

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2019/20



Reader Information

Document purpose	This bulletin details statistical information relating to children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2020.
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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 2020, 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 2019/20¹, collected from each of the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

- One-hundred-and-eleven children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2020;
- The average age of children at the time of adoption was 4 years 2 months, one month younger compared to the previous year;
- From the child's last entry into care, the average length of time for a child to be adopted in 2019/20 was 3 years 1 month. This was the same as in the previous year;
- For children adopted in 2019/20, the average duration from the HSC Trust proposal that adoption was in the best interest for the child (the Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal) to the Adoption Order was 2 years 3 months, the same as in 2018/19;
- In 2019/20, children adopted by Concurrent Carers² were substantially younger at the time of adoption (3 years 4 months compared with the national average of 4 years and 2 months). They also had a shorter last duration in care (2 years 7 months compared with the national average of 3 years 1 month).

¹ Please see Appendix for details of the return.

² The child is placed with carers who are approved as foster carers and adopters while the future of the child is still being decided.

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 and family. 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 Procedures (2017)³.

As part of review of the 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. Those processes include providing information and counselling to the child and its 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 adoptive parents whilst Freeing Order proceedings are commenced. Following the formal placement for adoption of the child with their prospective adoptive parents, the adoptive parents 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 their application, 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 and Decision-Maker as to their suitability to adopt.

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
October 2020**

³ *The Adoption Regional Policy and Procedures October 2017*

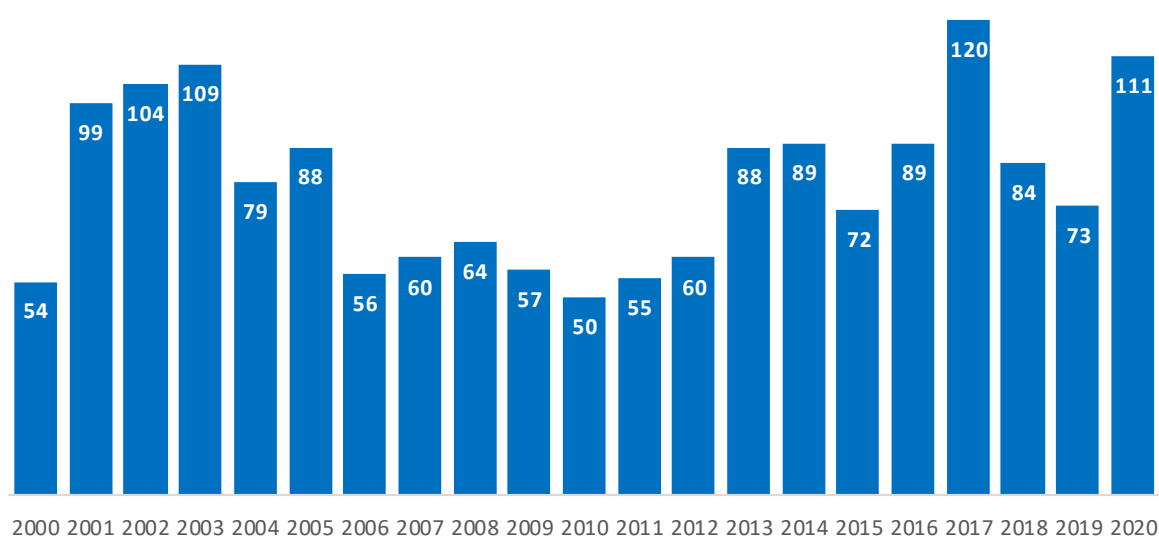
Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2019/20

1. Adoptions from care

During the year ending 31 March 2020, 111 children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland. This was an increase of 52% on the previous year however similar to the figure recorded during 2016/17 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 sets out the yearly number of adoptions from care. It shows that adoption numbers were notably high between 2001 and 2003 – this is 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 child⁴. Between 2005/06 and 2011/12, the numbers of adoptions were steady, however somewhat lower than in recent years (between fifty and just over sixty children a year). The increase from 2013 could be linked with renewed focus on adoption and 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.

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.

⁴ *Adopting Best Care*, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002

Figure 2 Number of children adopted from care by HSC Trust year ending 31 March 2020 (percentage of all children adopted from care)

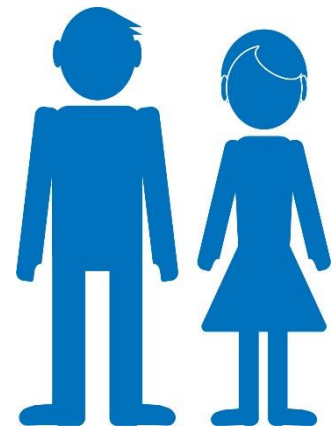


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The Northern HSC Trust had the largest number of looked after children adopted from care in 2019/20 (32 children), followed by the Southern and Belfast HSC Trusts with 26 and 25 children adopted respectively. Sixteen children were adopted from the Western HSC Trust and 12 from the South Eastern HSC Trust. As the number of children adopted in each HSC Trust is quite small, care must be taken when making year on year comparisons⁵.

2. The adopters

Some 84% of adopters were married couple adopters or different sex unmarried couples, 10% were same sex couples and 6% were single females adopters. Of all the adopters, 7 had previously adopted a child or children⁶, and 19% had dependent birth children in the household. The age of the adopters ranged from early thirties to mid-fifties, with the largest proportion of the adopters being in their forties at the time of the adoption (65%).



⁵ Please see Appendix for yearly figures.

⁶ Please note that this is based on the 111 adoptions during 2019/20, hence adopters who have adopted more than one child in 2019/20 will have been counted more than once.

3. Children adopted from care

Table 1 sets out the main characteristics of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland from 2015/16 to 2019/20. In 2019/20, the age of children adopted from care ranged from 1 year and 2 months to 14 years and 11 months. As in previous years, the majority of the children were between one and four years at the time of adoption.



Table 1 Children adopted from care (year ending 31 March)

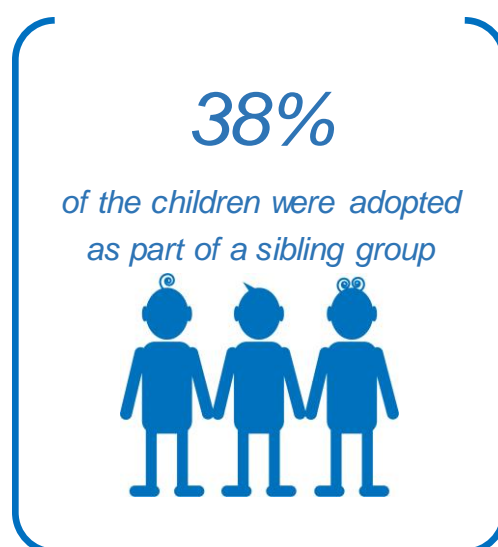
	Number of children					Percentages				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
All children adopted	89	120	84	73	111	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Female	43	53	41	31	45	48%	44%	49%	42%	41%
Male	46	67	43	42	66	52%	56%	51%	58%	59%
Age at adoption										
Under 1	0	<5		0	0	0%	-		0%	0%
1-4	62	78	{57	48	74	70%	65%	{68%	66%	67%
5-9	23	39	27			26%	33%	32%		
10-15	4	<5	0	{25	{37	4%	-	0%	{35%	{33%
16+	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Average age (yrs:months)	4:5	4:5	4:2	4:3	4:2					
Minimum age (yrs:months)	1:3	0:10	0:11	1:3	1:2					
Maximum age (yrs:months)	11:9	11:0	9:9	14:10	14:11					

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.

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

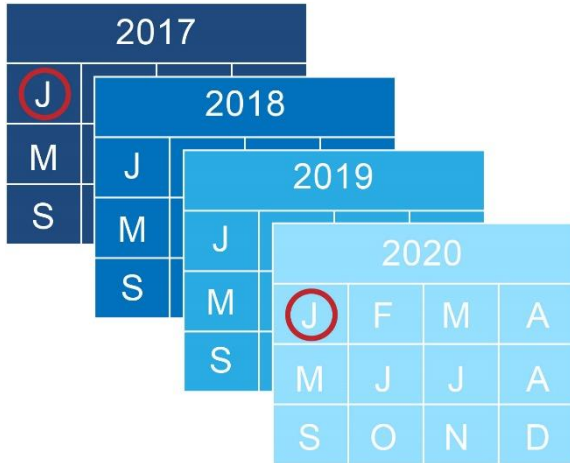
The majority of the children adopted from care were of white ethnic background (98%). Twelve children (11%) had special needs or a disability. This included physical and sensory impairment, learning disabilities, autism, behavioural difficulties and mental health difficulties.

In 2019/20, 69 of the children (62%) were adopted as a single child adoption whereas 38% were adopted as part of a sibling group (42 children).



4. Timing of the adoption process⁷

The average length of time between the date of the child's last period of care started to the Adoption Order was made was 3 years 1 months in 2019/20. The average length has stayed around three years since 2013/14. Some 17 the children (15%) were adopted within two years



of entering the final period of care. For 9 of the children (8%), the last period of care prior to being adopted lasted five years.

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 1 year and 1 month and the longest time was 9 years 8 months.

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

Duration of final period of care	Number of children					Percentages				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Under 2 years	17	27	18	16	17	19%	23%	21%	22%	15%
2 years to under 3 years	31	40	24	24	46	35%	33%	29%	33%	41%
3 years to under 5 years	36	45	36	28	39	40%	38%	43%	38%	35%
5 years and over	5	8	6	5	9	6%	7%	7%	7%	8%
All	89	120	84	73	111	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Average duration (yrs:months)	2:11	3:0	3:2	3:1	3:1					
Minimum duration (yrs:months)	0:7	0:10	0:11	1:3	1:1					
Maximum duration (yrs:months)	6:5	7:5	9:6	8:2	9:8					

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 2019/20, it has been highlighted that some delays were influenced by delays within the court system (for example appeals being lodged or delays in judgements being made); further

⁷ 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.

assessments needed of the prospective adoptive placement; international law; and staffing pressures.

Table 3 sets out the duration between different stages of the adoption process. The average duration from last admission into care to Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal for children adopted in 2019/20 was 11 months, one month longer than in 2018/19. The Best Interest Proposal is the child's Looked After Child 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 7 months from the 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 less than 1 month to 2 years 7 months for the children adopted. Furthermore, the average duration from Best Interest Proposal to the date the Trust accepted the Panel's recommendation that adopters were suitable for the particular child was 1 year 6 months.

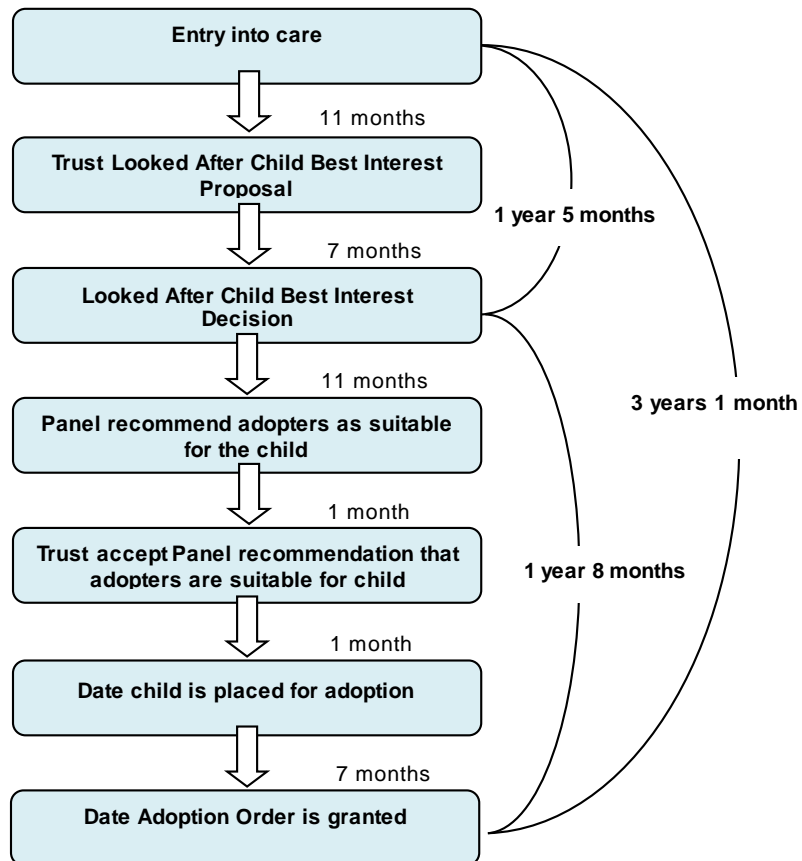
For children adopted in 2019/20, the average duration from the Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to adoption was 2 years 3 months, similar to that of recent years. In 2019/20, this ranged from 10 months to 5 years 1 months.

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

Stages in the adoption process	Average Duration (Years:Months)				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Last admission to care to Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal	0:9	0:9	1:0	0:10	0:11
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Best Interest Decision	0:7	0:6	0:6	0:6	0:7
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Panel recommend adopters as suitable for child	1:5	1:7	1:5	1:6	1:5
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Trust Accept Adopters Suitable	1:6	1:8	1:6	1:7	1:6
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Placement	1:7	1:9	1:7	1:9	1:8
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Adoption Order	2:3	2:4	2:2	2:3	2:3

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

Figure 3 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March 2020)



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.

Table 4 sets out the average age of the child at different points in the adoption process. In 2019/20, the average age of children at the time of their last admission into care was 1 year 1 month, ranging from the time of birth to 5 years 6 months.

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

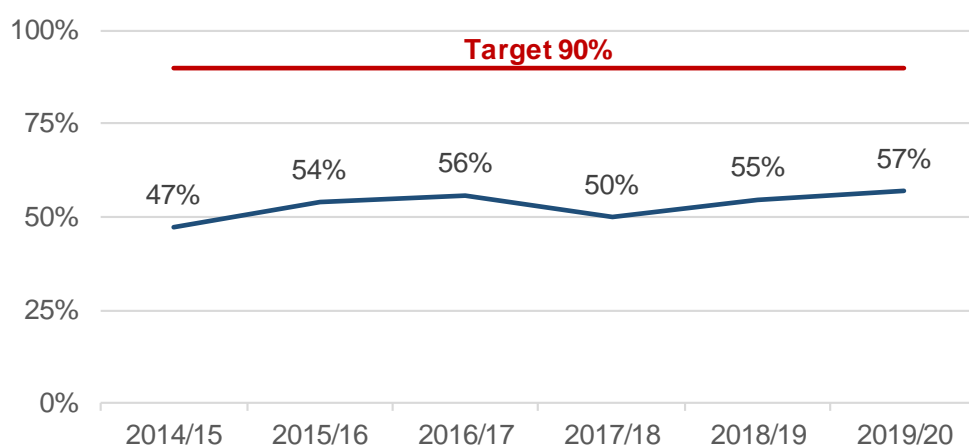
Stages in the adoption process	Year:Month				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Age at last admission into care	1:6	1:6	1:1	1:2	1:1
Age at Best Interest Proposal	2:3	2:2	2:1	1:11	1:11
Age at Best Interest Decision	2:9	2:8	2:6	2:5	2:6
Age Panel recommended adopters as suitable for child	3:7	3:8	3:5	3:5	3:4
Age Trust accept recommendation that adopters are suitable for child	3:8	3:9	3:6	3:7	3:5
Age placed for adoption	3:9	3:10	3:7	3:8	3:7
Age at Adoption Order	4:5	4:5	4:2	4:3	4:2

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

5. Timing of the adoption process - Commissioning Plan Direction

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 The Health and Social Care Commission Plan and Indicators of Performance Direction (Northern Ireland)⁸ 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.

Figure 4 Percentage of children who were adopted within three years of last entering care (year ending 31 March)

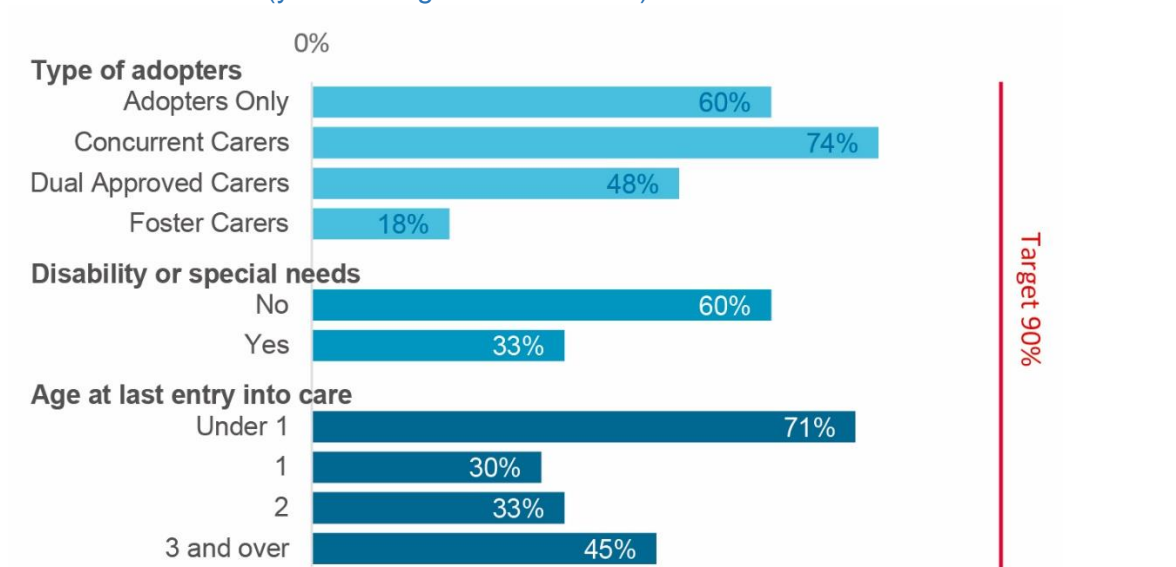


The target has not been met in recent years. The timing of the adoption relates to many factors and is unique for each individual child. Two factors that may influence the adoption journey are the child's age when entering care and if the child has a disability. The type of adopters that the child can suitably be placed with is a reflection of the child's care history and its personal circumstances and can also be an indication of the timing of the adoption process.

As can be seen in Figure 5, a higher proportion of younger children; those without disabilities; and those who were placed with concurrent carers were adopted within three years.

⁸ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-priorities>

Figure 5 Percentage of children who are adopted within three years of last entering care (year ending 31 March 2020)



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 Table 5, 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 five months in 2019/20.

Table 5 Length of time for Best Interest Decision to be reached in the adoption process (year ending 31 March)

	Years: Months
2015	1:5
2016	1:4
2017	1:3
2018	1:6
2019	1:3
2020	1:5

6. Adoption process by age group

Of the children adopted in 2019/20, 61% (68 children) had entered their final period of care when they were under one year of age. Some 20 children (18%) entered the final period of care when they were aged 1, 12 (11%) when aged two and 11 (10%) were aged 3 or over.

Table 7 (overleaf) sets out the adoption process broken down by the age of the child at the time of entering the last period of care. There was a variance of up to fifteen months for the different age groups of the time between last entry to care and the Adoption Order in 2019/20. 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 Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to adoption is set out in Table 6 below by the age of the child at the time of the Best Interest Proposal. This shows that duration for a child aged one year or under at the time of the Best Interest Proposal is generally shorter than those aged two years and older.

Table 6 Average duration between Trust LAC best interest proposal and adoption by age, year ending 31 March 2020

Age at Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal	Number of Children	Average duration between date of Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal and Adoption
	N	Year : Months
Under 1	40	1:11
1	26	2:1
2	17	2:9
3 and over	25	2:6
All children	108*	2:3

* Three children were excluded from the 2019/20 analysis due to not having a Best Interest Proposal date.

Table 7 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 last entry to 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			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020
Under 1	0:8	1:2	0:8	0:9	1:5	1:3	1:6	1:4	0:1	0:2	0:1	0:1	0:6	0:7	0:7	0:6	2:7	3:2	2:9	2:9
1	0:10	1:1	0:10	1:2	1:4	1:4	1:11	1:11	0:2	0:1	0:1	0:3	0:7	0:6	0:8	0:9	2:11	3:0	3:6	4:0
2	0:11	0:10	1:0	1:0	2:1	1:11	2:0	1:5	0:2	0:0	0:4	0:1	0:7	0:7	0:6	0:7	3:8	3:5	3:10	3:3
3 and over	0:9	0:6	1:4	1:1	2:2	2:3	1:8	1:10	0:0	0:0	0:3	0:2	0:9	0:7	0:6	0:8	3:7	3:2	3:9	3:5
All children	0:9	1:0	0:10	0:11	1:8	1:6	1:7	1:6	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:7	0:7	0:7	0:7	3:0	3:2	3:1	3:1

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

7. 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 decided⁹. 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.

Over the last four years, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of children adopted by Concurrent Carers, from 19% in 2016/17 to 45% in 2019/20. Over the same period, there has been a reduction in the proportion of children adopted by Dual Approved Carers, from 56% to 26%.

Table 8 Type of adoptions / pathways to adoption (year ending 31 March)

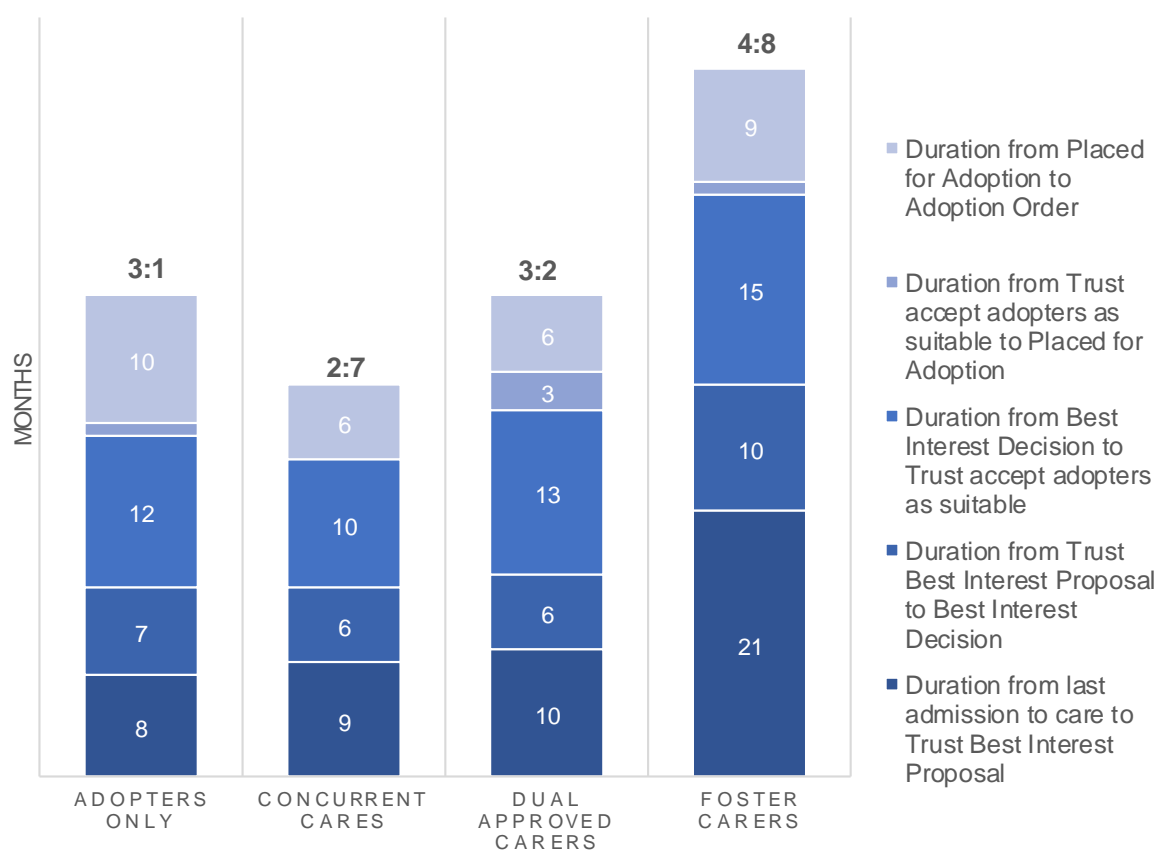
Type of adopters / Description	2017	2018	2019	2020
Adopters Only The child is placed with approved adopters for the purpose of adoption after Freeing Order has been granted by the courts.	12 (10%)	6 (7%)	7 (10%)	15 (14%)
Concurrent Carers The child is placed with carers who are approved as foster carers 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 (19%)	26 (31%)	26 (36%)	50 (45%)
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 (56%)	29 (35%)	27 (37%)	29 (26%)
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 (15%)	23 (27%)	13 (18%)	17 (15%)
All adoptions	120 (100%)	84 (100%)	73 (100%)	111 (100%)

⁹ The distinction between these four types of carers/adoption pathways was included in these returns for the first time in 2016/17.

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 9 and Figure 6 below, average duration from entering care to Trust Looked After Child 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 shorter for those placed with concurrent carers.

Figure 6 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters, year ending 31 March 2020



Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates. Number above each column refers to year:month

Table 9 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters (year ending 31 March 2020)

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	0:8	0:9	0:10	1:9	0:11
Duration from Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal to Best Interest Decision	0:7	0:6	0:6	0:10	0:7
Duration from Best Interest Decision to Panel recommend adopters as suitable for this child	1:0	0:8	1:0	1:2	0:11
Duration from Panel recommend adopters as suitable for this child to Trust accept adopters as suitable	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1	0:1
Duration from Trust accept adopters as suitable to Placed for Adoption	0:1	0:0	0:3	0:1	0:1
Duration from Placed for Adoption to Adoption Order	0:10	0:6	0:6	0:9	0:7
Last admission to care to Adoption Order	3:1	2:7	3:2	4:8	3:1

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

It is 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 10, children adopted by concurrent carers were on average younger at the time of the granting of the Adoption Order.

Table 10 Average ages of children at different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters (year ending 31 March 2020)

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

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

8. 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 11, below, sets out some of the statistics published in Northern Ireland, England and Wales¹⁰.

Table 11 Adoption statistics for Northern Ireland, England and Wales (year ending 31 March)

	Northern Ireland (2019/20)	England (2018/19)	Wales (2018/19)
All children adopted	111	3,570	309
Adoptions per 1,000 children in care at 31 March	34 ¹	46	45
Age at adoption			
Under 1	0%	7%	-
1-4	67%	74%	81%
5-9	33%	17%	16%
10-15		1%	-
16+	0%	<1%	-
Average age at adoption (yrs:months)	4:2	3:1	3:1
Average duration of last period of care (yrs:months)	3:1	1:11	2:2

¹ Note, number of children in care is based on 31 March 2018/19.

' - ' indicates that information is not available

Source: AD1 returns, Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland 2019/20

Source: Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2019

Source: Children looked after by local authorities in Wales April 2018 to March 2019

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

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

¹⁰ Figures for England and Wales are the latest available at time of publication.

Appendix A – Technical Notes

Data Collection

The figures for “Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland 2019/20” are derived from the fourteenth ‘AD1’ data collection of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland. The AD1 data collection 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 data collection 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 return, 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 returns are available to view or download from the DoH [website](#).

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 Trust Looked After Child 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 was therefore revised.

As a result, negative values are treated as the value '0' and are 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 Best Interest Proposal was in place (time = 0 months).

All time series included in this publication have been revised using this 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 Trust Looked After Child 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.

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in November 2013 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

If you have any comments on this publication, please contact Community Information Branch cib@health-ni.gov.uk .

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 2018 are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019>

Wales

Statistics on Children Looked After by Local Authorities are produced annually by the Welsh Assembly Government. Figures for the year ending 31 March 2018 are available through the link below:

<https://gov.wales/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2018-march-2019>

Appendix B - Additional Tables

Table 12 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
2018	84
2019	73
2020	111

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

Source from 2003: AD1 Returns, 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.

Table 13 Number of Children adopted from Care by HSC Trust (year ending 31 March)

HSC Trust	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Belfast	19	13	23	12	22	25
Northern	12	31	40	15	16	32
South Eastern	13	10	17	22	9	12
Southern	20	19	15	16	8	26
Western	8	16	25	19	18	16
Northern Ireland	72	89	120	84	73	111

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:

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