



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Corporate Plan 2016 - 2019

1 Foreword

The Adoption Authority looks forward to the next three years with optimism and is confident that it can continue to develop its role and services in line with its legislative brief, in a spirit of continuous improvement. The Authority takes pride in what has been achieved since its establishment in November 2010, following the commencement of the Adoption Act 2010. It sees the next planning cycle being concerned with consolidating earlier achievements and continuous improvement in services, while being adaptive to new changes as required.

The Authority relies upon and deeply appreciates the collaboration of multiple external partners in successfully discharging its role and it plans a further strengthening of these key relationships as a particular goal in the coming period.

Our intentions and planned activities over the coming years are encapsulated in the Five Strategic Goals we have adopted. These are expressed in deliberately ambitious terms and we will pursue them to the best of our abilities.

Our collective aim is to provide the highest possible standards in adoption and adoption related services, in line with our legal and policy obligations but also consistent with the limitations on our resources.

We appreciate the strong support we receive from the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and his Department and look forward to a continuation of our close working relationship in the years ahead.

Dr Geoffrey Shannon
Chairperson

Patricia Carey
Chief Executive Officer

2 Executive Overview

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is the Central Authority for Adoption in Ireland. It was set up under the Adoption Act 2010 and is an independent quasi-judicial statutory body appointed by Government for the purposes of regulating adoption in Ireland. The Adoption Act 2010 strengthened the regulatory framework governing the lifelong process that is adoption, and ensures that the best interests of children are paramount and are protected throughout. This is a key defining principle for all of the Authority's work and activities.

The Adoption Act 2010 and the establishment of the Central Authority coincided with Ireland's formal ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. This sets out an internationally agreed set of standards. The clarity of expression of these standards, relating to both international and domestic adoption, gives a very clear mandate to the Authority in the decision-making processes for which it is responsible.

The Authority works closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and collaborates with multiple partners and service providers, in particular TUSLA and the agencies accredited by the Authority. The Authority is mindful also of the strongly held views of other stakeholders, both organisations and individuals, on adoption law, policy and practice and aims to work pro-actively and constructively with all stakeholders in providing responsive and supportive services. The Authority looks forward to strengthening its engagement with stakeholders during the period ahead.

There are a number of legislative developments in prospect which are likely to impact on the future role and functions of the Authority and on the demand for adoption and adoption-related services during the course of this plan. The Authority will proactively consider their implications and will continue to liaise with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in anticipating and planning for their orderly implementation in due course.

A review of progress over the period of the previous plan (2012-15) and an on-line survey of key stakeholders were undertaken as a preliminary to the detailed preparatory work on this plan. The analysis was also supported by SWOT and PEST exercises. These have all contributed to the statement of Mission, Vision and Values set out in Paragraph 6 and have also influenced the content of planned activities over the coming period.

The Authority has adopted Five Strategic Goals for the period 2016-19 and these are outlined at Paragraph 6, together with the main action points and indicative timelines in paragraph 7. The intention is that these will guide the organisation's work and activities over the plan period and will form the framework for Executive and Board oversight of performance over the period. They are also the frame within which annual business planning and annual reporting will be undertaken.

An analysis of key risks is presented at Paragraph 8 and these will be actively monitored and integrated with the Authority's Risk Register for the purposes of Executive and Board oversight.

The Plan was adopted in draft form by the Authority at its meeting on 22 December, 2015.

The final version for consideration is now submitted.

3 Adoption Authority – Organisation & Governance

3.1 Introduction

The Adoption Act 2010 commenced on 1 November 2010. The Adoption Authority was also established on that day and operates as the Central Authority for Adoptions in Ireland. Since that date, adoption in Ireland is regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland which is an independent quasi-judicial statutory body appointed by Government.

The commencement and establishment days coincided with Ireland's formal ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. The purpose of the Adoption Act 2010, is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption. The regulatory framework governing adoption has been strengthened so as to ensure that the best interests of children are protected throughout the adoption process.

3.2 Functions and Governance arrangements

The functions of the Authority are set out in Section 96 of the Adoption Act 2010. These include functions of an operational, judicial and quasi-judicial nature in relation to the adoption process itself, as provided for under the Act but also relating to the Authority's designation as the Central Authority for the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. In addition, the Authority has registration and regulatory functions. Finally, there are reporting, policy advice and research functions set out. These statutory functions form the legal backdrop to each of the strategic goals, objectives and planned activities for the period of this plan.

Part 12 (sections 94-121 inclusive) provides, inter alia, for the establishment of the Authority and the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. The Authority members are the governing body of the organisation and are collectively responsible for promoting the success of the Authority by leading and directing the Authority's activities. The provisions of the Act put in place a statutory framework which ensures that we are accountable to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and to the Government. Our performance will continue to be evaluated against the provisions contained in the Act and the commitments made in this plan.

3.3 Organisation Structure

The organisation structure for the Authority is set out in Appendix 1.

4 Corporate Plan – the Legal Framework

The Authority is required, under Section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010, to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan.

It is also obliged to do so in the context of its obligations under the Code of Practice for State Bodies.

5 Principles and Values

The Authority has adopted a set of principles and values which underpin its approach to its mission, vision, goals, objectives and daily operations. These are concerned with:

Child – Centeredness:

- We focus on the best interests of children and ensure that their **lifelong** needs are considered as paramount when they require the services of the Authority.
- We are committed to the best and true interests of the individual child and will strive to ensure that children’s needs are paramount throughout the adoption process.

Quality Services:

- We seek to provide the highest quality service in all areas of our work, in line with law and best practice in adoption.
- We are committed to developing and retaining a highly skilled and knowledgeable staff through leadership, training, development and commitment to continuous improvement in the delivery of our services.

Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency:

- We are guided by honesty, propriety, accountability and ethical adoption practice in all of our actions and decisions.
- We operate in a manner which is open to scrutiny and which will be characterised by impartiality and equity.
- We are committed to delivering our services in the most efficient and effective way possible so as to achieve value for money.

Respect:

- We are committed to treating all with whom we deal with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- We are a listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those who work in adoption services, and / or are affected by adoption.
- We listen to the ideas and concerns of our own staff and use their knowledge and experience to make the Authority a good place to work.

6 Mission, Vision and High Level Goals

6.1 Mission Statement

“To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.”

6.2 Vision Statement

“To be recognised as the centre of excellence and the principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services.”

6.3 Strategic Goals

Goal 1:

“To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.”

Goal 2:

“To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.”

Goal 3:

“To inform and influence adoption policy and service delivery by reason of a practical understanding of the operations of the legislation through the provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.”

Goal 4:

“To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes.”

Goal 5:

“To maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation.”

7 Strategic Objectives

Goal 1:

“To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.”

Goal 1 Objectives	Desired outcome	Timeline
a) <i>To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners.</i>	All guidance and practice is fully reviewed in light of forthcoming legislation. Policy and practice guidelines prepared and issued to adoption service providers and practitioners.	Ongoing. Incorporation of changes subject to commencement of legislation
b) <i>To engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and the Government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services.</i>	Good and constructive relationship with all stakeholders.	Ongoing.
c) <i>Reaccredit and register against approved regulations, all agencies providing adoption services.</i>	To accredit applicant agencies against regulations and standards.	2016 and as required.
d) <i>Monitoring & inspection role of AAI</i>	To review, inspect and monitor accredited agencies.	2 inspections of accredited agencies in 2016.

Goal 2:

“To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.”

Goal 2 Objectives	Desired outcome	Timeline
a) <i>Make informed and timely decisions regarding: 1) the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt, 2) the making of adoption orders, 3) the recognition of intercountry adoption orders, 4) Article 17 referrals.</i>	Timely, equitable, transparent and quality decisions. Due process followed.	Ongoing.
b) <i>Maintain all registers.</i>	All registers are up to date, accurate and complete. NACPR up to date, accurate and complete. Comprehensive records in respect of all applications for Adoption Orders / requests for entry on the Register of Intercountry Adoption. Integrated document management system in place.	Ongoing.
c) <i>Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.</i>	Balanced decision making on release or non-release of information.	Ongoing.
d) <i>Maintain constructive relationships with all partners and develop national and international relationships that promote the highest possible standards in adoption and adoption related services.</i>	Authority engages positively with all partners and is informed by best practice internationally.	Ongoing

Goal 3:

“To inform and influence adoption policy and service delivery through provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.”

Goal 3 Objectives	Desired outcome	Timeline
a) <i>Engage proactively with all stakeholders.</i>	Stakeholders fully understand role of Authority and feel that their perspective is understood. Positive engagement between Authority and stakeholders.	Ongoing
b) <i>Develop and maintain an effective Communications Strategy</i>	Information shared with relevant stakeholders and general public in an informative and timely manner. Responsible communication.	Ongoing.
c) <i>Use website as a prime source of information for all stakeholders and the public at large.</i>	Accurate and up to date information easily accessible.	Quarter 1, 2016 for new website and then ongoing.
d) <i>Maintain statistical information and planning/development aspects of service provision.</i>	Relevant and timely statistics and planning information available to Authority.	Ongoing.
e) <i>Continue to undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity.</i>	Publication of current Irish research. Further research needs and opportunities identified	Ongoing Publication of ICGP – AAI Research in Quarter 1, 2016. Compilation of post adoption services directory – end of Quarter 2, 2016. Ongoing.
f) <i>Support Government Departments in the development of adoption related policy and legislation.</i>	Legislation and policy will be informed by AAI inputs, advices and recommendations.	Ongoing.
g) <i>Promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues.</i>	Public debate is well-informed by fact and by the expertise provided by the Authority.	Ongoing.

Goal 4:

“To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes”

Goal 4 Objectives	Desired outcome	Timeline
a) <i>Be prepared and be able to adapt to:</i> 1) <i>Children and Family Relationships Act 2015,</i> 2) <i>Adoption Amendment Bill 2016,</i> 3) <i>Information and Tracing Bill 2015,</i> 4) <i>all areas of AAI work affected.</i>	Authority is ready to respond immediately to any changes in its statutory function.	Ongoing in terms of preparation and undefined in terms of actual start.
b) <i>Be prepared for any potential changes in statutory functions of the Authority through any further legislative changes.</i>	Authority is ready to respond immediately to any changes in its statutory functions.	Ongoing in terms of preparation and undefined in terms of actual start.

Goal 5:

“To maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation.”

Goal 5 Objectives	Desired outcome	Timeline
a) <i>Ensure full compliance with Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.</i>	Authority fully compliant with Code. Authority ready to implement any changes in Code.	Annual reports as required by DCYA governance.
b) <i>Maintain robust Risk Management Framework.</i>	Effective Risk Management Framework in place. Risk Officer appointed. Risk Register in place and proactively managed.	Ongoing.
c) <i>Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity.</i>	Full confidentiality and best practice in management, security and archive of all data.	Ongoing.
d) <i>Authority to maintain a learning environment where competencies and training requirements are fully met.</i>	Authority equipped to competently deliver all of its functions.	Ongoing.
e) <i>Maintain Succession Plan.</i>	Seamless transition and consistency of service.	2016 and ongoing.
f) <i>Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources.</i>	Authority recognised for giving full value for money. All spending proposals underpinned by rigorous financial analysis.	Ongoing.
g) <i>The Authority maintains, and actively engages with, an independent Internal Audit Function.</i>	Independent Internal Audit function. Fully compliant with Internal Audit provision under Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Ongoing.

8 Risks & Mitigating Actions

Risk Definition	Mitigating Action
Legislation introduced that the Authority is not ready to implement due to resource challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority to have capacity to implement the legislation. Communications with DCYA critical at all stages. • Lead time agreed with the Department to implement the legislation.
Cases get caught between legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a robust transitional framework and period for existing cases to be dealt with.
Role and funding of accredited bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity from the Department on the policy on both role and funding of accredited bodies. • Contingency developed in cases of closure of accredited bodies.
Vulnerabilities around implementation of information and tracing legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority needs to be properly resourced to deliver on the aspirations of the pending legislation.
No contingency for unforeseen legal and other costs from 2016.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority now needs to agree solution to this with the Department.
Potential loss of key personnel and inability to replace key staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession Planning. • Develop HR capacity internally. • Secure greater flexibility in recruitment.
Plan contingent on no unforeseen emergencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility in Resource Plan with contingency.

Figure 1.0 – Risk Mitigation Plan

9 Implementation and Review

A more detailed implementation schedule, identifying the supporting tasks and lead responsibility for each has been prepared as a guide to internal management and a frame for annual business planning over the period of this Plan.

The Authority will conduct an annual review of progress under this Corporate Plan, which will inform its annual report for each of the relevant years and the business plan for the following year.

A full evaluation of progress over the period of the Plan will be undertaken towards the end of the planning cycle.

Appendix 1

The Adoption Authority of Ireland Organisational Structure



