



## Key points from VAA Statistical Returns: 2007-8

### Context

1. In Spring 2008 CVAA commissioned Julie Selwyn from the Hadley Centre at Bristol University to examine the CVAA returns for the past 5 years. Her report was shared with members at the members Meeting in July 2008. As part of her work, Julie Selwyn had highlighted weaknesses in our annual data collection; for example, ambiguous phrasing of some questions leading to inaccurate responses and/or potential double counting.
2. The Annual CVAA Return was redesigned to take account of Julie Selwyn's comments and members agreed that the same template should be used for 2008-09.
3. All agencies completed a return. A breakdown of responses by question and a comparison with previous years is attached at Appendix 1.

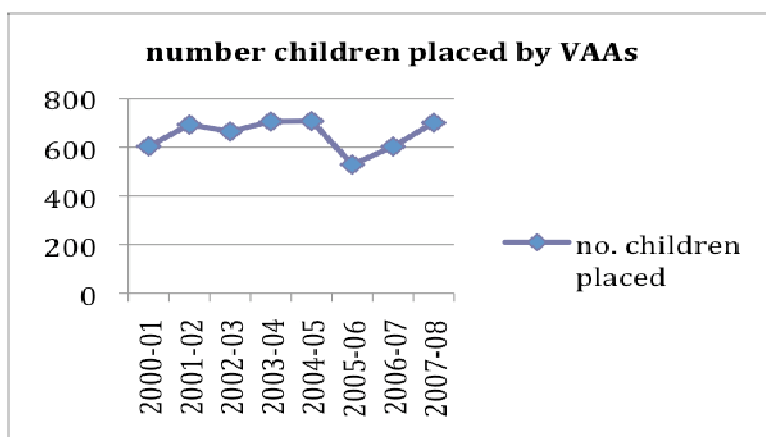
### Key Findings

4. Headline totals are: (*figures for 2006-07 in brackets*)
  - 506 (581) families approved for domestic adoption during the year
    - 62 were single (12%)
    - 252 were approved for a sibling group
    - in 134 families one or both of the adoptive parents has a BME background
    - in 9 one or both the adoptive parents would describe themselves as disabled
    - 66 were approved as second time adopters
    - 10 were same sex couples (6 male, 4 female)
    - 7506 enquiries were received during the year
    - 755 assessments of prospective adopters began during the year
  - 473 (464) approved families did not have a placement on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008
  - 64 (76) approved families withdrew during the year
  - 736 (561) children placed by VAAs were not subject of an Adoption Order on 31<sup>st</sup> March
  - 701 (622) children were placed with VAA families during the year: 349 boys and 352 girls
  - 159 (144) sibling groups were placed: 114 (123) being pairs
  - 491 (546) children placed by VAAs were made subject of an Adoption Order
  - 40 placements disrupted before an Order was made
  - 2044 children are receiving support other than letterbox
  - 1791 letterbox arrangements are in place involving 1567 children
  - 2782 adults received access to information/intermediary services
  - 1344 birth relatives received intermediary services during the year
  - 120 (144) families were assessed for inter-country adoption during the year

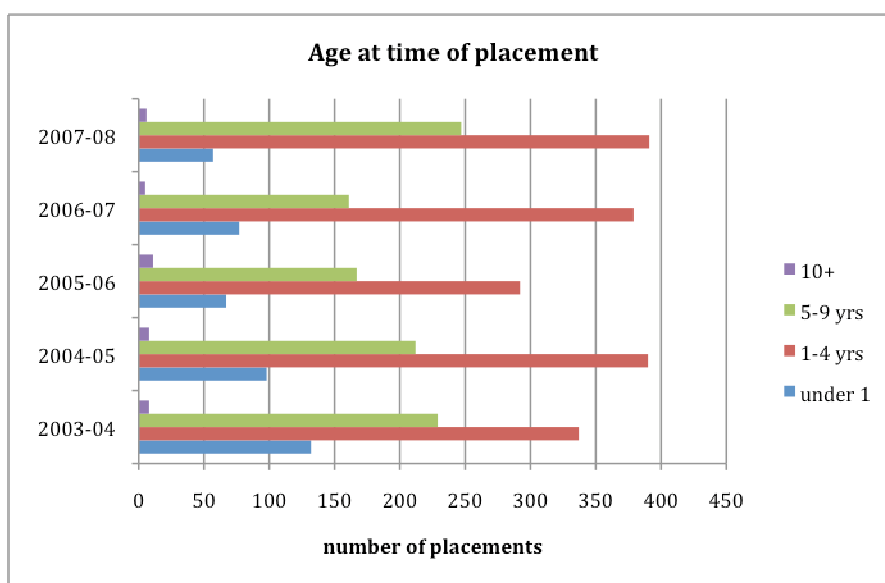
## Analysis

### *Children placed*

5. This year 79 more children were placed than in 2006-07; 701 compared to 622. This is also an increase on the previous year and nearly at the 2004-05 figure<sup>1</sup>.



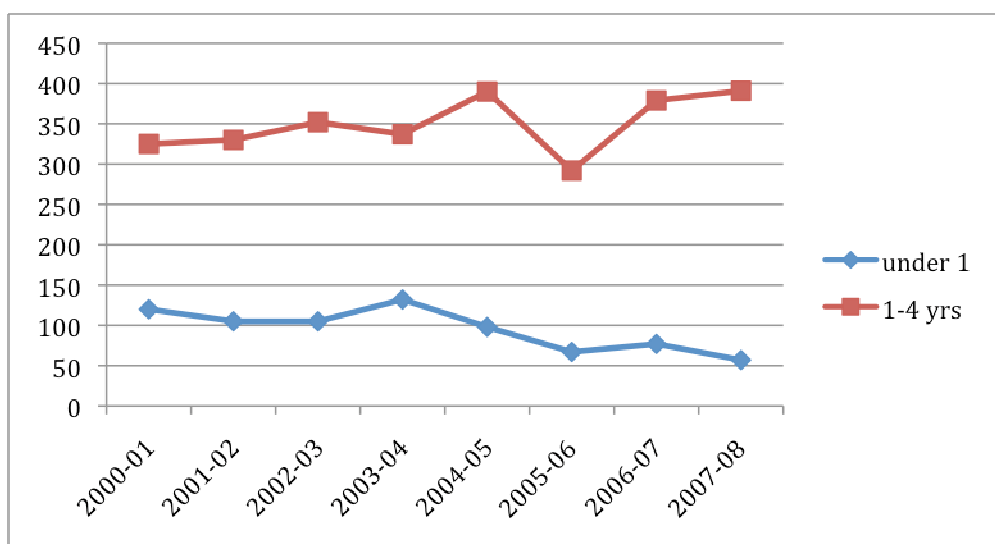
6. The chart demonstrates the age distribution by year:



7. Figures for the ages of children placed have only been collected in age bands since 2003-04. Before that, figures were collected in respect of children under 5 at the age of placement. This confirms that as the focus of practice has increasingly moved to evidencing that all possible efforts have been made to enable a child to live within their family, the number of children placed before their first birthday has decreased. Whilst understandably it is important for a child to know that work was undertaken, the older the age at placement, the more likely it will be that the child's early experiences will impact on his/her capacity to attach to the adoptive family.

<sup>1</sup> Note in 2001-02 and 2002-03 two VAAs did not make a return and in 2004-05 three agencies did not submit a return

## CVAA Member Activities 2007-08



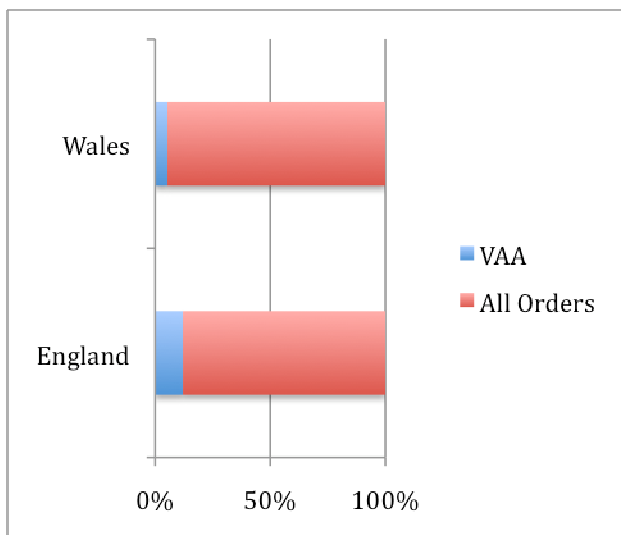
8. The number of Adoption Orders made in respect of children placed by VAAs has reduced again; inviting the question about whether the length of time between placement and Order is increasing.

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
No. VAAs		26/29	28/30	30/32	35/35	33/36	34/35	35/35	35/35
No. Adoption Orders	472	522	538	559	664	601	572	546	491

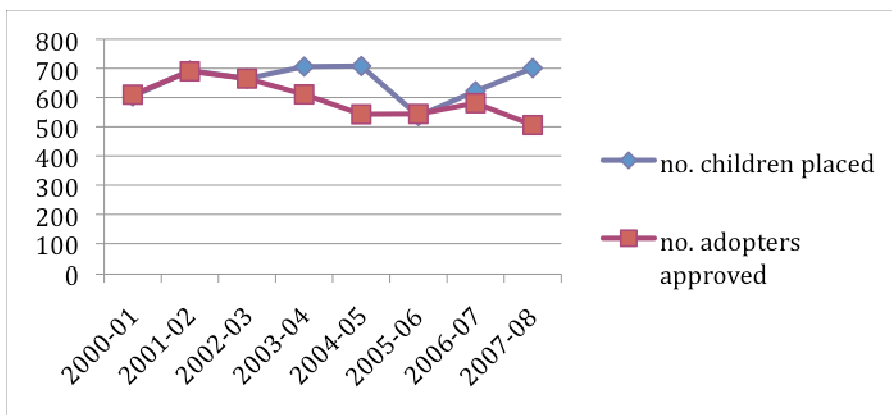
9. 436 Orders were in respect of children placed by VAAs in England, 3 in the Isle of Man, 12 in Wales, 1 in Northern Ireland and 39 in Scotland. The next chart shows how these compare to the total number of Orders made (national figures are not yet available for Scotland and Northern Ireland).
10. The DCSF Statistics<sup>2</sup> show that in 2007-08 3200 children were adopted from care compared to 3300 in 2006-07 and 3800 in 2003-04. The 27 VAAs in England were responsible for 13.62% Orders and in Wales the share was 6%: 12 of the 212 Orders. It is possible that a small number of children will be placed cross border and so the figures must be taken as an indicator only because the national statistics refer to children for whom they are responsible whereas the VAAs refer to Orders made in respect of children placed with their adopters.

<sup>2</sup> DCSF Children looked after in England year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008; released 16<sup>th</sup> September

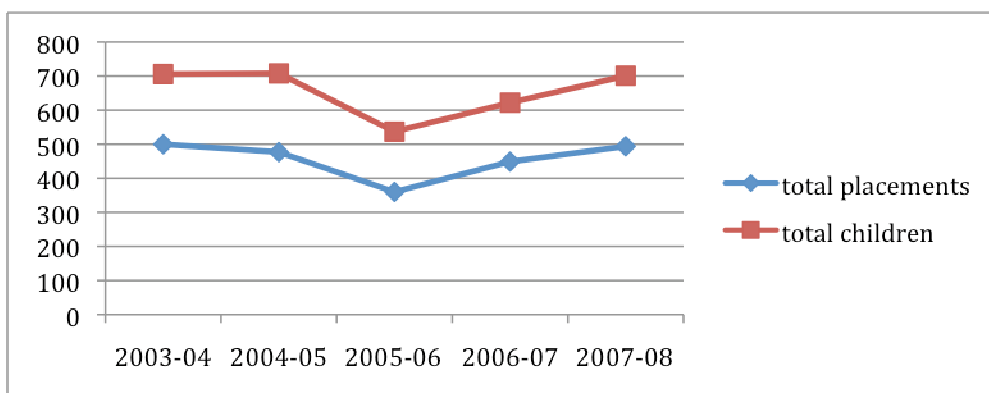
CVAA Member Activities 2007-08

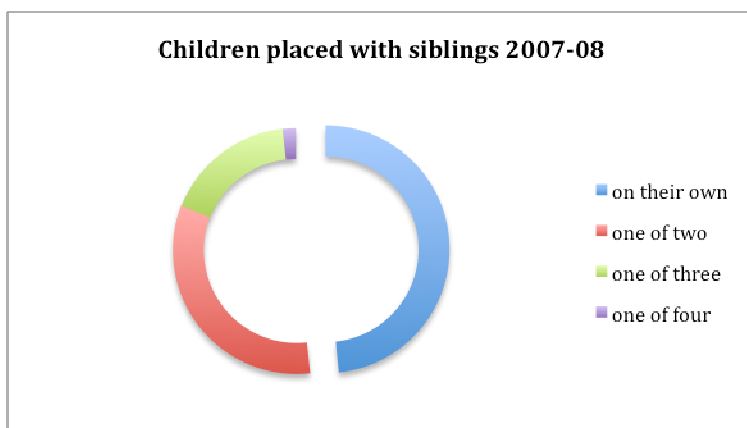


11. The next chart shows the children placed in relation to the number of adopters approved; however, it should be remembered that children are not always placed as single placements.



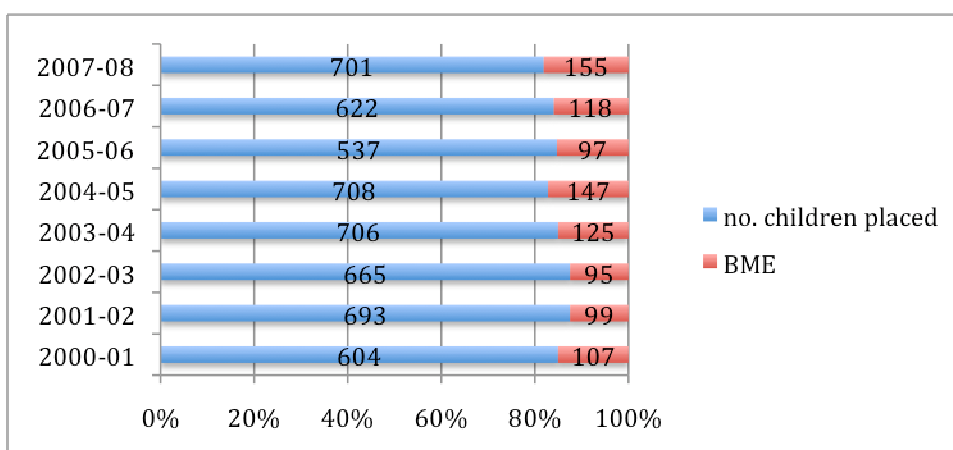
12. This year 159 sibling groups were placed; twelve more than in 2006-07 and 14 more than in 2005-06. These comprised 114 pairs, 42 groups of three and three groups of four. The relationship between the number of children placed and the number of placements is shown below:





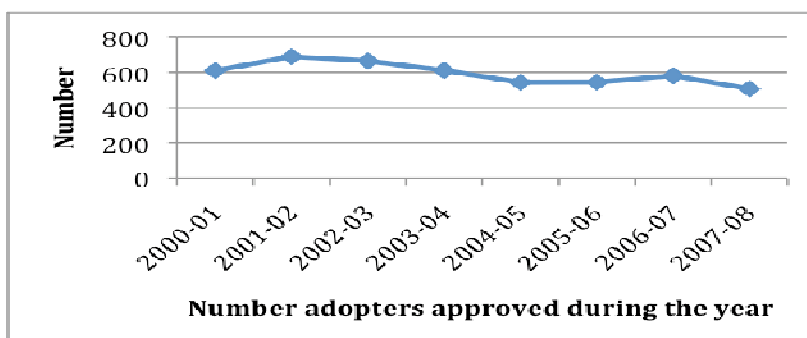
13. 155 children placed were of BME heritage; 150 placed by VAAs in England and five by VAAs in Scotland. Although comparable figures are not available, looking at the heritage of children who were made subject to an Adoption Order in 2007-08 in England<sup>3</sup>; 19% were from a BME background. VAAs in England placed 623 children of whom 150 had a BME heritage; 24%.

14. The table shows the total number of children placed and the number with a BME background.



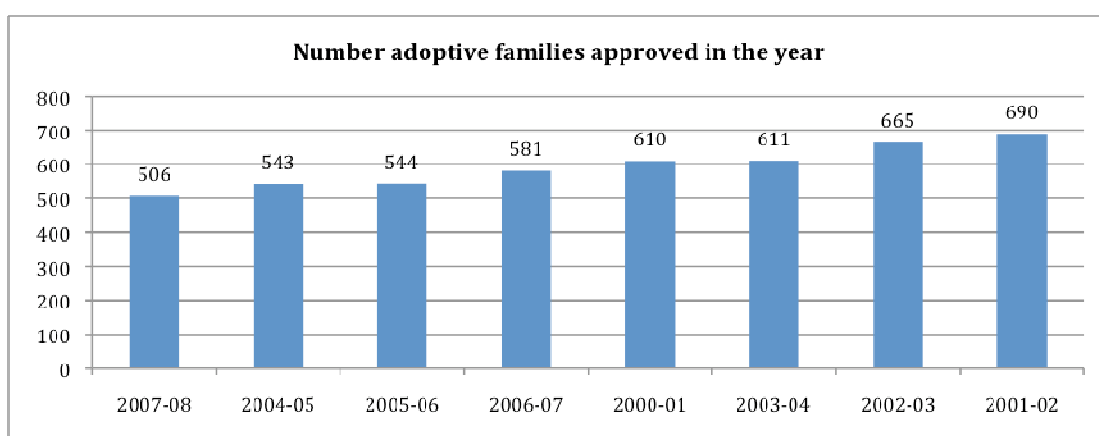
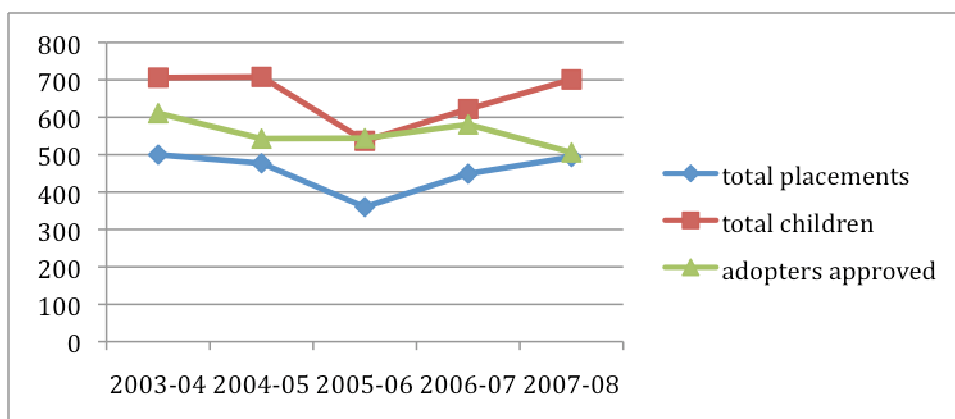
### Adopters

15. 506 families were approved for domestic adoption during the year; 75 fewer than the previous year and the lowest number since CVAA began collecting statistics.



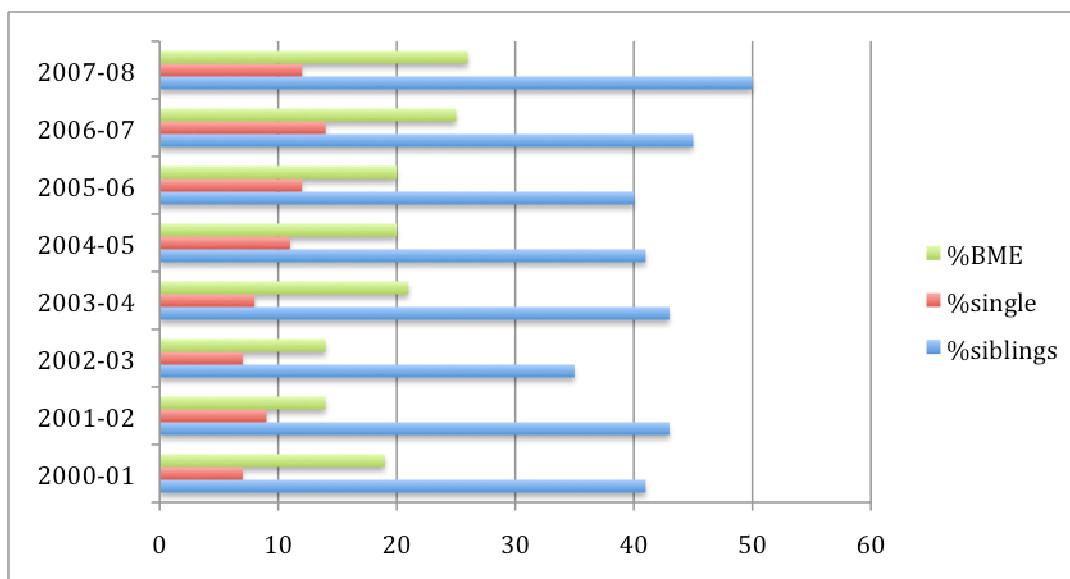
<sup>3</sup> Data for Scotland and Northern Ireland is not yet available

16. Looking at this in comparison to the number of placements shows that the trend for approvals is going the opposite way to the increasing number of placements.



17. Half the adopters approved during the year were approved for a sibling group compared to 44.5% in 2006-07 and 39% in 2005-06.
18. 10 (2%) were same sex couples (6 male, 4 female)
19. Of the 62 single adopters approved only one was male. This is the first year that this gender detail has been collected. As a proportion of approved adopters single adopters accounted for 12%: down from 14% the previous year but higher than the 11% of 2005-06.
20. Ten same sex couples were approved; 4 female and six male; all in England.
21. 26% of approved adopters included a parent from a BME background: primarily in England (31%). Wales and Northern Ireland did not have any BME and Scotland only 4 (6% of approved adopters).
22. The chart shows the percentage of all approvals by characteristics; some of these will of course overlap.

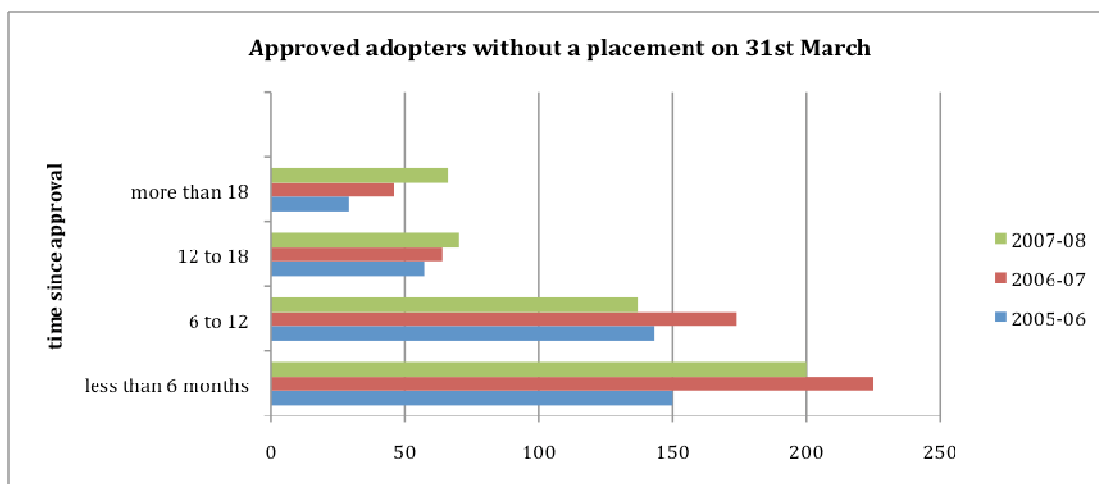
## CVAA Member Activities 2007-08



23. It does show that the number of single adopters is increasing and this perhaps suggests that VAAs will need to think carefully about their marketing given anecdotal evidence that workers are more likely to seek a couple as adopters.
24. This year for the first time a question was asked about disability; 9 of the approved families included a parent who would describe themselves as disabled; 7 in England, and one each in Wales and Scotland.

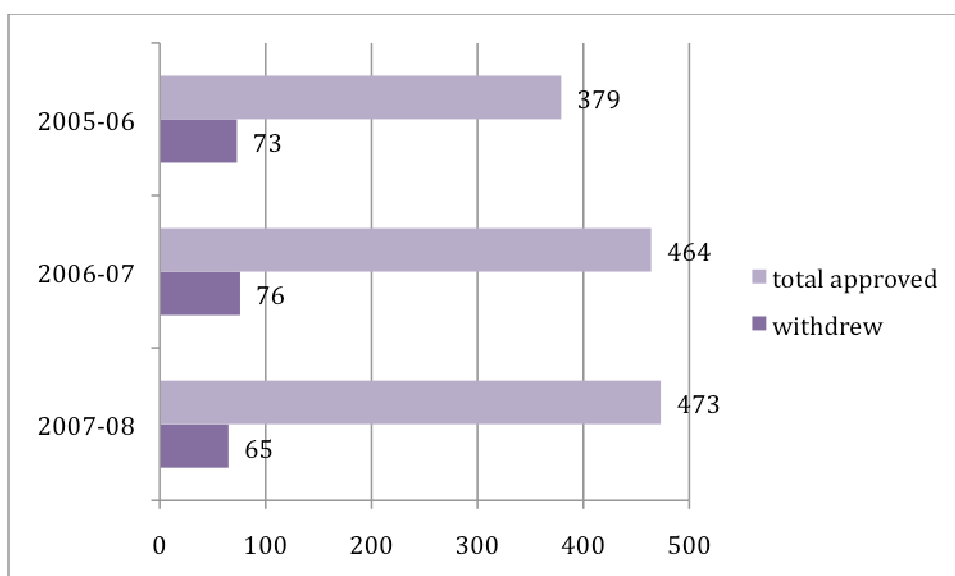
473 approved families were without a placement on 31<sup>st</sup> March; a slight increase on 2006-07 (464) and a considerable increase over 2005-06 (379). The Table shows the breakdown across the four nations. The chart shows how the length of time adopters have been waiting since approval has increased.

Length of approval	<i>Eng and Isle of Man</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>NI</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>07-08</i>	<i>06-07</i>	<i>05-06</i>
Less than 6 months	171	6	1	22	200	225	150
6-12 months	117	1	6	13	137	174	143
12-18 months	62	0	1	7	70	64	57
More than 18 months	59	0	6	1	66	46	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>379</b>



25. The issue of withdrawals was discussed at the July Members Meeting and so a question was asked this year about the reasons. Members wanted to learn about the reasons so that as far as possible these could be avoided in future. The question posed was whether VAAs took on “marginal” families.

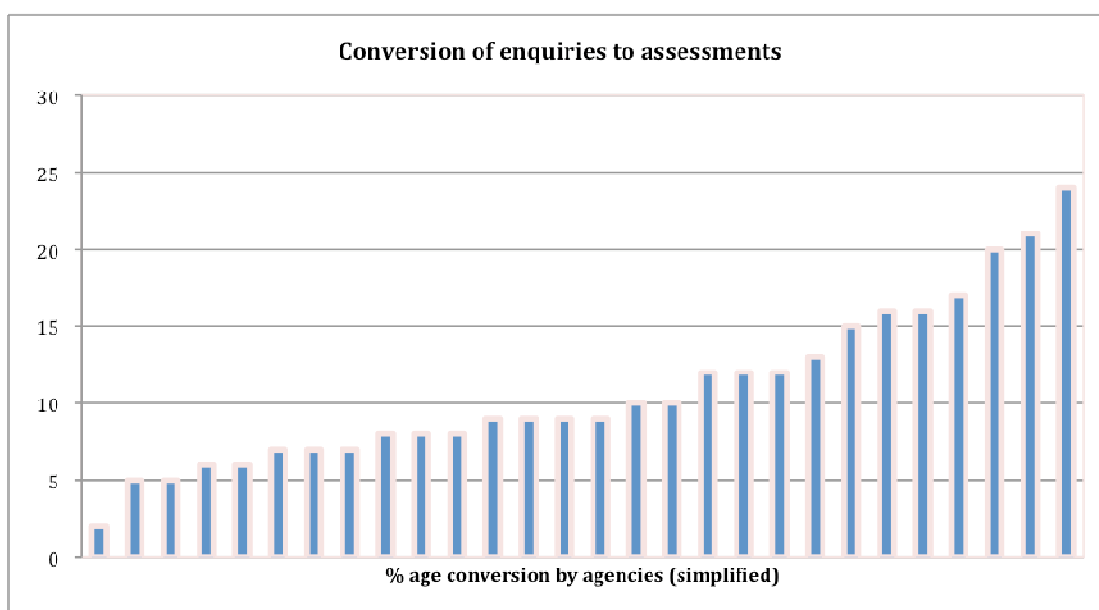
26. 65 families withdrew after approval; 56 in England, 1 in Wales, 3 in Northern Ireland and 5 in Scotland. This is lower than 2006-07 (76) and 2—5-06 (73). As a proportion of the number of approved adopters without a placement on 31<sup>st</sup> March (not a direct comparison) this is



27. 11 of the 65 (17%) withdrew because of their own pregnancy, seven because of relationship breakdown and 47 for “other” reasons. These included

- no placement
- approved for sibling but link did not proceed
- emigrated
- change in needs of birth children
- transferred to another agency (2)
- single adopter started a relationship
- illness

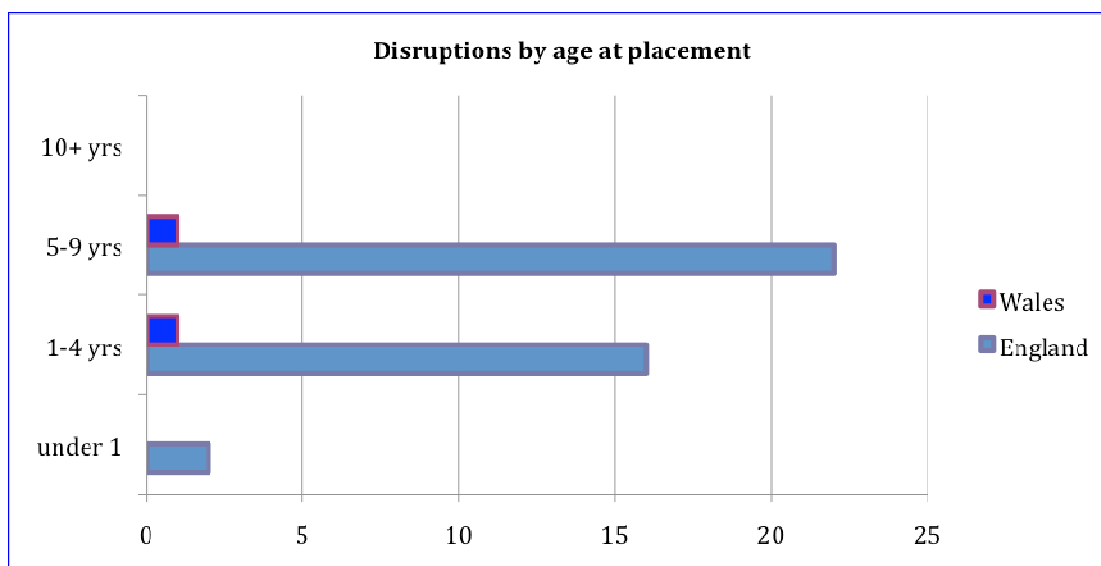
28. Although 65 is high when considered in the context of the cost to VAAs with no return (because the placement cannot be sold) the feedback did not suggest that there was an issue about VAAs assessing families who are unlikely to be used. There are also no comparable Local Authority figures but they too experience loss of families.
29. This year for the first time agencies were asked about the number of enquiries they received from people interested in applying to adopt; 7506. 755 assessments were begun: approximately 10% (although of course some of these will be in respect of people who made their first contact in the previous year and some of those who enquired this year will begin their assessment next year). As an indicator however it does prompt the question of whether VAAs should review their marketing materials so that enquirers are better able to select an agency. This has to be considered in the context of the recent survey findings which showed that the majority of people interested in adopting approached two or more agencies.
30. Looking at individual agency returns shows that the "conversion" rate ranged from 80% to 2.3%. It may be that the high scoring VAA use a different definition for enquiry, so removing that the range was 2.3% to 23%. This is shown on the chart (some rates applied to more than one agency).



31. Two assessments for Special Guardianship Orders were undertaken during the year and eleven kin viability assessments: 9 in England and 2 in Northern Ireland.

*Disruption*

32. 42 placements disrupted before the Order was made during the year; 40 in England and 2 in Wales. VAAs were aware of seven placements that disrupted after an Order had been made; all in England. Six were children who were placed when they were over 10. The seventh was a child aged between 5 and 9 years.



33. In comparison, 36 placements disrupted in 2006-07 and 28 the previous year. Age details were not collected.

34. As a percentage of the number of children placed (although the placements that disrupt are not necessarily placed within the same year) this is 5.99%. In 2006-07 the rate was 5.97% with 5.29% in 2005-06.

### Adoption Register

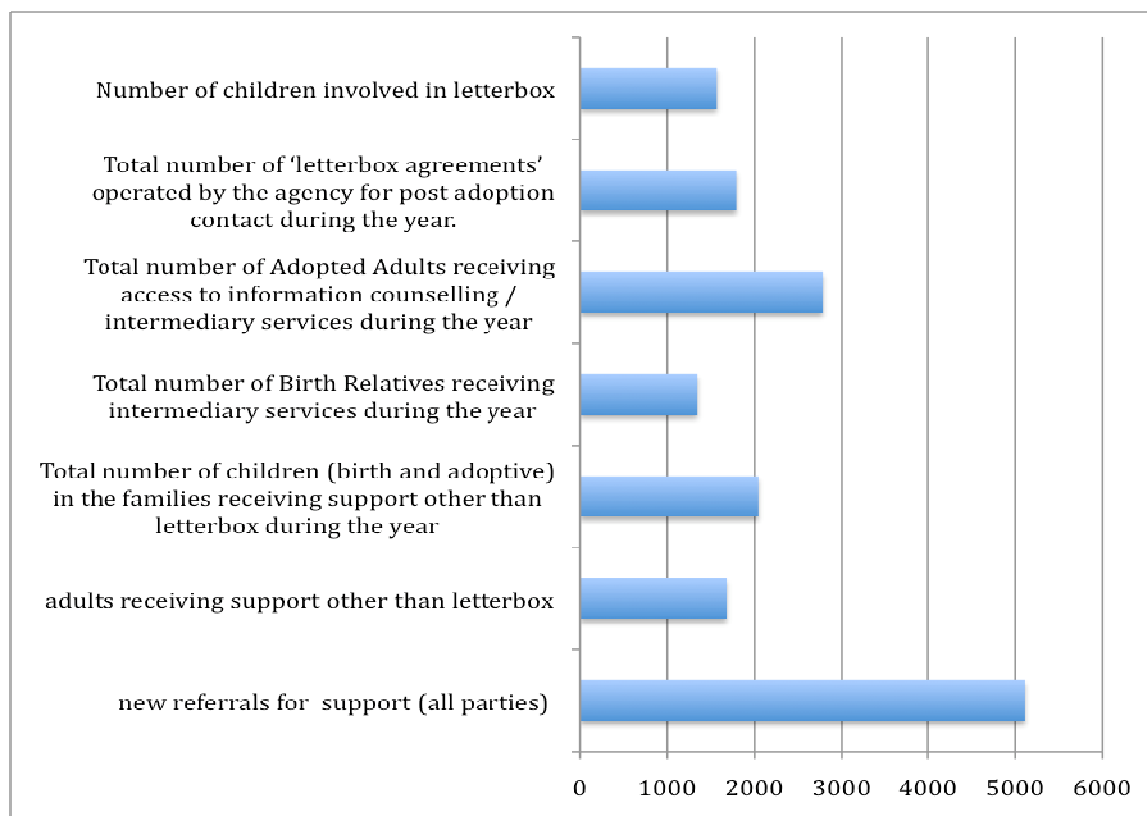
35. The 2007 Annual Report for the Adoption Register (England and Wales) has recently been published. 199 children were matched in 2007: VAAs provided placements for 92 (46%):

- 41 of the 101 children in single placements
- 18 of the 40 sibling pairs
- 5 of the 6 sibling groups of three
- 

### Other work undertaken by VAAs

36. Adoption Support is a key part of the services provided by VAAs and in 2007-08 5113 new referrals for support were received: 4680 in England and the Isle of Man, 32 in Wales, 320 in Northern Ireland and 81 in Scotland. Although this is significantly lower than in 2006-07 (6608 referrals) it is nearer to the 2005-06 figure of 5633. The numbers receiving support via networks or groups (and not individually or by letterbox) was 3008; an increase on last year (2852) but a decrease over 2005-06 (3122).

37. Intermediary services were provided to 1344 birth relatives; a slight decrease from last year (1393) but still considerably higher than 2005-06 (967). This year the criteria for recording support activity was more clearly defined and this may explain some of the figures across the activities shown in the Table in Appendix 1. The next chart shows the combined totals.



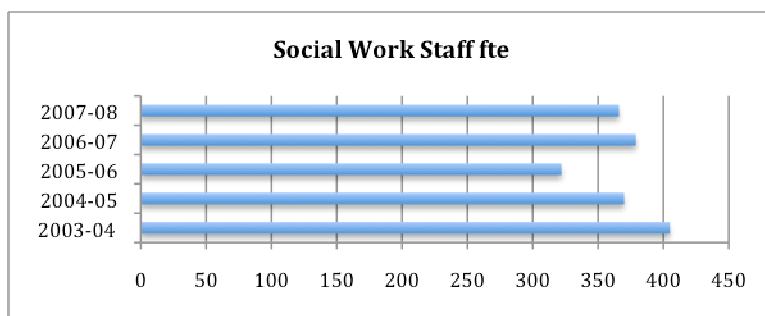
38. This year saw a decrease in the number of families assessed for inter-country adoption; 120 compared to 144 last year and 118 in 2005-06. However, 253 families were supported during the year, a considerable increase over the 48 in 2006-07 but still a decrease in comparison to the 390 in 2005-06.

39. As in previous years, VAAs undertake a wide range of other activities for example:

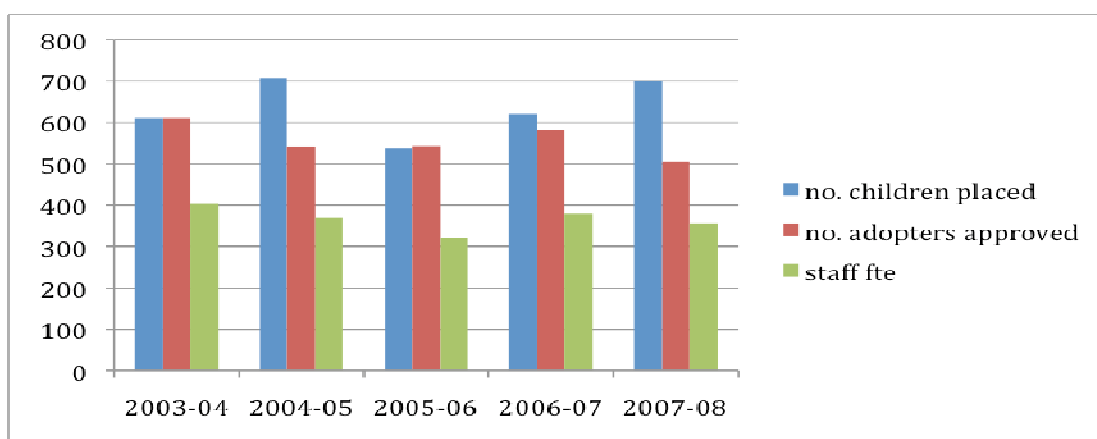
- Charing Adoption Panels
- Charing Disruption Meetings
- Training
- Parenting programmes with adopters
- IRM panel membership
- Social work service to Catholic Schools
- Life Story Work
- Consultancy
- Concurrent planning projects
- Participation in research
- Student placements

**Staff**

40. The number of fte staff on 31<sup>st</sup> March has decreased this year from 379 in 2006-07 to 366. These figures include all registered social work staff working in adoption, including sessional workers, team leaders and managers.



41. Figures for 2004-05 relate to all but three VAAs and for 2005-06 to all but one VAA.

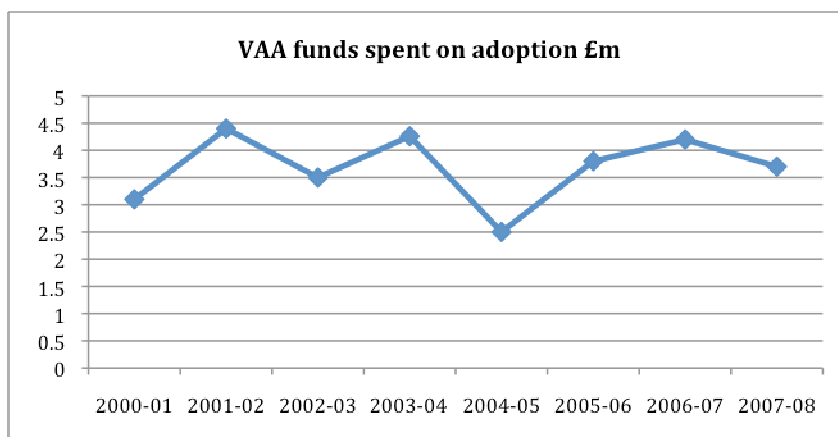


42. Looking at the relationship between staffing and throughput shows, not surprisingly, some correlation. However, it does not show the adoption support or other work that VAAs undertake and so is not a full perspective.

### Finance

43. VAAs contributed £3.7m towards the cost of the services they provided, a decrease from £4.2m in 2006-07. This year one agency did not provide a figure and last year several did not; thus the figure must be seen as an under-estimate.

44. These figures relate to income not derived from inter-agency fees, contracts or service level agreements. In addition, it is important to note that a VAA may also subsidise their services; for example, where the number of "sales" in a year is low the running costs of the VAA may remain the same and it may be the following year before the placement is sold.



## CONCLUSIONS

45. This report has illustrated the contribution that VAAs make to adoption work across the UK. It is encouraging to see that the number of children placed has increased: now that the Adoption and Children Act 2002 has been in force for three years (since 30<sup>th</sup> December 2005) it is likely that the impact on activity has evened out.
46. However, pressure on VAAs continues and the figures in this report illustrate more than ever the importance of good quality business planning and marketing. The different charts should prompt individual member agencies to consider the issues within their own agencies against the overall findings.
47. The research being undertaken by Bristol and Loughborough Universities will therefore be helpful in providing a breakdown of the costs of activity in respect of adoption. BAAF and the VAAS will then be in a position to review the inter-agency fee.

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