different from other sources, e.g. NIGALA, due to categorisation.

⁶ *Adopting Best Care*, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002

Figure 2 Number of children adopted from care by HSC Trust year ending 31 March 2017 (percentage of all children adopted from care)



The Northern HSC Trust had the largest number of looked after children adopted from care in 2016/17 (40 children), followed by the Western and Belfast HSC Trusts where 25 and 23 looked after children were adopted respectively. In the South Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts, 17 and 15 looked after children were adopted. As the number of children adopted in each HSC Trust is quite small, care must be taken when making year on year comparisons⁷.

2. The adopters

Some 97% of adopters were married couple adopters. Of all the adopters, 13% had previously adopted a child or children⁸, and 14% had dependent birth children in the household. The age of the adopters ranged from early thirties to mid-sixties, with the majority of the adopters being in their forties at the time of the adoption (60%).

⁷ Please see Appendix for yearly figures.

⁸ Please note that this is based on the 120 adoptions taken place in 2016/17, hence adopters who have adopted more than one child in 2016/17 will have been counted more than once.

3. Children adopted from care

Table 1 sets out the main characteristics of looked after children adopted from care in Northern Ireland from 2012/13 to 2016/17. In 2016/17, the age of children adopted from care ranged from 10 months to 11 years. As in previous years, the majority of the children were between one and four years at the time of adoption.

Table 1 Looked after children adopted from care (year ending 31 March)

	Number					Percentages				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	N	N	N	N	N	%	%	%	%	%
All children adopted	88	89	72	89	120	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Female	39	42	38	43	53	44%	47%	53%	48%	44%
Male	49	47	34	46	67	56%	53%	47%	52%	56%
Age at adoption										
Under 1	<5	<5	52*	0	<5	-	-	72%*	0%	-
1-4	52	53		62	78	59%	60%		70%	65%
5-9	33	34	20	23	39	38%	38%	28%	26%	33%
10-15	<5	<5	0	4	<5	-	-	0%	4%	-
16+	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Average age (yrs:months)	4:10	4:4	4:1	4:5	4:5					
Minimum age (yrs:months)	1:0	1:0	0:11	1:3	0:10					
Maximum age (yrs:months)	15:8	11:9	9:1	11:9	11:0					

In order to avoid personal disclosure, some cells have been suppressed or merged when the actual figure is less than 4.

'-' represents a percentage that has been suppressed in order to prevent the actual figure from being calculated.

* The age categories 1-4 have been merged due to small numbers.

The majority of the children adopted from care were of white ethnic background (93%) with a further eight children of either Irish Traveller, 'other' or mixed ethnicity. Some twenty six children (22%) had special needs or a disability. This included physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities, autism and behavioural difficulties.

In 2016/17, 54% of the children were adopted as a single child adoption whereas 46% were adopted as part of a sibling group.

46%

*of the children
were adopted as
part of a sibling
group*

4. Timing of the adoption process⁹

The average length of time between the date the child's last period of care started to the Adoption Order was made was 3 years 0 months in 2016/17. The average length has stayed around three years since 2013/14. Almost a quarter of the children (23%) were adopted within two years of entering the final period of care. Eight children (7%) had been in care for five years or longer at the time of adoption.

Table 2 Duration of final period of care (year ending 31 March)

Duration of final period of care	Year					Year				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	N	N	N	N	N	%	%	%	%	%
Under 2 years	7	20	14	17	27	8	22	19	19	23
2 years to under 3 years	30	34	20	31	40	34	38	28	35	33
3 years to under 5 years	46	33	32	36	45	52	37	44	40	38
5 years and over	5	2	6	5	8	6	2	8	6	7
All	88	89	72	89	120	100	100	100	100	100
Average duration (yrs:months)	3:5	2:11	3:1	2:11	3:0					
Minimum duration (yrs:months)	1:0	0:5	0:9	0:7	0:10					
Maximum duration (yrs:months)	15:3	10:7	7:11	6:5	7:5					

For some children who enter care, adoption is the preferred means to secure permanency and stability and the agreed care plan would be identified at an early juncture. For other children, adoption may not be considered until the child has spent some time in care, for example after changes to the child's family situation which makes it unlikely that the child can return home to birth parents. This will in some cases explain the above variation in durations, where the shortest time from entering care to adoption was ten months and the longest time was 7 years 5 months.

There are a number of factors however that may cause delays to the duration of the adoption process. Although every child's situation is unique, with regards to the children adopted during 2016/17, it has been highlighted that some delays were influenced by extra consideration required of the child's physical health; delays within the court system, additional assessments of family members had to be carried out; appeals within the Courts delayed the adoption process; and for some children there were delays to allow siblings to be adopted together.

Table 3 sets out the duration between different stages of the adoption process. The average duration from last admission into care to Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal for children adopted in 2016/17 was 9 months, the same as in 2015/16. The Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal is the child's LAC review where it is agreed to pursue adoption as an option and refer the child's circumstances to the Adoption Panel for recommendation. In general it took 6 months from the

⁹ Please note that there has been a slight change to methodology which has caused minor revisions to some historic figures. Please see Technical Notes for details.

Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to when the Trust accepted the adoption panel's recommendation that adoption was in the best interest of the child (Best Interest Decision); this period ranged from 1 month to 2 years for the children adopted. Furthermore, the average duration from LAC Best Interest Proposal to the date the Trust accepted the Panel's recommendation that adopters were suitable for the particular child was 1 year 8 months.

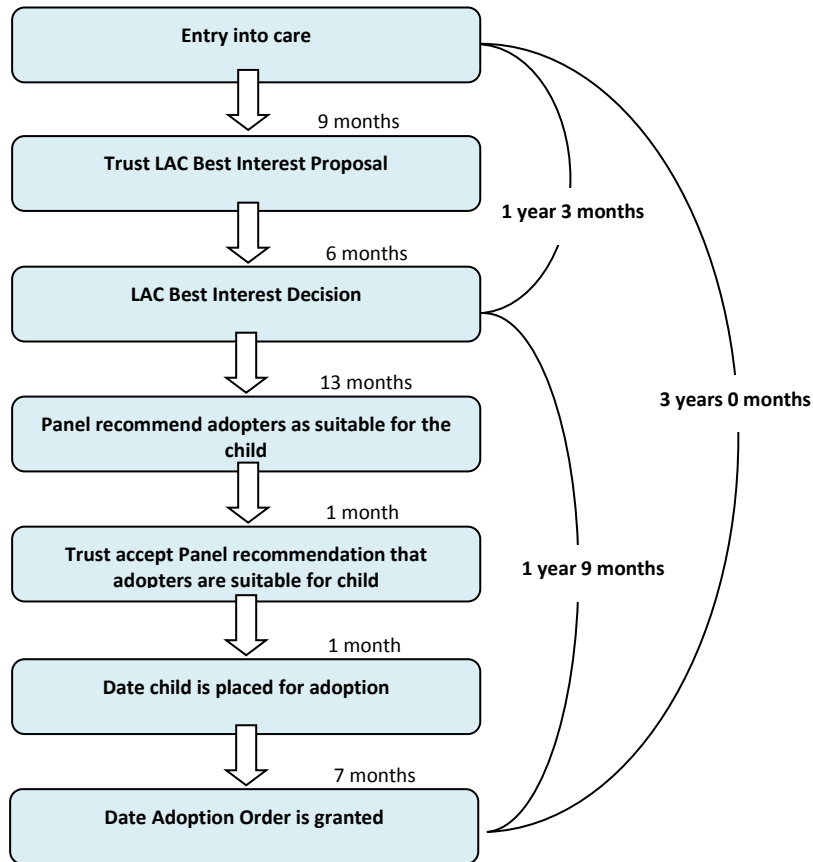
For children adopted in 2016/17, the average duration from the Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to adoption was 2 years 4 months, similar to that of recent years. In 2016/17, this ranged from 10 months to 4 years 7 months.

Table 3 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March)

Stages in the adoption process	Average Durations (Years : Months)				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Last admission to care to Trust LAC Review Best Interest Proposal	0:11	0:10	1:0	0:9	0:9
Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Best Interest Decision	0:7	0:6	0:6	0:7	0:6
Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Panel recommend adopters as suitable for child	1:9	1:6	1:5	1:5	1:7
Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Trust Accept Adopters Suitable	1:10	1:7	1:6	1:6	1:8
Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Placement	1:11	1:8	1:7	1:7	1:9
Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Adoption Order	2:7	2:3	2:4	2:3	2:4

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates. Figures have been revised and may differ slightly from previous publications

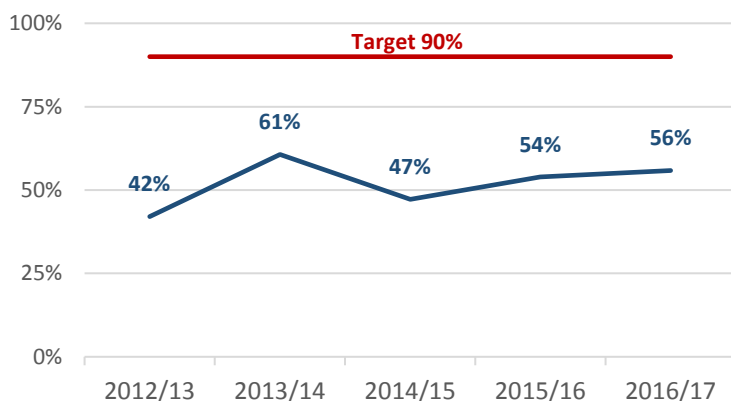
Figure 3 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process during the year ending 31 March 2017



Note: The time between different stages of the adoption process may not add to the total time as a small number of cases have been excluded from some of the interim calculations due to missing values or dates.

The Health and Social Care Commission Plan and Indicators of Performance Direction (Northern Ireland) 2016

Percentage of children who are adopted within three years of last entering care

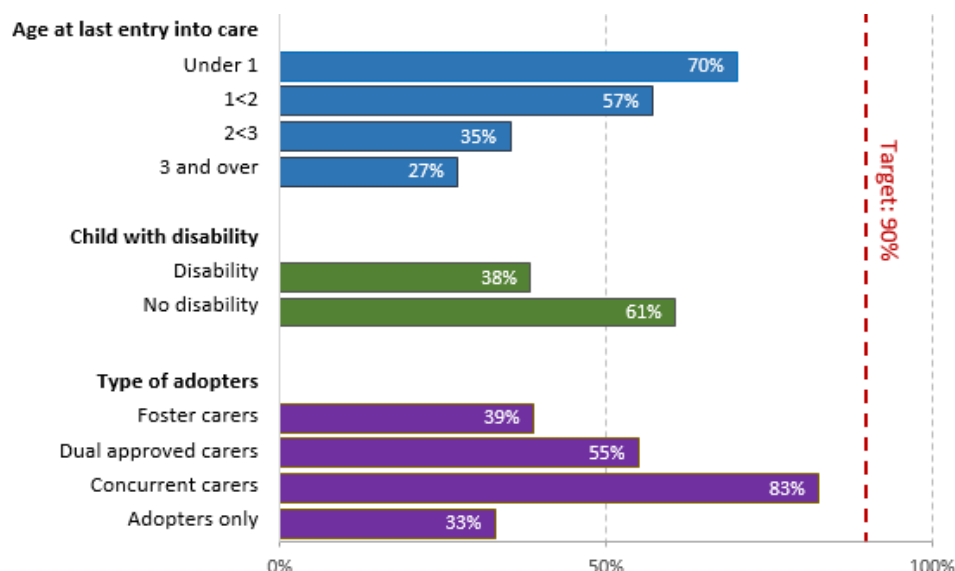


Adoption is not the best option for every child who is in care; however for those children where adoption would be in their best interest, it is important that this is identified early to ensure that the child can be placed in a stable family setting.

Ensuring the timeliness of the adoption process is a priority for the Department of Health. This is reflected in its Commissioning Plan Direction¹⁰ which includes a target and an indicator relating to the timing of the adoption process.

The target sets out that 90% of all adoptions from care should be completed within three years of last entering care.

Percentage of children adopted within three years of last entering care



The timing of the adoption relates to many factors and is unique for each individual child. Two factors that may influence the adoption journey are the child's age when entering care and if the child has a disability.

The type of adopters that the child can suitably be placed with is a reflection of the child's care history and its personal circumstances.

Please note that some of the cohorts above are based on low number of children.

Length of time for Best Interest Decision to be reached in the adoption process.

Year	Years: Months
2012/13	1:6
2013/14	1:3
2014/15	1:5
2015/16	1:4
2016/17	1:3

The overall adoption process involves court activity which may contribute to delays in the adoption process. The time up to the Best Interest Decision however reflects the part of the process that is mainly down to the HSC Trusts. As set out in the table, the time from the start of the final period in care to the Trust's decision that adoption is in the best interest for the child was one year three months in 2016/17.

¹⁰ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-priorities>

Table 4 sets out the average age of the child at different points in the adoption process. In 2016/17, the average age of children at the time of their last admission into care was 1 year 6 months, ranging from the time of birth to 7 years, whilst the average age at adoption was 4 years 5 months.

Table 4 Average ages of children at different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March)

Stages in the adoption process	Age (year:month)				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Age at last admission into care	1:5	1:6	1:0	1:6	1:6
Age at Best Interest Proposal	2:4	2:3	2:1	2:3	2:2
Age at Best Interest Decision	2:11	2:7	2:4	2:9	2:8
Age Panel recommended adopters as suitable for child	4:0	3:7	3:3	3:7	3:8
Age Trust accept recommendation that adopters are suitable for child	4:1	3:7	3:4	3:8	3:9
Age placed for adoption	4:2	3:8	3:5	3:9	3:10
Age at Adoption Order	4:10	4:4	4:1	4:5	4:5

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Table 5 Average duration between different stages of the adoption process by age at the start of the last period in care (year ending 31 March)

Age at start of last period of care	Average duration between entry into care and Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal				Average duration between date of Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal and matching of child and adopters				Average duration between date of matching and date placed for adoption				Average duration between date placed for adoption and granting of the Adoption Order				Average duration between last entry into care and adoption			
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 1	0:11	0:11	0:9	0:8	1:3	1:6	1:4	1:5	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:8	0:8	0:7	0:6	2:8	2:11	2:9	2:7
1	0:8	1:3	0:8	0:10	2:0	1:6	1:11	1:4	0:0	0:1	0:1	0:2	0:8	0:9	0:8	0:7	3:1	3:7	3:3	2:11
2	0:9	1:0	0:10	0:11	1:9	1:10	1:5	2:1	0:2	0:1	0:1	0:2	0:7	0:9	0:10	0:7	2:11	3:1	3:1	3:8
3 and over	0:11	1:5	0:9	0:9	1:7	1:7	1:8	2:2	0:1	0:0	0:1	0:0	0:8	0:7	0:10	0:9	3:1	3:7	3:2	3:7
All children	0:10	1:0	0:9	0:9	1:7	1:6	1:6	1:8	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:8	0:8	0:8	0:7	2:11	3:1	2:11	3:0

The time between different stages of the adoption process may not add to the total time as some cases may be excluded from the in-between calculations.

0:0 is less than 1 month.

Figures have been revised and may differ slightly from previous publications.

5. Adoption process by age group

Of the children adopted in 2016/17, over half (56%) had entered their final period of care when they were under one year of age. Twelve percent entered the final period of care when they were aged 1, fourteen percent when aged two and eighteen percent were aged 3 or over. Table 5 (above) sets out the adoption process broken down by the age of the child at the time of entering the last period of care.

Although there was a variance of up to thirteen months for the different age groups of the time between last entry to care and the Adoption Order in 2016/17, there has historically been no major difference in the duration of the stages of the adoption process. In 2016/17 however, there were some difference between the duration from LAC Best Interest Proposal and matching of child and adopters. For those one year and younger when entering care, this took less than one and a half year. For those aged two and over, this process took over two years. It is however worth noting that the numbers involved are small and care must be taken when making year on year comparisons.

The average duration from the Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to adoption is set out in Table 6 below by the age of the child at the time of the LAC Best Interest Proposal. This shows that duration for a child aged under one year at the time of the LAC Best Interest Proposal is generally shorter than those aged one year and older. However we must be careful in drawing conclusions due to the small numbers involved in some categories.

Table 6 Average duration between Trust LAC best interest proposal and adoption by age, year ending 31 March 2017

Age at Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal	Number of Children	Average duration between date of Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal and Adoption
	N	Year : Months
Under 1	46	1:9
1	26	2:7
2	11	2:5
3 and over	35	2:10
All children	118	2:4

Two children were excluded from the 2016/17 analysis due to not having a Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal date.

6. Type of adopters

Recent years have seen a change in the way adoptions are processed prior to the Adoption Order is granted. In general, there are four pathways that can be followed, from the traditional route where a child is placed with approved adopters for the purpose of adoption, to being placed with concurrent carers while the future of the child is being decided¹¹. In the latter case, social services will work with birth parents to assess if the child can return to their care, and if the child cannot return safely to their birth family's care (and pending the approval of the courts) then the child goes on to be adopted by the concurrent carers.

Like concurrent carers, dual approved carers are also approved as both foster carers and adopters. Dual approved carers take the placement of a child after the Trust has agreed that the care plan for the child is adoption but prior to the court's decision whether to free the child for adoption. So in this instance the child is also initially placed on a fostering basis. Both the options above reduces the time it will take to reach the Adoption Order and as such, permanency and stability for the child will potentially be achieved at an earlier stage.

Finally, children who are adopted from care can be placed on a fostering basis with foster carers or kinship foster carers. When the child's care plan changes to adoption, the foster carers, at that point, seek to become approved adopters to enable them to provide permanence for that specific child.

Table 7 Type of adoptions / pathways to adoption, year ending 31 March 2017 - Revised

Type of adopters	Description	Number of children adopted
Adopters Only	The child is placed with approved adopters for the purpose of adoption after Freeing Order has been granted by the courts.	12
Concurrent Carers	The child is placed with carers who are approved as foster carers and adopters while the future of the child is still being decided. Social services will work simultaneously with the birth parents and the prospective adopters. The primary plan is for the child to return home, but if this is not possible, the carers adopt the child.	23
Dual Approved Carers	The carers are both approved as foster carers and adopters. The child is placed with the dual approved carers after Best Interest Decision is made by the Trust, and the carers act as the child's foster carers up until the point when the child's legal status is changed to 'placed for adoption'.	67
Former Foster Carers	The child is initially placed in foster care and foster carers, who subsequently become approved as adopters for the child, go on to adopt the child.	18
All adoptions		120

Note: Historic information is not available for type of adopters.

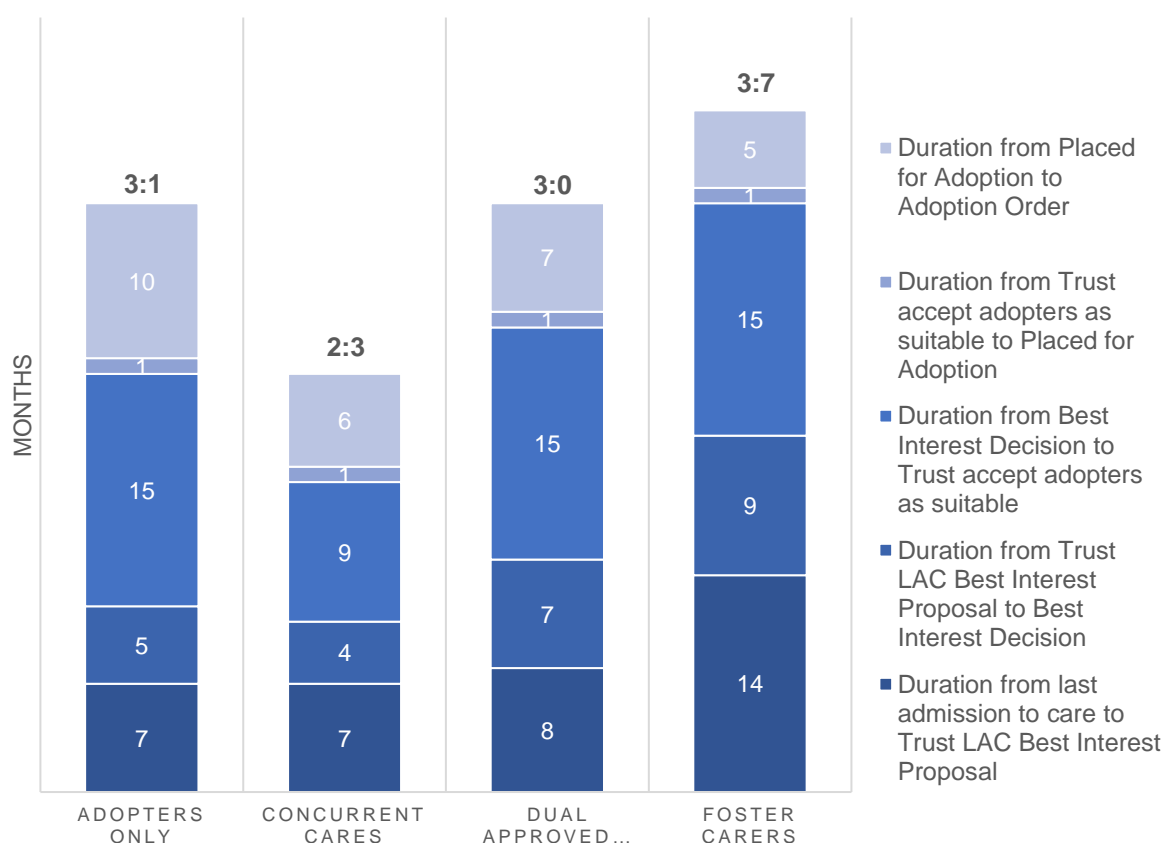
Note: These figures have been updated following the receipt of revised information from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust – 8th January 2018

¹¹ The distinction between these four type of carers/adoption pathways was included in this survey for the first time in 2016/17. Historic comparison is therefore not available.

The choice of the kind of carers the child is placed with will depend on the child's unique circumstances. For a child to be placed with concurrent carers, it must be identified that there is likelihood, based on past history that the child may not be able to safely return home to the care of birth family. However the birth parents are afforded an opportunity to engage with service to demonstrate their parenting capacity and have their child returned. Another child may be placed in foster care, however the pathway of adoption may not be relevant for the child until sometime down the line. Because of these differences, it is expected that the time from a child's last entry into care to the Adoption Order will differ between the four adoption routes, though the emphasis must be on achieving permanence whether that is through a return home to birth family or adoption as early as possible.

As can be seen from Table 8 and Figure 4 below, average duration from entering care to Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal was considerably longer for those initially placed with foster carers. Furthermore, average duration from entering care to the granting of Adoption Order was considerably shorter for those placed with concurrent carers.

Figure 4 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters, year ending 31 March 2017 - Revised



Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Note: Historic information is not available for type of adopters.

Note: These figures have been updated following the receipt of revised information from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust – 8th January 2018

Number above each column refers to year:month

Table 8 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters (year ending 31 March 2017) - Revised

Stages in the adoption process	Type of adopters				All adoptions
	Adopters Only	Concurrent Carers	Dual Approved Carers	Foster Carers	
Duration from last admission to care to Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal	0:7	0:7	0:8	1:2	0:9
Duration from Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Best Interest Decision	0:5	0:4	0:7	0:9	0:6
Duration from Best Interest Decision to Panel recommend adopters as suitable for this child	1:3	0:8	1:2	1:1	1:1
Duration from Panel recommend adopters as suitable for this child to Trust accept adopters as suitable	0:0	0:1	0:1	0:2	0:1
Duration from Trust accept adopters as suitable to Placed for Adoption	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1
Duration from Placed for Adoption to Adoption Order	0:10	0:6	0:7	0:5	0:7
Last admission to care to Adoption Order	3:1	2:3	3:0	3:7	3:0

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Note: Historic information is not available for type of adopters.

Note: These figures have been updated following the receipt of revised information from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust – 8th January 2018

It is further expected that children in the four adoption routes may relate to somewhat different cohorts when looking at the age of the child at different stages of the adoption process. As can be seen in Table 9, children adopted by concurrent carers were considerably younger, both at the time of entering care and at the granting of the Adoption Order.

Table 9 Average ages of children at different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters (year ending 31 March 2017) - Revised

	Type of adopters				All adoptions
	Adopters Only	Concurrent Carers	Dual Approved Carers	Foster Carers	
Age at last admission into care	1:8	0:5	1:10	1:4	1:6
Age at Best Interest Proposal	2:2	1:0	2:6	2:7	2:2
Age at Best Interest Decision	2:7	1:5	2:11	3:4	2:8
Age Panel recommended adopters as suitable for child	3:9	2:0	4:1	4:5	3:8
Age Trust accept recommendation that adopters are suitable for child	3:10	2:2	4:2	4:5	3:9
Age placed for adoption	3:11	2:2	4:3	4:6	3:10
Age at Adoption Order	4:9	2:8	4:10	5:0	4:5

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Note: Historic information is not available for type of adopters.

Note: These figures have been updated following the receipt of revised information from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust – 8th January 2018

7. UK adoption statistics comparison

There is no common legislative framework operating across the United Kingdom relating to adoption, hence any statistics showing data for the four jurisdictions will not necessarily provide like-for-like comparisons. Bearing this in mind, Table 10, below, sets out some of the statistics published in Northern Ireland, England and Wales¹².

Table 10 Adoption statistics for Northern Ireland, England and Wales (year ending 31 March)

	Northern Ireland (2016/17)	England (2016/17)	Wales (2015/16)
All children adopted	120	4,350	340
Adoptions per 1,000 children in care at 31 March	40	60	60
Age at adoption			
Under 1	<5%	7%	1%
1-4	65%	71%	75%
5-9	33%	21%	24%
10-15	<5%	1%	<1%
16+	0	-	<1%
Average age at adoption (yrs:months)	4:5	3:4	-
Average duration of last period of care (yrs:months)	3:0	2:0	2:3

' - ' indicates that information is not available

Source: AD1 survey, Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland, DoH

Source: Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2017

Source: Adoptions, outcomes and placements for children looked after by local authorities in Wales 2015/16

Note: there is no common legislative framework operating across the United Kingdom relating to adoption, hence any statistics will not necessarily provide like-for-like comparisons.

In general, children adopted from care in Northern Ireland were on average older and had spent longer time in care than that of children adopted from care in England and Wales.

Around a quarter of children adopted from care in both England and Wales were aged five or over at the time of adoption. This compares with over a third of children in Northern Ireland.

The average duration from last entry into care to the granting of the adoption order was 2 years in England and two years three months in Wales. In Northern Ireland the average duration was 3 years.

¹² At the time of this publication, Wales had not yet released adoption statistics for 2016/17. Figures for 2015/16 is therefore used as comparison.

Appendix A – Technical Notes

Data Collection

The figures for “Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland 2016/17” are derived from the tenth ‘AD1’ survey of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland. The AD1 survey return was provided by each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to Community Information Branch (CIB) within the Department of Health (DoH).

The AD1 survey was introduced in 2004, and its primary aim is to monitor the numbers of children adopted from care and the timescales between different stages in the adoption process. It is an individual level survey, with one record for each young person fitting the parameters for the collection. Returns are completed online by nominated HSC Trust staff using a secure web-based application. Records are anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the young people whose details are included in the return.

Guidance notes and other documents associated with the completion of the AD1 survey are available to view or download from the DoH [website](#).

Change to methodology

The adoption process is set out in stages, where one event, recommendation or decision would naturally follow the next. However, with the focus on improving the timing of the somewhat lengthy adoption process, the natural order of the events may not be followed. This may cause, when calculating duration between different stages of the adoption process, a 'negative' duration to be calculated. This mainly relates to the LAC Best Interest Proposal occurring prior to last entry into care.

Historically, within the AD1 calculations, these negative values have been excluded from analysis (eg the value has been treated as 'missing'). However, as the negative value may be a reflection of efficiency and improved service, it may be considered unfair not to include them in overall performance evaluations. The methodology has therefore been revised.

Negative values is now treated as the value '0' and is included in calculations. This means that, for the example above, where the Best Interest Proposal was agreed prior to the last entry to care, is in the calculations interpreted as if no time passed between the child entered its last period of care and the LAC Best Interest Proposal was in place (time = 0 months).

It is expected that the amended methodology will resulted in improved performance, however only marginally and only for some of the variable as negative values only has a limited number of occurrences. For the 2016/17, the only figure affected by the new methodology was the duration between last entry into care and Best Interest Decision, which improved from 1 year 4 months (old methodology) to 1 year 3 months (new methodology).

All time series included in this publication have been revised using the new methodology.

Format of historic figures

Any historic figure including '12 months' has been changed to the format of '1 year'. For example '0:12' is now displayed as '1:0' and '2:12' is displayed as '3:0'.

Missing dates and Rounding

Some children may not have all the key dates referred to in this publication. For example, children adopted from care with parental consent (Article 16) may not have a LAC Best Interest Proposal date. Children with missing dates will be excluded from analysis involving those specific dates but included in all other calculation. The total number of children included in each stage of the adoption process may therefore vary. Furthermore, due to missing dates, summing average durations between key dates may give a different result when the same duration is calculated directly without using intervening dates. These differences may be further compounded through rounding errors.

Data Quality

All information submitted by HSC Trusts was validated at the point of entry, where Trust staff correct or amend data as required, and provide appropriate explanations if information is missing. AD1 returns are checked and quality assured by HSC Trust managers before being submitted to CIB within the DoH. CIB perform further checks, using historical data to monitor annual variations and emerging trends.

A detailed quality report for the AD1 survey statistics is available on the DoH website <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/children-adopted-care-return-and-quality-report> .

Main Uses of Data

The main uses of these data are to monitor the delivery of social care services to children, to help assess Trust performance, corporate monitoring, to inform and monitor related policy, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. The bulletin is also used by academics/ researchers, the voluntary sector and those with an interest in children in care.

A National Statistics Publication

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is the Department of Health's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

If you have any comments on this publication, please contact Community Information Branch on Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk or Tel: 028 90522580

Related Publications

Statistics on all children adopted in Northern Ireland (from care and not from care) can be sourced from the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency annual reports.

<http://www.nigala.hscni.net/publications.htm>

Details of statistics on children adopted from care published by other countries within the UK (United Kingdom) can be found as detailed below.

England

Statistics on 'Children looked after in England' (including adoption and care leavers) are produced annually by the Department for Education. Figures for the year ending 31 March 2017 are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>

Wales

Statistics on Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities are produced annually by the Welsh Assembly Government. Figures for the year ending 31 March 2016 are available through the link below:

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/adoptions-outcomes-placements-children-looked-after/?lang=en>

Scotland

'Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland' is published on an annual basis by the Scottish Government, with the latest published figures relating to year ending 31 July 2016. Figures relating to adoption can be found in the additional tables at the following link:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/6791>

Appendix B - Additional Tables

Table 11 Number of Children adopted from Care in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March)

Year	Number of children adopted from care
2000	54
2001	99
2002	104
2003	109
2004	79
2005	88
2006	56
2007	60
2008	64
2009	57
2010	50
2011	55
2012	60
2013	88
2014	89
2015	72
2016	89
2017	120

Source for years 2000 and 2001: Adopting Best Care, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002.

Source from 2003: AD1 surveys - www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-adopted-care.

Note: Number of adoptions has been estimated for the years 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2011.

Table 12 Number of Children adopted from Care in Northern Ireland by HSC Trust (year ending 31 March)

HSC Trust	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	N	N	N	N	N
Belfast	27	18	19	13	23
Northern	16	23	12	31	40
South Eastern	11	25	13	10	17
Southern	18	16	20	19	15
Western	16	7	8	16	25
Northern Ireland	88	89	72	89	120

This statistical bulletin and other statistical bulletins published by Community Information Branch (CIB) are available to download from the internet at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research-social-services/social-care-statistics>

For further information on children adopted from care in Northern Ireland please contact:

Community Information Branch

Department of Health
Annexe 2
Castle Buildings
Stormont, Belfast
BT4 3SQ

Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk



028 9052 2580