

Introduction

This report discusses the activities of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in 2010-11 and compares these with previous years.

CVAA has 32 members, including those organisations in Associate Membership; all concerned with delivering adoption and adoption support services in the UK. All of those members who undertake adoption placement activity completed the statistical return.

The statistics for 2010-11 include for the first time, data relating to the activities which a number of agencies carry out in respect of inter country adoption. CVAA will be reviewing this information to determine whether and what additional data regarding this aspect of the sector's work would be useful.

Unless stated otherwise, all the data presented in sections other than that headed inter country adoption, refer to domestic adoption activity in the UK

Overall this robust collection of data has proved invaluable in analysing adoption trends not only within the sector but more broadly, and it may be possible to make additional information available in response to any particular issues raised by various stakeholders.

Key Findings

The headline totals for 2010-11 are: (figures for 2009-10 are in brackets)

- 618 (614) children were placed with VAA families during the year: 335 (325) boys and 283 (289) girls
- 511 (558) children placed by VAAs were made subject of an Adoption Order
- 148 (149) sibling groups were placed: 129 (119) of these were pairs
- 467 (489) families were approved for domestic adoption during the year, of whom:
 - 60 (61) were single applicants (13%)
 - 210 (259) were approved for a sibling group
 - one or both of the adoptive parents in 104 (143) families has a BME background
 - in 4 (7) one or both of the adoptive parents would describe themselves as disabled
 - 47 (56) were approved as second time adopters
 - 18 (17) were same sex couples: 7 female and 11 male (7 female, 10 male)

- 7581 (8502) enquiries were received during the year.
 - 655 (607) assessments of prospective adopters began during the year
 - 366 (472) approved families did not have a placement on 31st March 2011
 - 37 (80) approved families withdrew during the year
 - 1446 (1010) letterbox arrangements are in place involving 1331 (1104) children
 - 1870 (2287) Adopted adults received access to information/intermediary services
 - 1012 (1139) birth relatives received intermediary services during the year
- Additionally
- 88 (62) families were assessed for inter-country adoption during the year
 - 58 inter country adoptions took place, 30 boys and 28 girls

Charts

1	Children placed 2000-01 to 2010-11
1a	Children placed in England in comparison with the rest of the UK in 2009-10 and 2010-11
2	Number of VAAs placing number of children
2a	Number of VAAs approving adopters
3	Children placed singly or in sibling group
4	Comparison of children placed and adopters approved
5	Age at time of placement 2000-01 to 2010-11
6	Age at placement Comparison with 2009-10 and 2010-11
7	Age distribution of children placed 2000-01 to 2010-11
7a	Inter Country Age distribution of children placed 2010-11
8	Children placed by gender
9	Number of BME children placed 2000-01 to 2010-11
9a	Percentage of BME children placed 2000-01 to 2010-11
10	Additional needs of children placed table
11	Additional needs of children placed graph
12	Adoption Orders made in respect of children placed with VAA adopters
12a	Children placed but not yet subject to Order on 31 st March
13	Relationship year on year between the numbers of children placed and Orders made
14	Disruption after placement but before making of Order
15	Number of adopters approved within year 2000-01 to 2010-11
16	The % adopters approved for siblings
17	Second time approvals
18	The number of adopters approved of BME heritage
18a	The % adopters approved of BME heritage
19	Characteristics of adopters approved within 2010-11: single/couple
20	Characteristics of adopters approved single/couple 2007-08 to 2010-11
21	Characteristics of adopters approved same sex and single adopters 2008-09 to 2010-11
22	Length of time since approval of adopters without a placement by Nation
23	Length of time since approval of adopters without a placement
24	Length of time since approval of adopters without a placement compared to number of adopters who withdrew
25	Enquiries from people interested in applying to adopt

26	Enquiries and assessments 2007-08 to 2010-11
27	Relationship of assessments begun to number of enquiries
27a	Relationship of Inter Country assessments begun to number of enquiries
28	New referrals for support
29	Support services provided
30	Letterbox agreements
31	Staffing 2003-4 to 2010-11
32	Staffing and throughput

Where possible the following colours code has been used on the graphs

2010 -11	2009 -10	2008 -9	2007 -8
Yellow	Red	Blue	Green

1. The first section of the report looks at the work of the VAAs in 2010-11 in comparison to previous years. However, it is important to set the analysis into context; the figures are a snapshot of the year from 1st April to 31st March and thus there will be work undertaken within the year which does not show in the figures; if for example a placement is made on 2nd April, the preparation for this will have been undertaken in the previous year and the adopters will have been counted as not having a placement on 31st March.
2. The report begins by looking at the children placed with VAA adopters and then at the characteristics of adopters. The third section details the range of other work undertaken by VAAs.
3. It is important to clarify that the term 'a placement' refers to the entity which is created when a child or children have moved to live permanently with a new adoptive family. The placement may relate to a single child or to more than one child and therefore placement numbers do not always equate to the actual number of children placed.

CHILDREN PLACED

4. There was a slight increase in the overall number of children placed this year: 618 compared with 614 in 09/10, but both these figures remain below 'the peaks' of 701 and 673 children in the years 07/08 and 08/09 respectively. It is also interesting to note that the increase pertains to children placed in the rest of the UK, other than in England where the figure decreased from 531 to 510.

The voluntary sector clearly continues to make a significant contribution in securing permanency for children through adoption, however the overall downward trend is concerning given the anticipated increase which it is expected will be denoted in the statistics regarding the numbers of children looked after during 2010-11

Figure 1

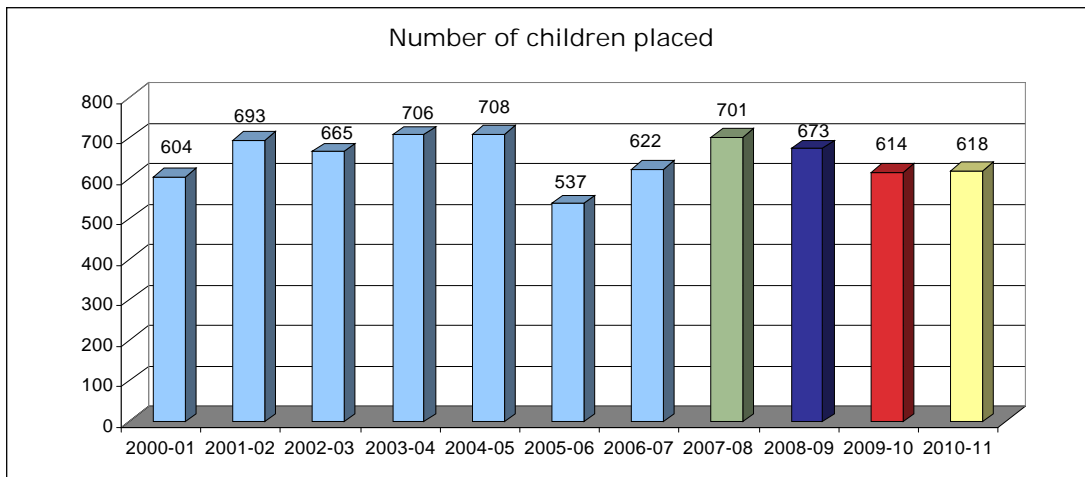
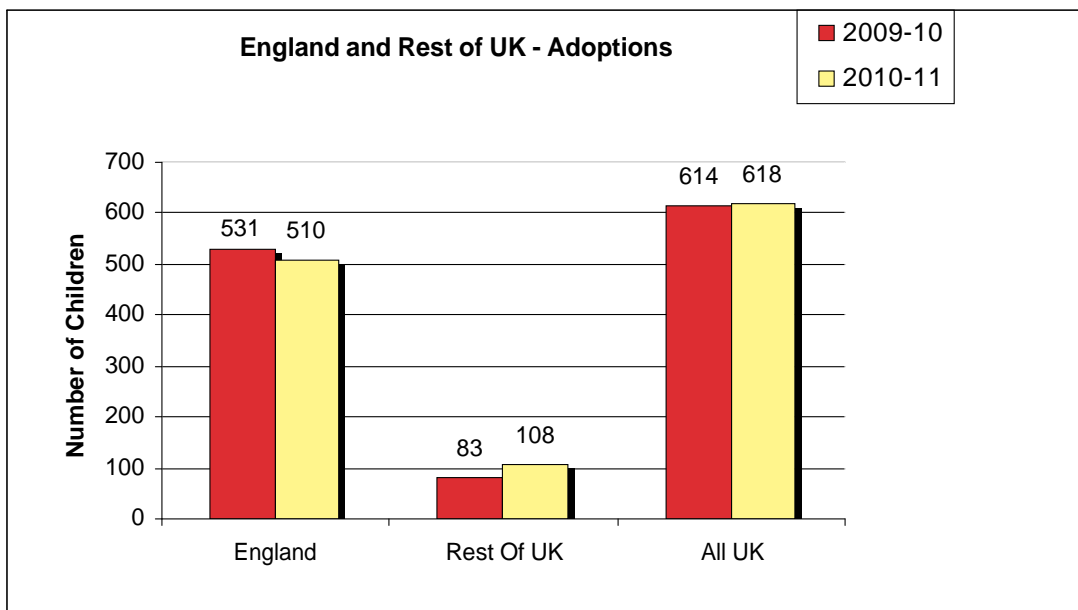


Figure 1a



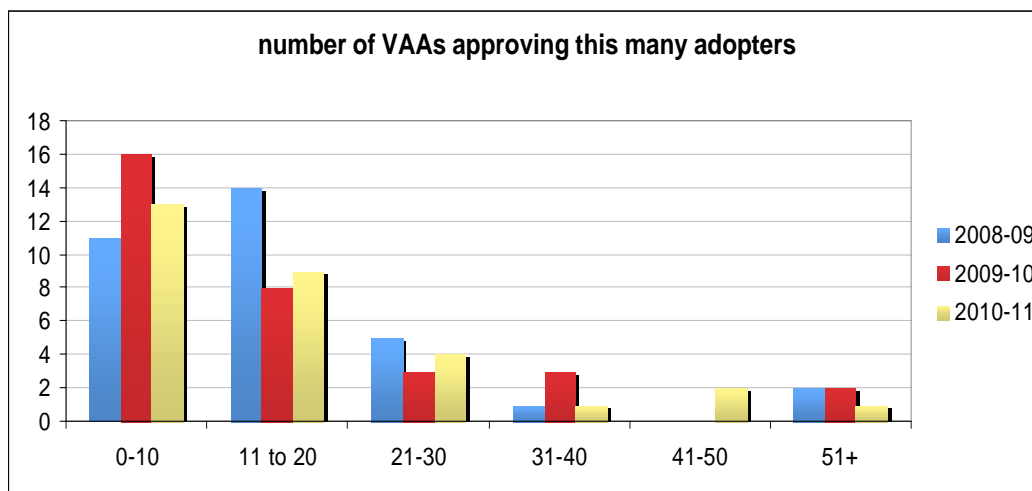
- There continue to be changes to the shape of the voluntary adoption sector with a small number of mergers. This reflects changes similarly in the statutory sector where an increased number of Local Authorities are reported to be working collaboratively with neighbouring LAs. CVAA is urging increased cooperation between member agencies, and with the statutory sector. Returns for 2010/11 demonstrate that 19 agencies each placed 20 or fewer children in the year and 3 each placed over 40 children, with the majority of agencies placing between 11 and 20 children.

With an increase over recent years in the number of children coming into care, most agencies, whether large or small, are seeking to increase the number of adoptive families which they can provide. It should be recognised, however, that many agencies undertake a wide range of adoption and non adoption work, with adoption placements being only a part of their activity.

Figure 2

Number VAAs placing this number of children	0-10	11 -20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+
2008-09	10	12	5	0	4	2
2009-10	11	12	4	3	4	2
2010-11	8	11	5	3	1	2

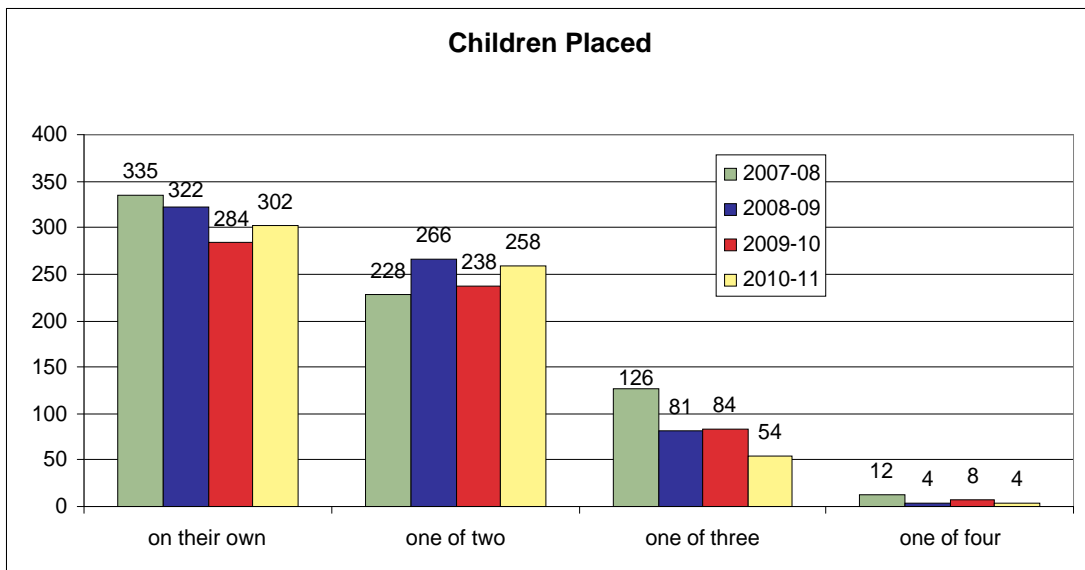
Figure 2a



6. Whilst the overall number of children placed increased slightly, there was a greater increase in the number of placements (618 children in 450 placements compared to 614 children in 433 placements in 09/10). In essence this year's figures show that the VAAs placed more children as single children (302 compared with 284 in the previous year) or with one other sibling (258 compared with 238 in the previous year). Conversely they demonstrate that fewer children were placed as a sibling group of 3 (54 as compared with 84) and only 1 group of 4 children were placed together as compared with 2 groups of 4 children in the previous year.

As stated previously, these statistics do represent a snapshot of activity, and next year's reports may look quite different, but the decrease in the placement of larger sibling groups requires careful monitoring. Certainly given the current economic climate, prospective adopters may feel more cautious about making the commitment to parent a larger sibling group, but this has significant implications for the provision of adoption support resources, particularly if the plans for a number of children are that ideally they be placed with several of their siblings.

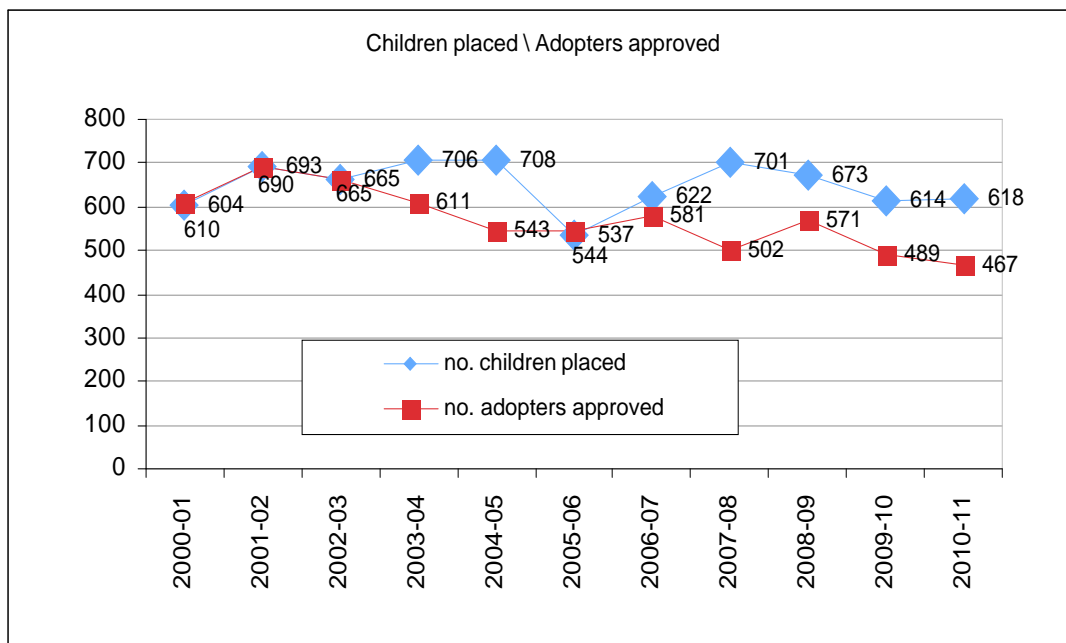
Figure 3



7. The following chart, Figure 4, shows the relationship between the number of children and the number of placements. It also shows the number of adopters approved as a context. Although it shows that more adopters were approved (467) than placements made (618 children in 450 placements) there is no direct correlation because of the importance of matching children with adopters who can meet their needs. In addition some of the placements will have been with adopters approved in previous years.

However, given the decrease in the number of families approved for domestic adoption (467 compared with 489 in 09/10) and the significant decrease in the number of families approved for sibling placements (201 compared with 259) there has to be concern about the availability of placements in the coming year and a concerted and targeted recruitment drive must be considered.

Figure 4



8. Figures for the ages of children placed have been collected in age bands since 2003-04.
9. Figure 5 compares the ages of children placed across the years whilst figure 6 demonstrates the age distribution of the children placed during 2010-11. This shows that the number of children placed under one has reduced considerably from last year, 18 compared to 36 the previous year. One of the primary reasons for this may be a consequence of the time taken for care proceedings. This remains extremely concerning, given the impact of delay on a child's ability to form an attachment to their new family.
10. The number of children placed in the 1 to 4 age band has remained almost the same (383 as compared with 384). The increased numbers of children placed by VAAs in the 5-9 age range (205 as compared with 188) is a positive indicator of the targeted placement activity of the sector, as is the increase from 6 to 12 being the comparative numbers of children placed aged 10 plus.

Figure 5

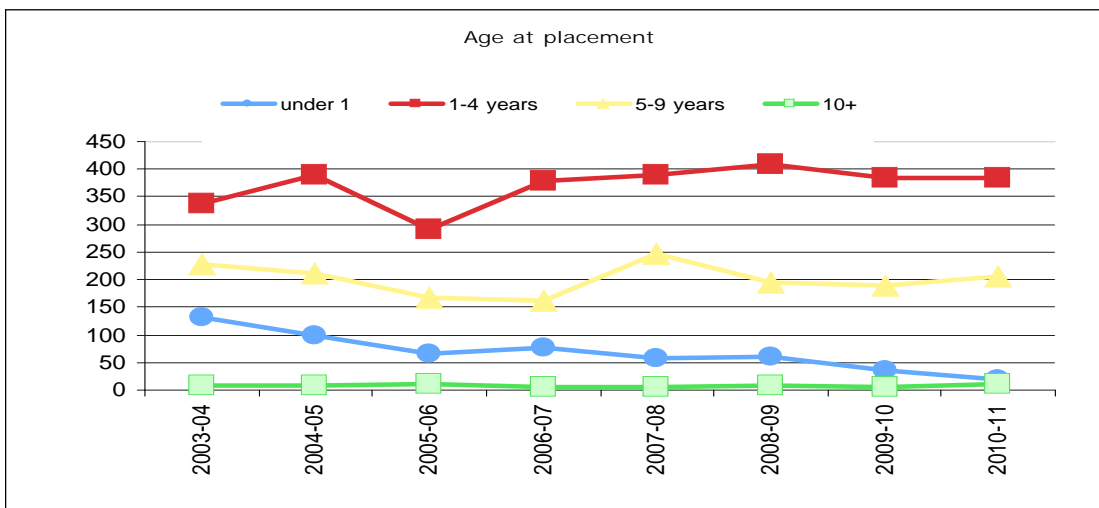
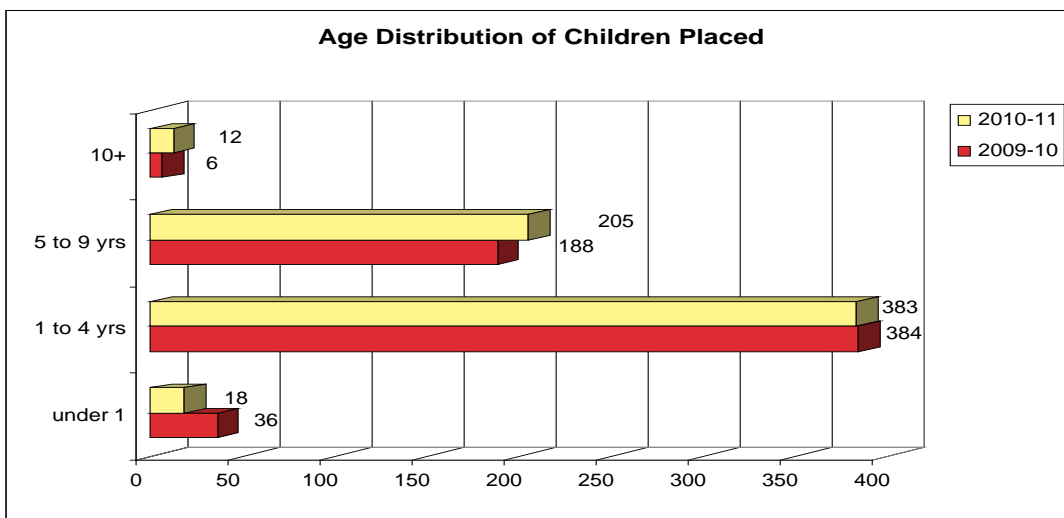


Figure 6



11. The proportion of placements by age is illustrated in the next chart. Figure 7a shows the Inter Country Placements by age which is new data set that has been collected for the first time this year.

Figure 7

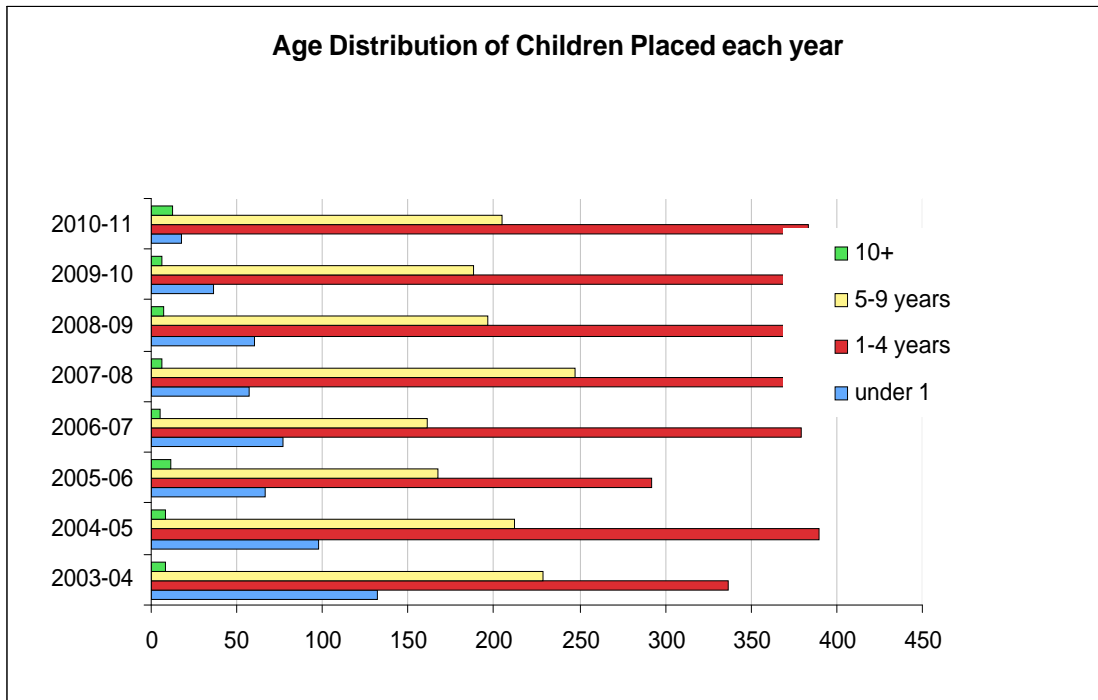
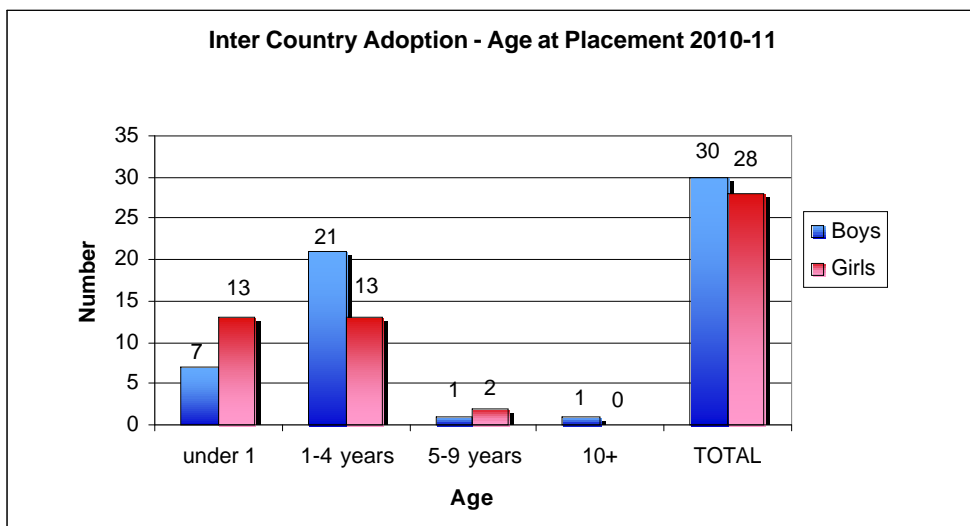
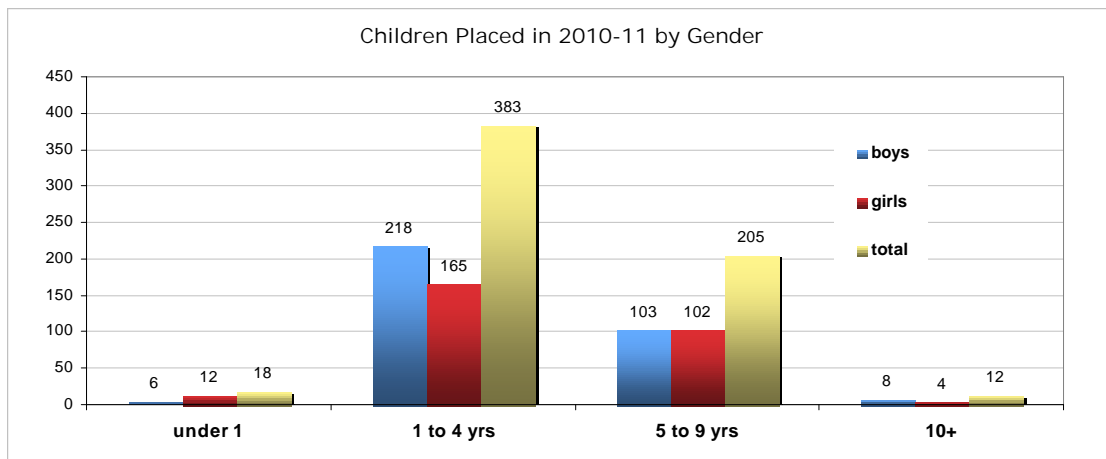


Figure 7a



12. Data in respect of gender has been collected since 2008/9. This year the % of boys placed has increased slightly to 54% (335 in comparison to 325) and for girls the number has decreased from 289 to 283. These are small changes and over a relatively short period of collection of this data. Nevertheless anecdotally boys are harder to place than girls and it may be therefore that the results again indicate some targeted recruitment and preparation work by the VAAs who seek to find families for those children whom Local Authorities find most difficult to place The distribution across age bands for 2010/11 placements is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8



13. The proportion of children placed of BME heritage has decreased slightly, from 23% to 21%. Whilst recognising the government's directive that children from BME heritage should not be disadvantaged by the delay in seeking a BME adoptive family, nevertheless the voluntary sector has supported some excellent initiatives focused on recruiting adopters from the BME communities and it is hoped these can continue to be sustained and developed.
14. Figure 9 shows the total number of children placed and the number with a BME background.

Figure 9

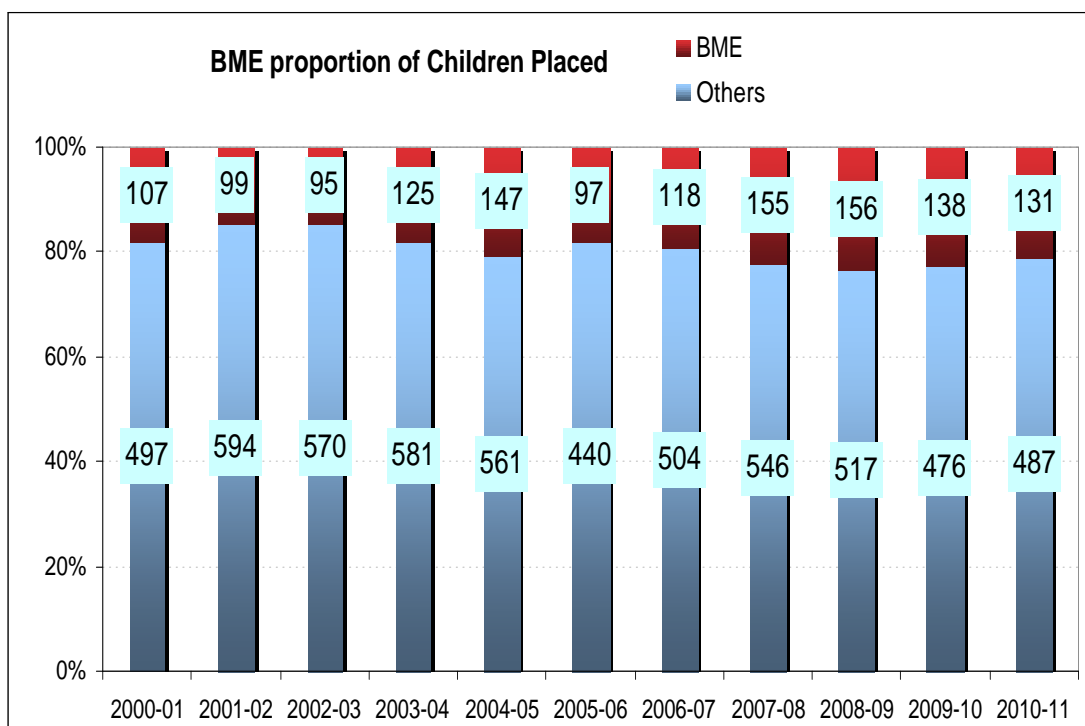
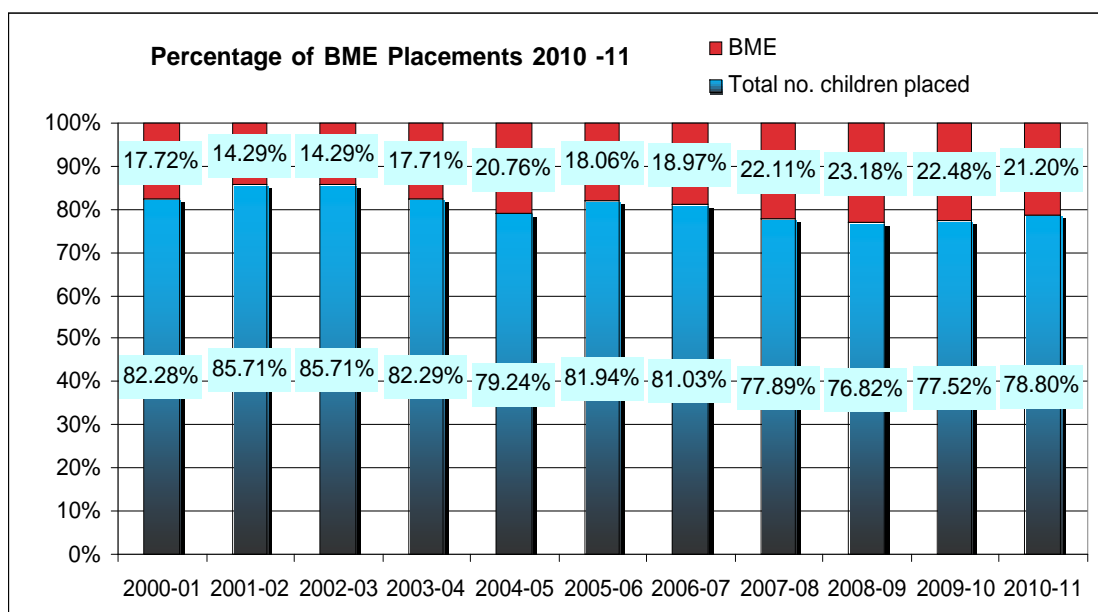


Figure 9a



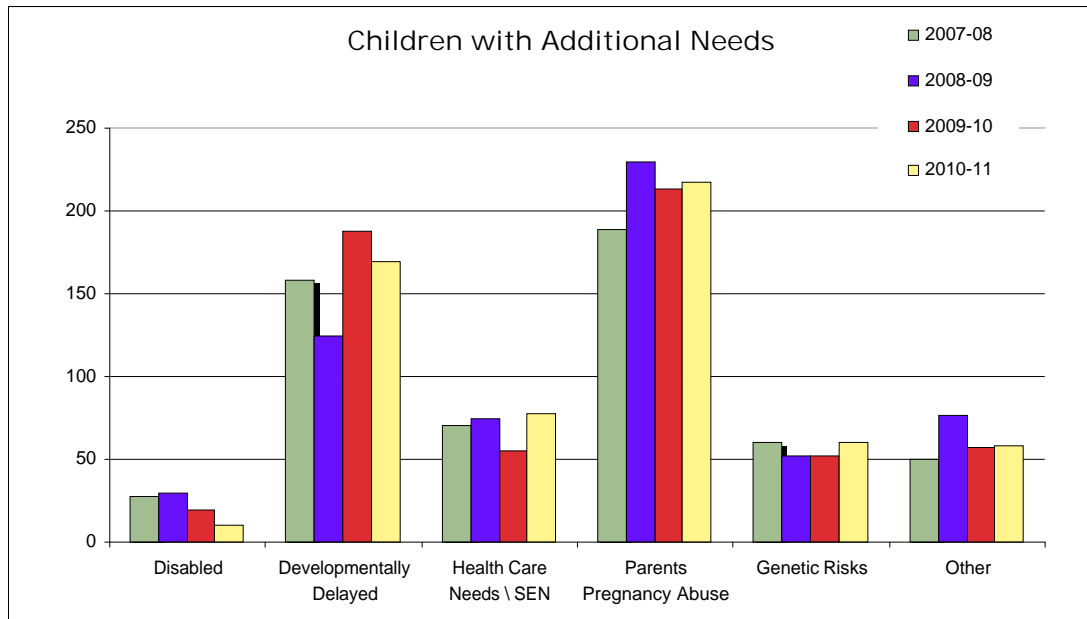
15. Since 2007/8 a question has been included about additional characteristics of children placed. It must be recognised that some children will have more than one characteristic and the numbers have not been totaled.

Figure 10

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Total number placed	701	673	614	618
Disabled	30	30	19	10
identified as developmentally delayed	158	124	188	169
identified as having specific health care needs, subject of an SEN statement	70	74	55	78
parents are known to have abused alcohol and drugs during pregnancy	189	230	213	217
known to carry genetic risks, such as schizophrenia	60	52	52	60
Other	50	77	57	58

16. The numbers show that the percentage of children placed who have specific health care needs and are subject of an SEN statement has risen from 9% to almost 13%. However the figures show that the number of children described as being developmentally delayed has decreased; it may therefore be that the way the additional needs are recorded has been applied differently. This is a complex area to evidence but certainly the VAAs continue to seek to recruit adopters for children with additional needs, many of which do not become fully evident until some time post placement.

Figure 11



17. The number of Adoption Orders made in respect of children placed by VAAs reduced for the second consecutive year, with 511 orders made as compared with 558. It is also worth noting that this statistic does not tell us how long a child was in placement before an Order was granted.

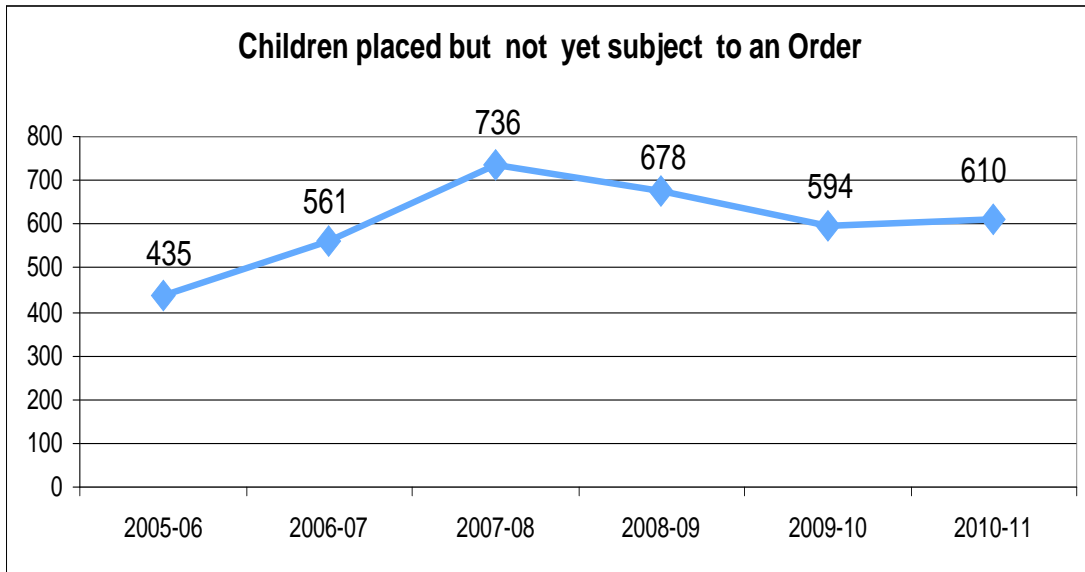
Figure 12 refers to the number of CVAA member agencies engaged in domestic adoption activity and although this has decreased from the previous year, it should not have impacted significantly on Adoption Order numbers at this stage, as when mergers or closures of agencies occurs the current work of the agency which is closing or merging is usually taken on by the larger or another agency.

Figure 12

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
No. VAAs	35/35	33/36	34/35	35/35	35/35	35/35	34	30
No. Orders	664	601	572	546	491	609	558	511

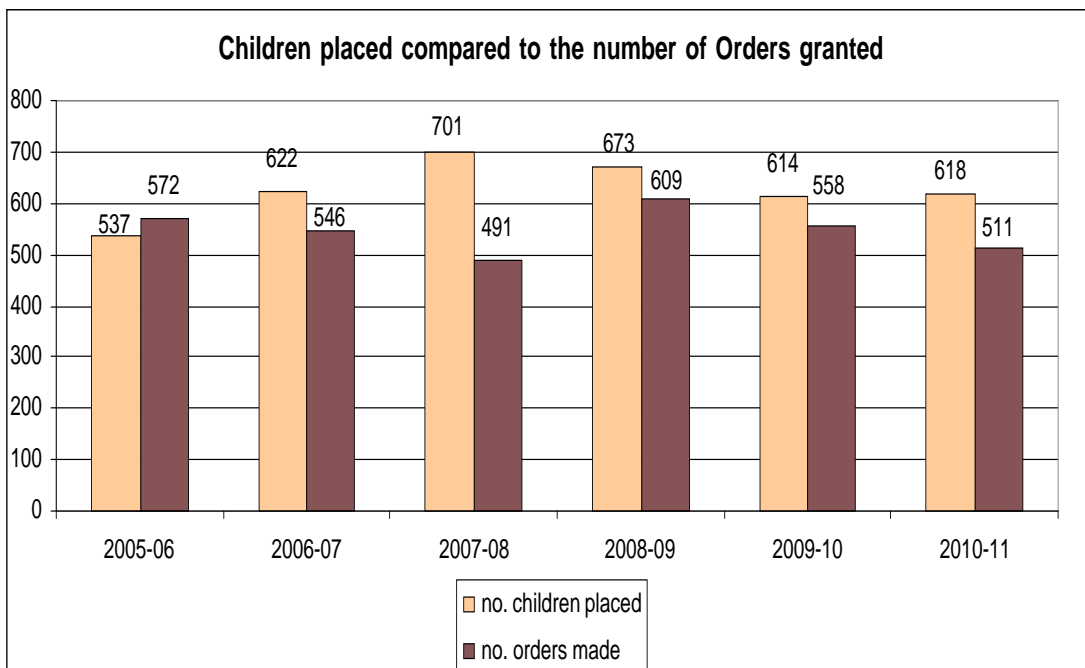
18. Figure 12a shows that the number of children placed through a VAA and not yet subject to an Adoption Order rose in 2010/11 to 610, a small increase but one which does reflect the substantial work of the VAAs in supporting placements.

Figure 12a



19. Figure 13 shows the relationship year on year between the number of children placed and Orders made; highlighting that in the last three years there has been a higher number of children in placement without an Order than the number of children placed in each year. This may reflect the fact that children are often in placement for more than one year before an Order is sought and attained, and may merit collection of additional data.

Figure 13



Disruption

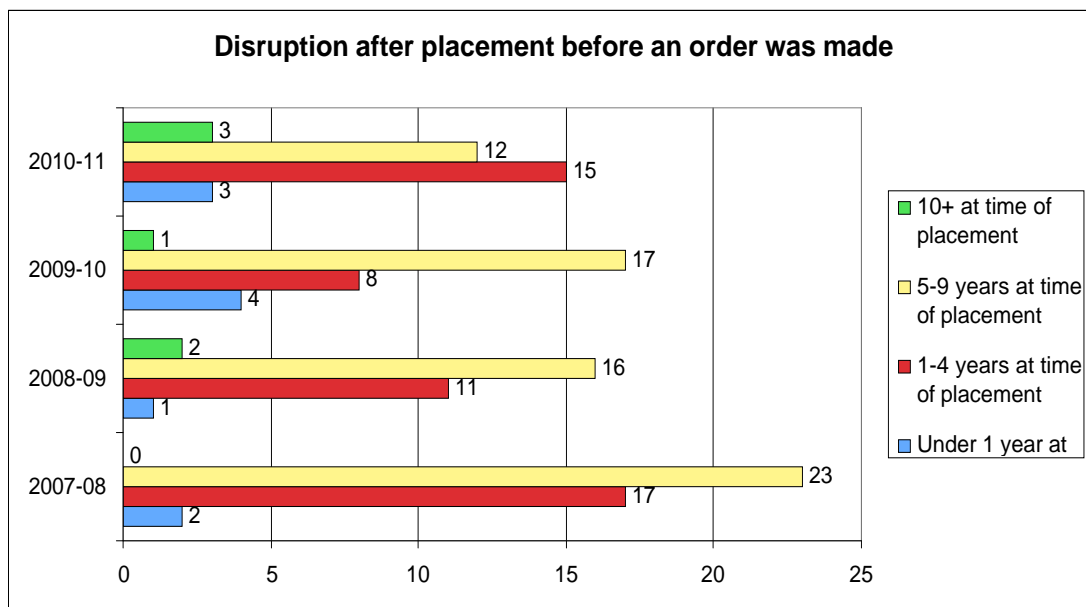
20. During 2010/11, the placements of 33 children disrupted before an Adoption Order was made. This compares with 30 children in the previous year, but still represents a rate of only 5.3%. Even acknowledging the complexity of the children placed, this represents a success rate of 94.7%.

It should of course be noted that the placements reported as disrupting during that year and pre order, may well not be the placements which were made in that year; some are likely to have been made in previous years.

21. The return shows that of the 33 children whose placements disrupted pre order, 3 children were aged under 1 at the time of placement, 15 children were aged 1-4 years, 12 children 5-9 years, and 3 were aged 10 or over. It is difficult and may be misleading to draw conclusions from this data, particularly because the numbers of children under 1 year and the numbers of children over 10 years are so small. Before drawing any conclusions it would be important to undertake a more detailed analysis of all the relevant factors. However the disruption rate in placements of children aged 1-4 years is 3.9%, and in children aged 5-9 years rises to 5.8%.
22. In the returns for 2010/11 the placements of only 2 children who had already been adopted were reported as having disrupted during this year, a significant decrease on the 8 children in placements which were reported to have disrupted in the previous year.

Over recent months CVAA has sought to undertake an analysis of children whose placements are known by agencies to have disrupted over the past five years. Whilst not all agencies responded and some of the reporting was based on anecdotal information, the figures collected indicate a disruption rate over that time frame of less than 5.11% (149 children out of a total of 2915 children placed for adoption in the UK).

Figure 14



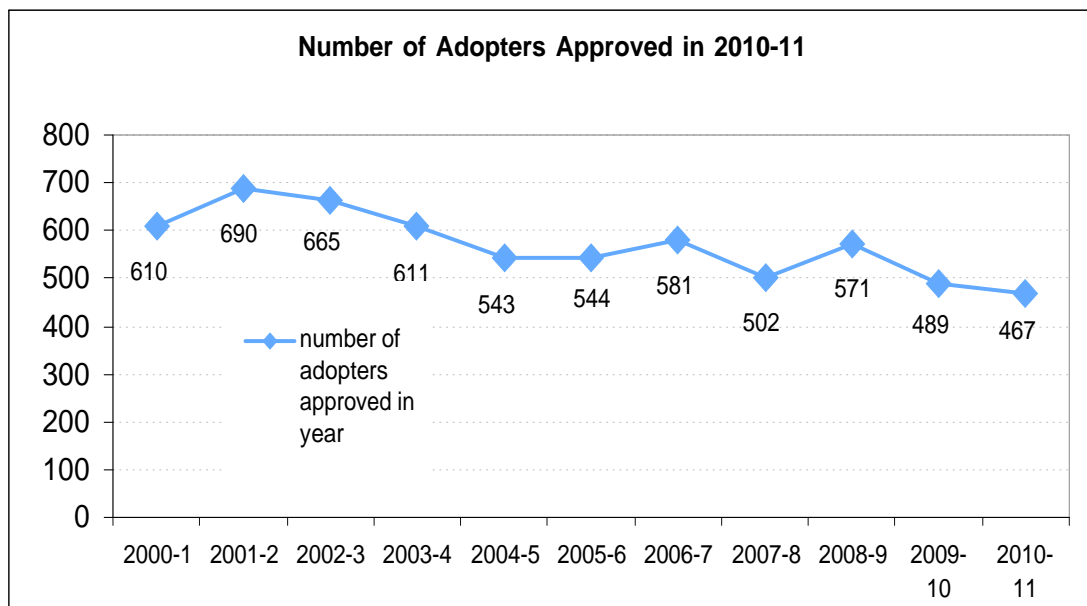
ADOPTERS

23. For the second successive year, fewer families were approved for domestic adoption (467 as compared with 489 in 2009/10).

Of concern is the fact that the figures for this year represent the lowest number of adopter approvals for over 10 years. There may be several factors which have influenced the preparedness of individuals to consider adoption; the economic downturn has certainly been reported by some enquirers as a key factor; concerns about cuts in public services and the potential diminution of adoption support may be another; one might speculate that recent press coverage may not have inspired confidence in the adoption sector and the process of becoming an adopter. This is clearly an issue which needs to be addressed.

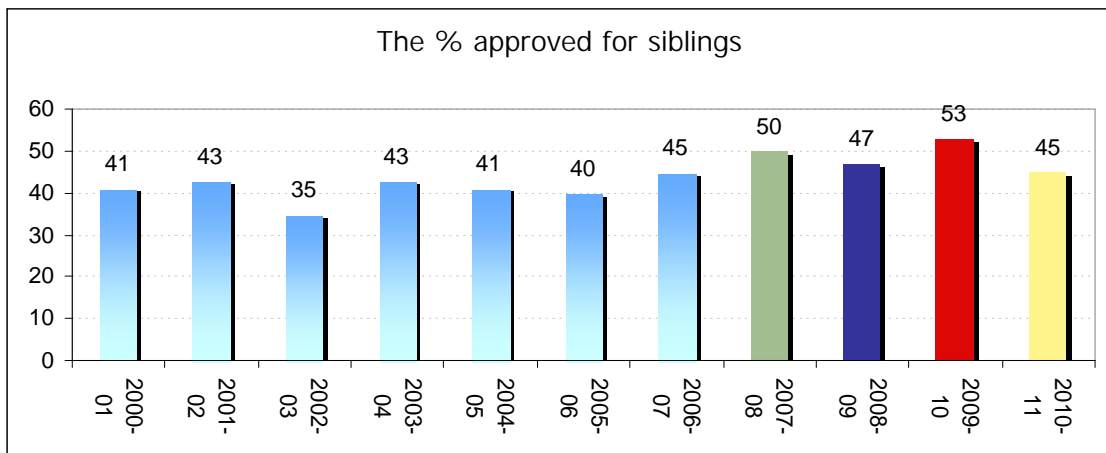
There have also been financial and resource pressures on Voluntary Adoption Agencies, with the charitable sector in this time of financial crisis being less able to carry risk and bear the burden of increased deficits. This has resulted in the closure of a small number of VAAs and in staff reductions in other VAAs, although these impacts have not been consistent across the whole sector, with some agencies experiencing growth.

Figure 15



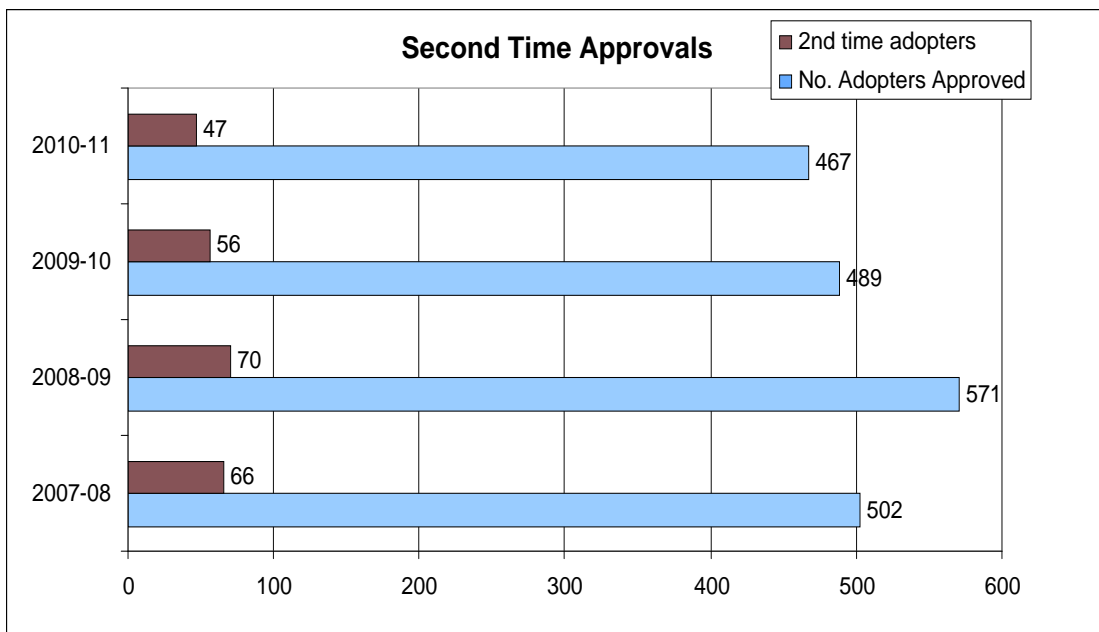
24. Of further concern is the fact that the number of adopters approved for a sibling group decreased in comparison with the previous year, 210 as compared with 259. The factors associated with this may be similar to those highlighted in paragraph 22, particularly concern regarding the financial impact of parenting more than one child. In reality the need for adoption allowances has increased at the same time as LA finances dictate more stringency.

Figure 16



25. The number of second time adopters has also decreased to reach the lowest figure on the last four years. It is possible that this is also linked to factors identified in paragraphs 22 and 23.

Figure 17



26. 22.27% of approved adopters included a parent from a BME background; this compared with 29% in the previous year but is more in line with the 2008-9 figures. A number of Voluntary Adoption Agencies continue to place a specific emphasis on recruiting adopters from BME communities whilst developing networks to support white families who adopt children from of a different racial heritage.

Figure 18

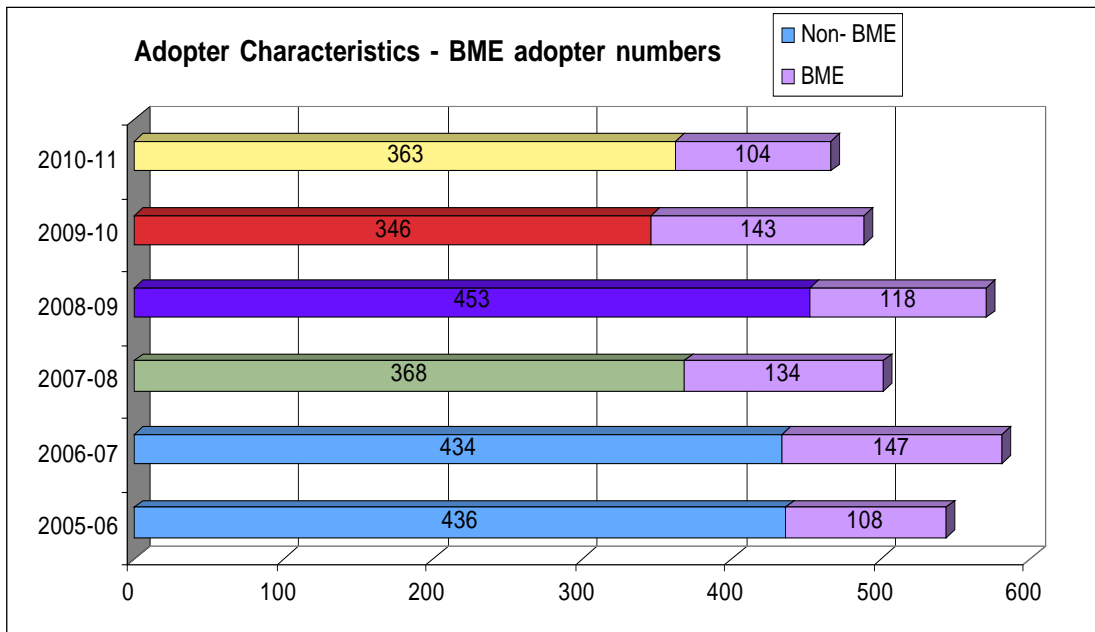
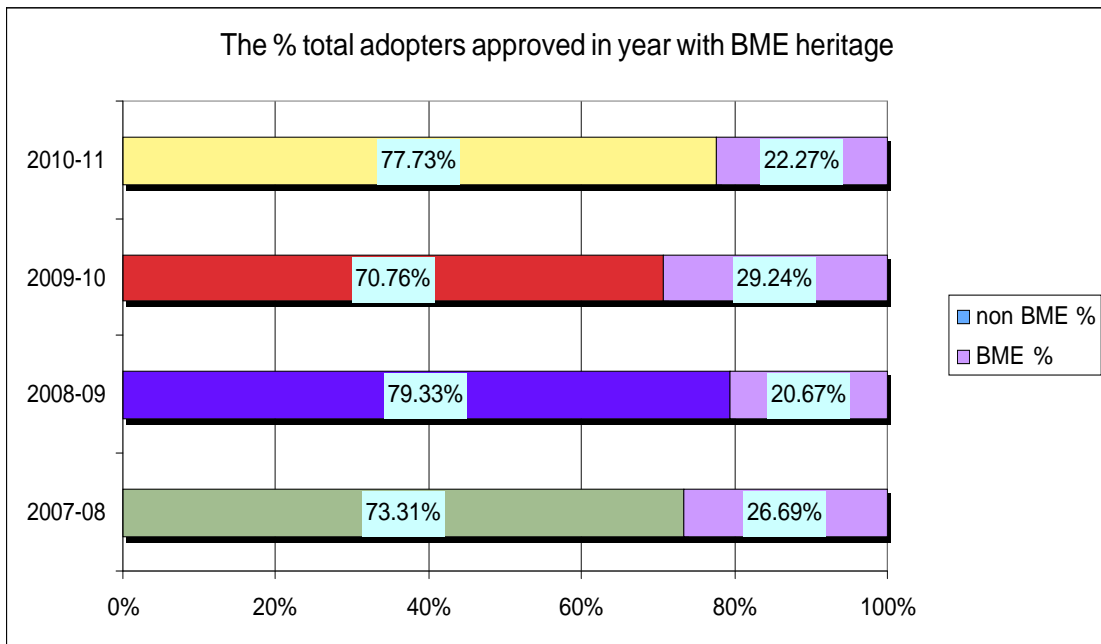


Figure 18a



27. The chart below, Figure 19, shows the percentage of all approvals in 2010-11 by single/couple characteristics.

Figure 19

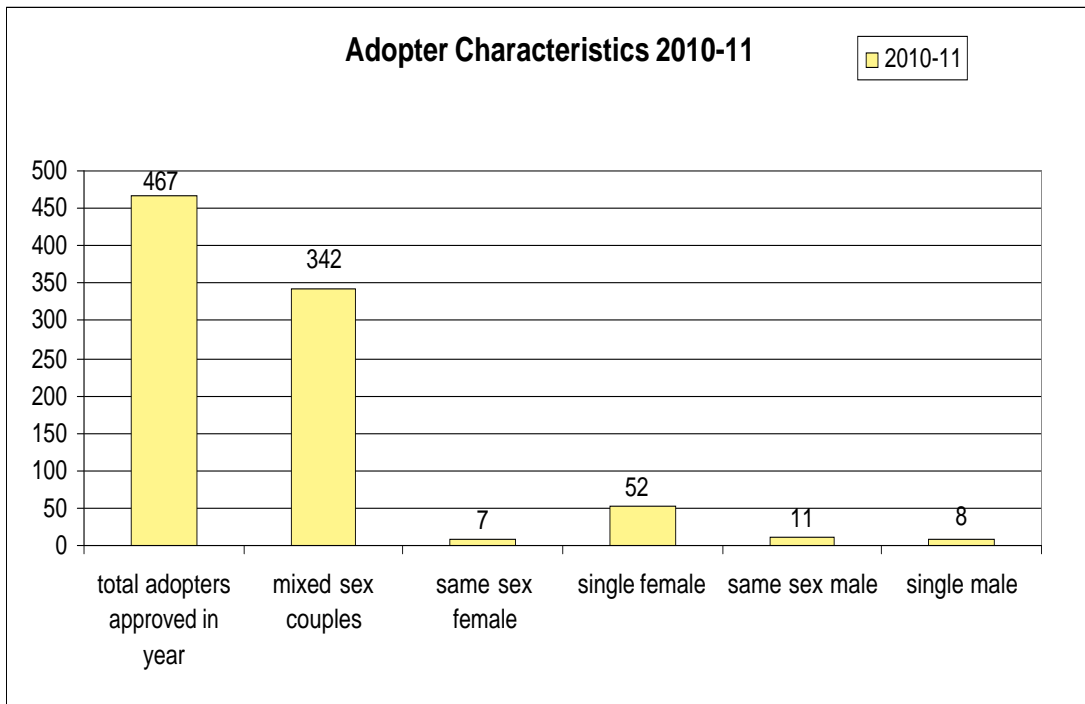
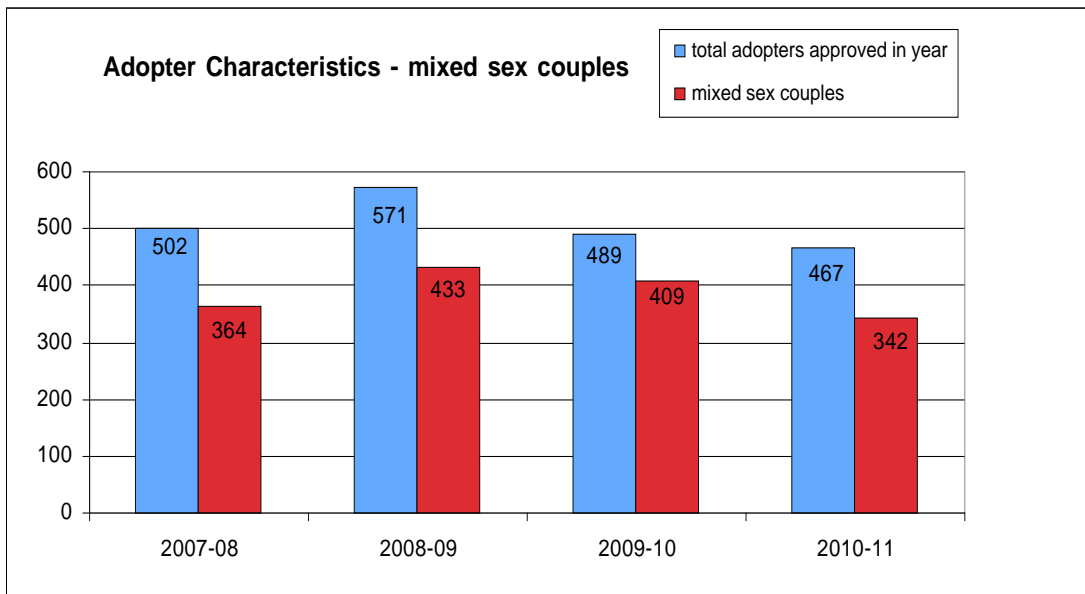
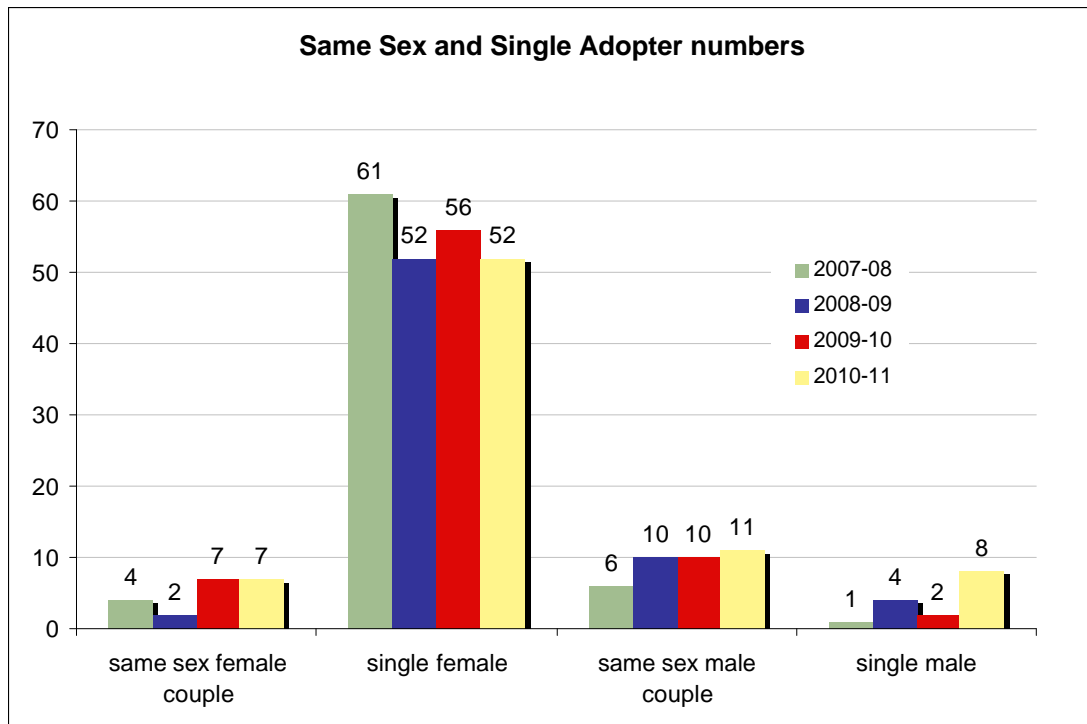


Figure 20



28. 18 approvals (3.85%) related to same sex couples; compared with 17 in the previous year. Slightly fewer single female applicants were approved (52 as compared with 59 last year) and there was an increase in the number of single males approved (8 as compared with 2 during the previous year). However the figures are relatively small and it is therefore difficult to draw conclusions at this stage.

Figure 21



29. 366 approved families were without a placement on 31st March 2011; this is a significant drop from the 472 families approved and yet without a placement at the same point in 2010. Significant concern had been expressed publicly by CVAA during the year regarding the numbers of approved adopters not being utilised by comparison with the numbers of children awaiting placements. It is therefore encouraging to see that this number has decreased but ongoing monitoring will be important. The Table, Figure 22, also shows the breakdown across the four nations. The chart shows how the length of time that adopters have been waiting since approval has increased.

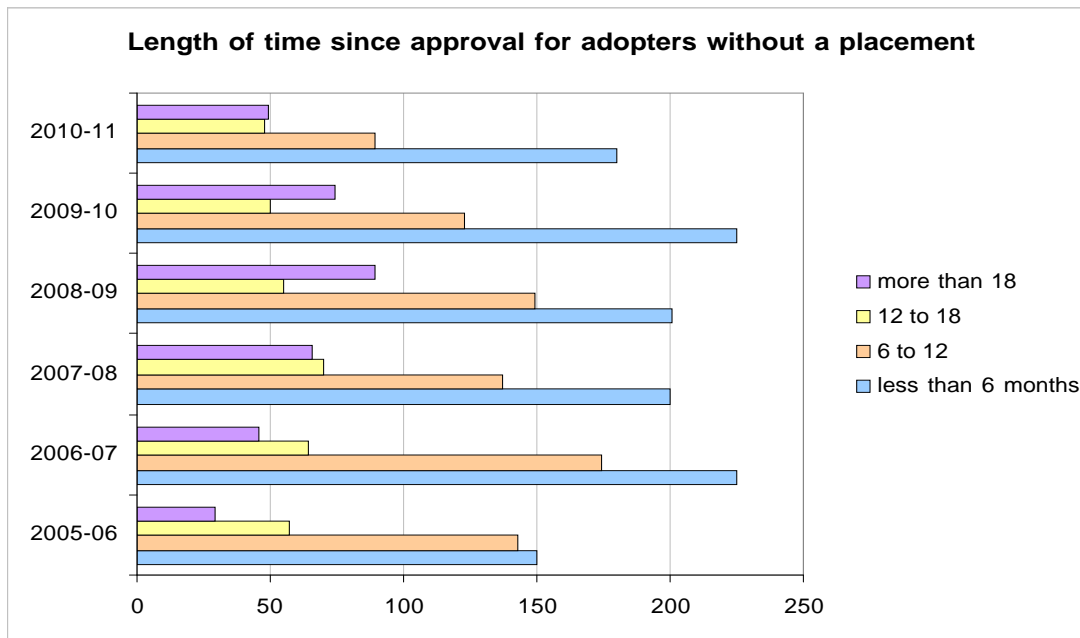
Figure 22

Length of approval on 31 st March	England and Isle of Man	W	NI	S	10-11	09-10	08-09	07-08	06-07
Less than 6 months	158	4	2	16	180	225	201	200	225
6-12 months	77	2	0	10	89	123	149	137	174
12-18 months	44	1	0	3	48	50	55	70	64
More than 18 months	43	0	3	3	49	74	89	66	46
TOTAL	322	7	5	32	366	472	494	473	464

30. It is significant to note that the vast majority of approved adopters wait less than 12 months between approval and having children placed with them, and a significant proportion wait less than 6 months. This would certainly suggest that VAAs are very

firmly focussed on recruiting the range of families which Local Authorities need for children requiring adoption. VAAs are always looking at new ways of enabling prospective adopters to have as full an understanding as possible of the needs of children requiring placement, and of helping people who are interested to think more widely about the children needing placements.

Figure 23

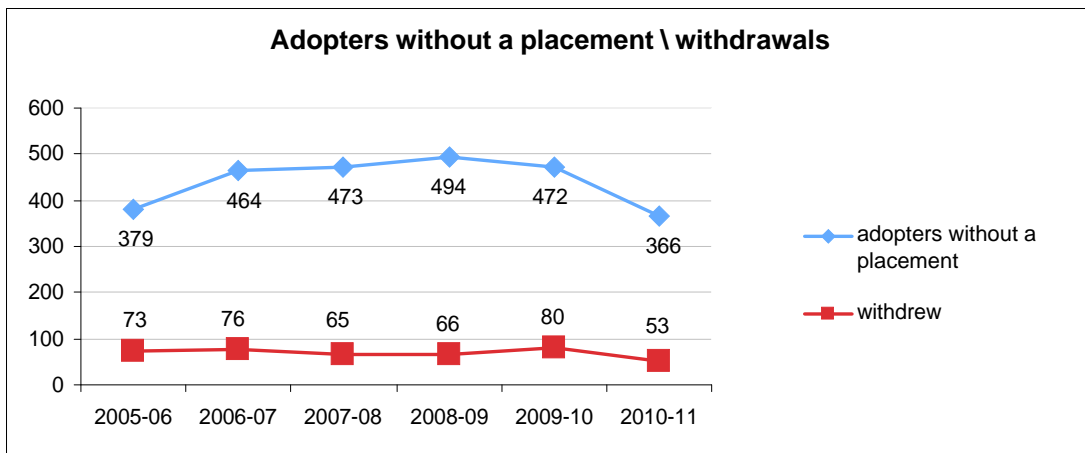


30. 37 sets of adopters withdrew after approval; this compares very positively with the high number (80) who withdrew during the previous year. Figure 24 plots this against the number of adopters without a placement, given that this is the reason most frequently given for withdrawal. As reported earlier, that number has also decreased significantly.

It should be noted that 'the number of adopters without a placement' is a static figure collected at the year end whilst 'the number of prospective adopters who withdrew' relates to a period over the course of a year. However these figures would suggest that VAAs are being increasingly focussed in their recruitment, assessment and support of adopters, ensuring that they work with those prospective adopters who are most able to meet the complex needs of children awaiting placement for adoption.

This factor is obviously important to the VAAs themselves as when families withdraw the VAA will have expended significant resources on working with them, whilst receiving no placement fee. Of equal if not greater significance is the emphasis VAAs are placing on recruiting, training and supporting prospective adopters so that they are well equipped to meet the needs of children from the care system, and so that we can see increased numbers of children from complex backgrounds sustained long term in adoptive families.

Figure 24

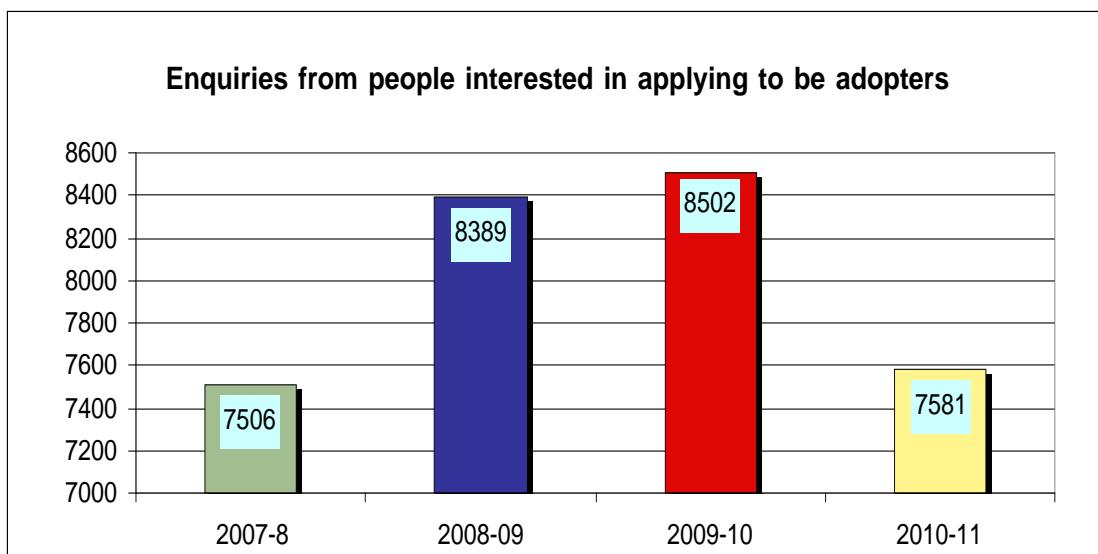


ENQUIRIES

- This is the fourth year that agencies have provided details about the number of enquiries they received from people interested in applying to adopt. Of concern is the year on year increases reported up to 2009-10 have not been sustained. In 2010-11 there was a significant decrease from 8502 in 2009-10 to 7581 in 2010-11. Reference has already been made in this report to the possible impact of the current economic climate on individual's confidence to pursue adoption. Anecdotally this is being cited as a key cause in the decrease in enquiries and without a much larger survey it is difficult to determine this with any greater certainty.

CVAA will continue to undertake regular monitoring of adopter enquiries during the current year, and also of adopter assessments commenced. Significantly there has not been such a significant drop in this number as illustrated in figure 27. It may be that as those enquiring about adoption tend increasingly to use the internet to make initial approaches to a number of adoption agencies, then the key factor to monitor is the number of adopter assessments commenced.

Figure 25



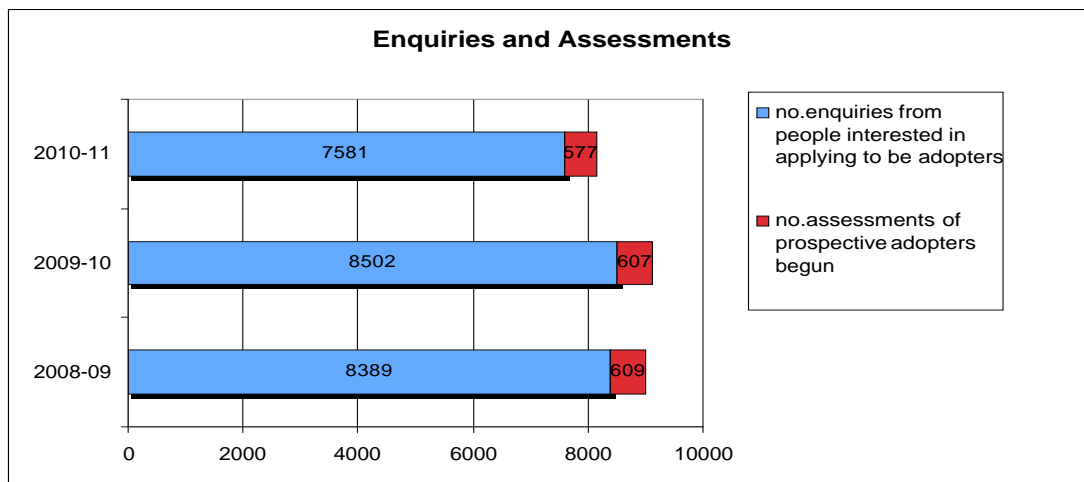
32. Despite the decrease in enquiries from prospective adopters, an increased number of assessments were begun this year as compared to last; 655 compared to 607. This is a conversion rate of 7.61% (although, of course, some of these will be in respect of people who made their first contact in the previous year and some of those who enquired this year will begin their assessment next year). This could indicate a positive impact of targeted recruitment activity and the provision by VAAs of good quality information materials.

Figure 26

Between 1 st April and 31 st March	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Enquiries from people interested in applying to be adopters	7581	8502	8389	7506
Rate of assessments of prospective adopters begun	7.61%	7.14%	7.50%	10%
SGO assessments begun	2	2	0	2
Kin Viability assessments begun	4	2	12	11

33. Some enquiries will be from people who after making an initial enquiry select themselves out (which may be appropriate) and some will be from people who do apply but not within the year. However, every enquiry that does not result in an application uses staff time and so it is important to minimise this further than is currently the case.
34. The chart shows more clearly the difference over the three years (albeit with the note of caution about the way enquiry is defined.)

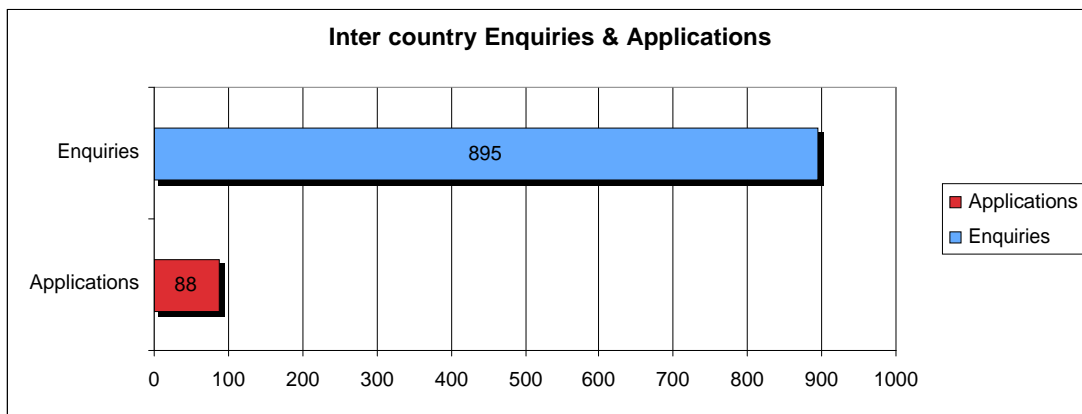
Figure 27



- 35 The statistical collation shown in Figure 27 for the first time incorporates information regarding the contribution of the VAA sector to inter country adoption. It is an area which will be expanded upon in future reporting and the conclusions to be drawn with therefore over time become more substantial.

For now it is important to note that the eight member agencies who undertake inter country adoption received 895 enquiries during 2010-11. This equates to almost 11% of all enquiries received about adoption, (domestic and inter country), during the year. CVAA website, (cvaa.org.uk), currently receives a greater number of enquiries relating to inter country than to domestic adoption.

Figure 27a



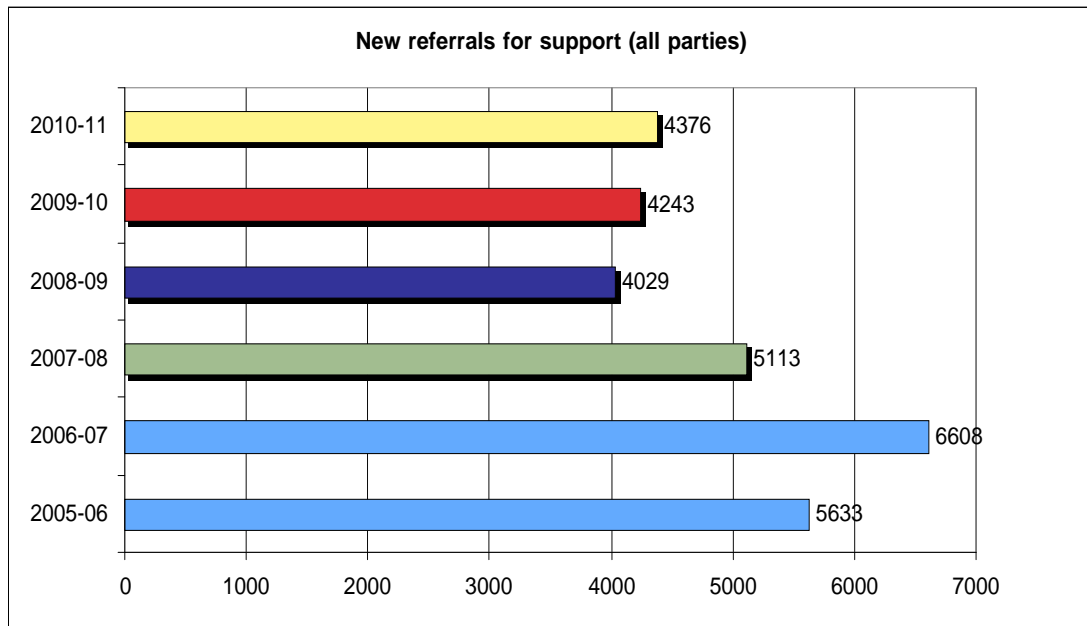
36. As shown in the chart above, 88 assessments for inter country adoption were commenced by VAAs during the year. This denotes a conversion rate from enquiry to assessment of almost 10%, which is higher than for domestic adoption (7.61%). The figure of 88 is also an increase on the previous year (62) but a significant reduction from the 120 assessments undertaken in 2007-8.
37. The number of families adopting inter country who were supported by VAAs was 96; this compares with 73 in the previous year, 151 in 2008-9 and 253 in 2007-8.

ADOPTION SUPPORT

38. The provision of ongoing adoption support for as long as the individuals within the family wish is a key factor in enabling successful placements and believed to be a key factor in maintaining the low disruption rate, even in very challenging placements, as evidenced by the VAAs. Member agencies of CVAA offer a Core Menu of Adoption Support Services. The majority of adopters gain confidence from being able to turn for support and advice to the VAA which assessed and prepared them for becoming adoptive parents. They report positively on the VAA 'always being there' for them, offering a high level of expertise and experience in adoption, providing continuity of personnel...both social work and administrative/reception staff. They value the low key proactive resources which VAAs make available to them...parent support groups, children's activity days for example, and they utilise the tailored services such as therapeutic parenting groups, young people's groups, lifestory work for children,

parent counselling. In addition to providing ongoing support for families approved by the VAA, VAAs also undertake work for local authorities on a commissioned basis. The benefit for the LA is that the VAA has a body of expertise and for the individuals referred to the VAA the fact that they are not a part of the LA can be important, especially in counselling and intermediary services, and often more widely.

Figure 28



39. Figure 28 demonstrates a small increase in the number of referrals received from all parties for adoption support, but of course numbers 'can never tell the whole story'; some referrals may be for one off advice but many will be for significant complex pieces of work to be undertaken with adoptive parents and their children.

If the referrals were to be divided equally between the 30 or so member agencies, that would still equate to 145 referrals per year per agency or almost 3 new referrals per week. Of course the division does not fall so neatly but even so one can see that there are far more referrals for adoption support (4376) than there are new adoption assessments commenced (655).

It is important to recognise therefore that adopter recruitment and assessments, form only one part of the services delivered by VAAs. Furthermore, that for much of the adoption support work undertaken, especially the 'historic work', VAAs receive no statutory funding. With current cuts in Local Authority services it is likely that increased demands will be made on VAAs adoption support services. All this within the context of VAAs placing primarily the children for whom Local Authorities are themselves unable to identify adopters; these being therefore some of the most challenging and needy children to parent. With the inclusion from 2011 of AdoptionUK as an Associate Member of CVAA is it hoped that further work can be undertaken to evidence the key issues in adoption support provision.

40 The two charts, figure 29 & 30 show different support services offered and compares 2010-11 with the three previous years.

Figure 29

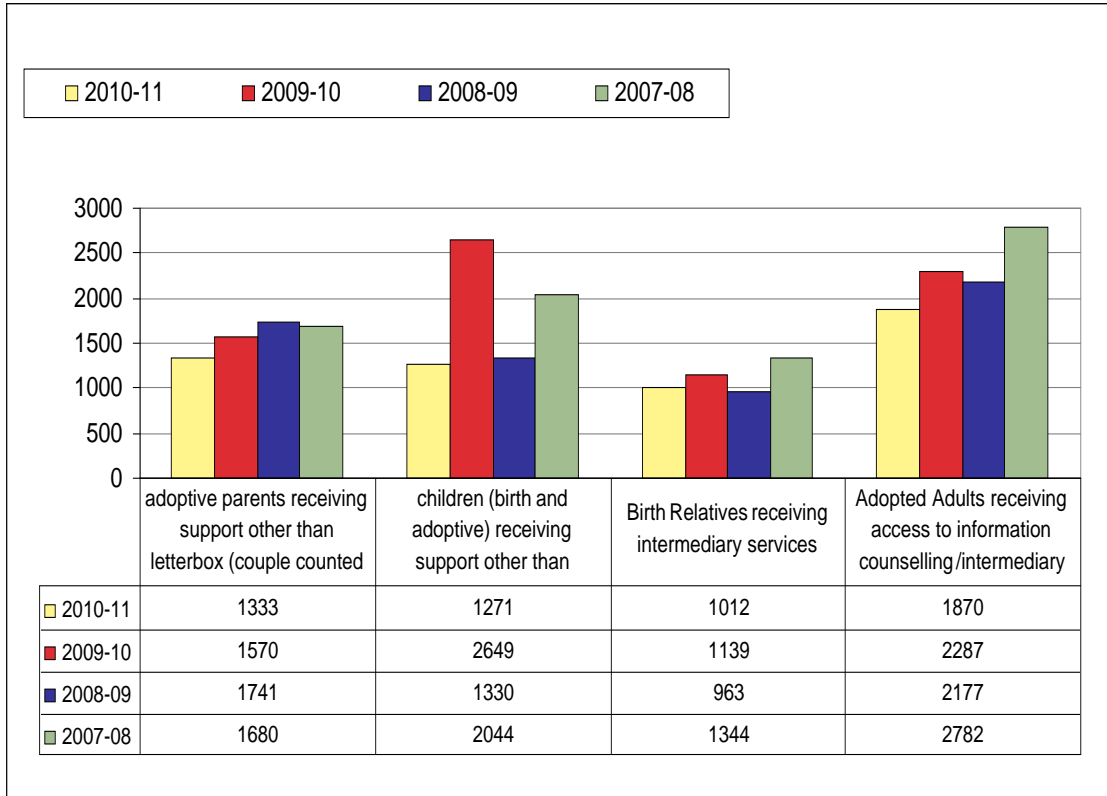
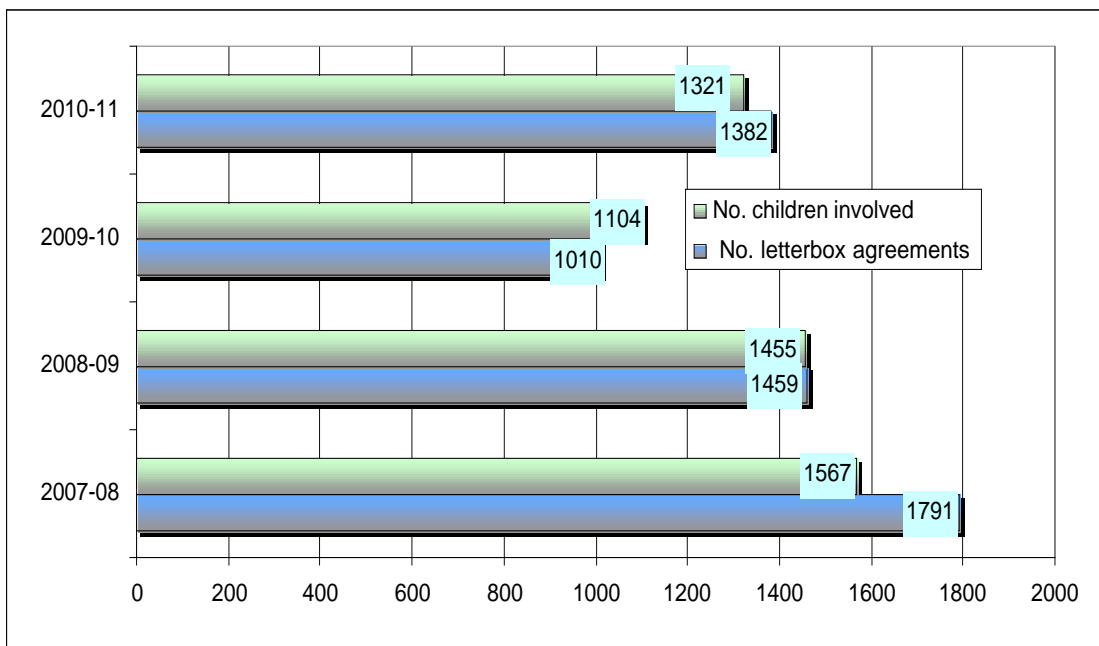


Figure 30



OTHER ACTIVITIES

41. As in previous years, VAAs undertake a wide range of activities in addition to recruitment of adopters and placement of children, and in addition to the range of adoption support services provided and as evidenced.
42. An increasing number of VAAs have contracts with Local Authorities to deliver specific services or undertake particular pieces of work. These range for relatively small short term agreements to substantial arrangements for example to deliver a Local Authority's adoption service. Further details can be provided on request.

However some examples include the following:

- Concurrent planning services
 - Provision of independent counselling and support services for birth relatives of children being adopted
 - Access to care and counselling in respect of care records
 - Chairing Adoption Panels, Fostering Panels and IRM Panels
 - Chairing Disruption Meetings
 - Direct work with children
 - Provision of Parenting programmes for adoptive parents
 - Provision of Theraplay
 - Participation in research and delivery of training
43. Some CVAA member agencies are also registered providers of foster care. Others offer schools based services and a wider range of services to vulnerable children, families and adults.

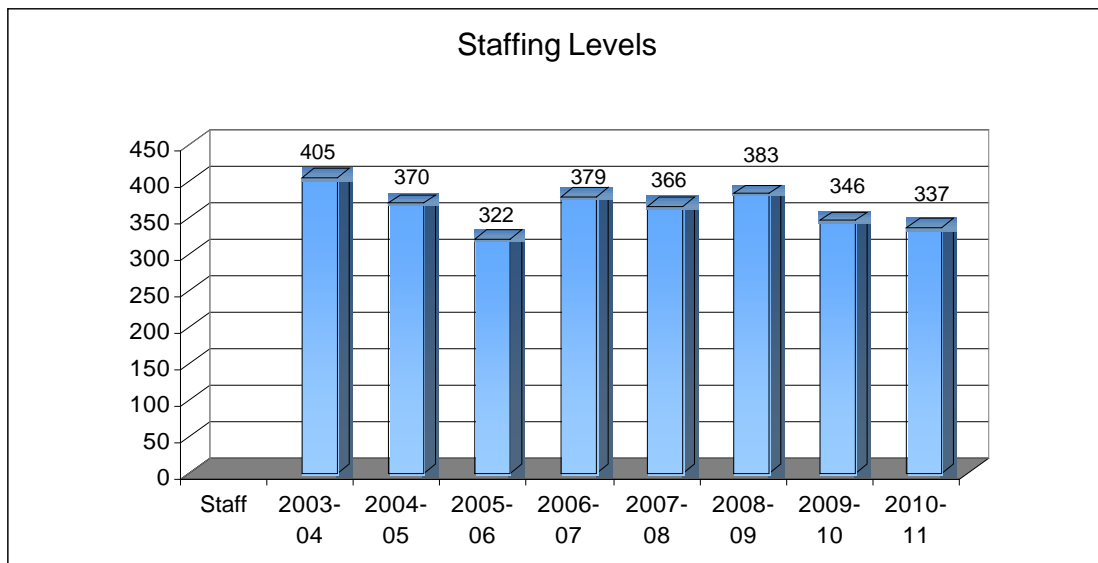
FINANCE

44. It is becoming increasingly difficult for many Voluntary Adoption Agencies to maintain the level of voluntary funding which historically they have contributed to the sector. Over the past five years this has been averaged well in excess of £3m per year. The current economic climate has impacted on individual and many corporate donors and on the availability of trust funding. Additionally the VAAs had generally utilised voluntary funds to pioneer innovative practice, and to provide resources for areas of work outside of those which attract statutory funding, including the provision of Access to Records and Intermediary Services for adults whose connection with the agency pre dates the inter agency fee mechanism. It is much more difficult and one would argue inappropriate to utilise voluntary funding to address the deficit created by the shortfall in statutory funding for adoption placement activity. This structural deficit has been evidenced in research; ('Adoption and the inter-agency fee', Selwyn et al, 2009). In order to ensure that the VAAs could continue to provide the adoption placements which are clearly vital in avoiding further delay for children awaiting adoption, CVAA in 2011 implemented a modest increase in the inter agency fee and will monitor both the impact on member agencies and most importantly on placement activity.
45. It is estimated that the VAAs total expenditure on domestic adoption amounted to over £23 million in 2010-11. (This figure is based on an 80% return from the VAAs.)

STAFF

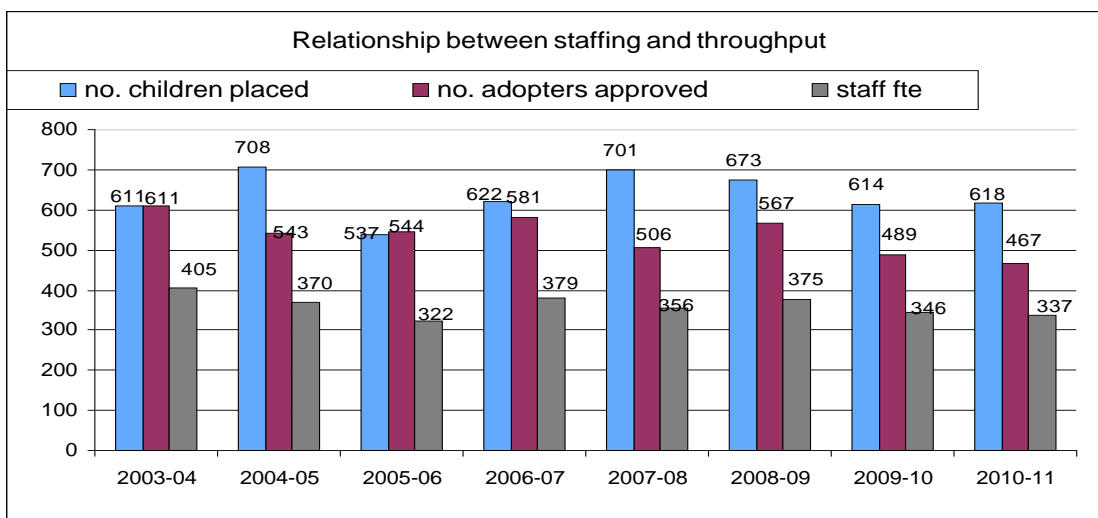
46. The number of full time equivalent (fte) staff on 31st March was a decrease on the previous year: 337 fte compared to 346 (and 383 in 2008-9). These figures include all registered social work staff working in adoption, including sessional workers, team leaders and managers. A note of caution is that VAAs have estimated the contribution of sessional workers and the way that they employ/use this group may vary so that it is not a straightforward calculation. VAAs will also employ and/or commission other staff e.g. admin and business support and the cost of these will contribute to the overall cost of providing the placements. Some VAAs will commission expertise as required for specific pieces of work and this may not be reflected in the figures of social work staff.

Figure 31



47. 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.

Figure 32



CONCLUSIONS

48. The key messages from this analysis for VAAs and other stakeholders in adoption are:

- The need to develop further targeted adopter recruitment activity to achieve an increase in the number of appropriate enquiries from prospective adopters; for example by considering whether we can focus marketing activity even more robustly on recruiting adopters who can meet particular needs related to information regarding children awaiting adoption
- This should then facilitate continued improvement in the rate of conversion of enquiries to assessments, thus maximising efficient use of VAA resources
- There must be clarity about the needs of children whom Local Authorities are unable to place, and mechanisms established between LAs and VAAs to achieve early identification of such children; this will ensure that more of those children who have been waiting a long time for adoption can be placed, and also that increased numbers of young children can be placed quickly once a decision for adoption is made.
- In addition to reducing delay, placing children as soon as practicable with adopters also increases their chance of stability. Research by Biehal et al ('Characteristics outcomes and meanings of three types of permanent placement', Biehal N et al 2009 DCSF Adoption Research Initiative) found that age at placement was a key predictor of placement stability and that disruption rates for children in foster care compared unfavourably with those for children who had been adopted.
- There needs to be increased recognition of the support needs of children from complex backgrounds who are placed for adoption, and a shared acknowledgement between LAs and VAAs and with politicians and policy makers, of the adoption support services required.
- For CVAA as an organisation, there is recognition of the importance of continuing to address the issue of the inter-agency fee as that is a key determinant of the 'viability' of the sector. Of most significance however is the impact which it is believed the inter agency fee has on delay for children awaiting adoption.
- The Voluntary Adoption sector is a key stakeholder in the provision of adoption services in the UK. CVAA promotes and supports members locally and nationally to enhance the contribution of the sector to achieving timely permanence for children where this is the most appropriate option for them.

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