



SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Actively listening to adopters and adopted children and young people has been central to the activities of the National Adoption Service since it was established in 2014. Co-production is one of the fundamental principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2016. This document outlines the National Adoption Service approach to service user engagement and co-production. NAS highly values engagement with the children and young people and adults who experience the service at all levels. All NAS improvement plans have their roots in service user feedback and involvement. Some engagement is led nationally on behalf of all services but will not overshadow arrangements in place in regions and VAA's. The service is committed to ensuring engagement is meaningful and is implemented across all levels – national, regional and local.

The aims of the service include:

- The consistent delivery of high quality adoption services throughout Wales
- Keeping delay to a minimum in the placement of children for adoption
- Ensuring the widest choice possible of adoptive placements for children
- Ensuring high quality and consistent information for prospective adopters regardless of which agency they contact
- Ensuring that high quality training and assessment for prospective adopters is consistently available
- Good quality linking, matching and introductions processes for children with prospective adopters
- Ensuring comprehensive adoption support services available to all affected by adoption at the time that they need them
- Collaborative working between regional adoption agencies, local authorities, health and education.

For the purpose of this strategy **service user engagement** is defined as the:

- active involvement of people with lived experience of adoption and adoption services in Wales
- sharing of views regarding the experience of service users in relation to service delivery
- direct involvement of service users in service design, development and delivery.

Our service users

- Children with a plan of adoption, are placed for adoption or adopted
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Birth families
- Adopted adults
- Relatives of children who have been adopted

NAS commitment

We will engage with our service users at every opportunity and active participation will be encouraged to ensure direct influence and involvement from an early stage. We will consult in a variety of ways and will always provide clear, concise and relevant information on the area of service we are seeking information about, taking into account participants' preferences in terms of language and media. We want people to feel able to engage easily and any barriers will be identified and addressed; issues raised will be responded to appropriately and changes as a result of feedback will be communicated in a timely way.

Key focus areas of service provision and where engagement will be welcomed include:

- the adopter enquiry and assessment process
- availability and quality of training
- the range and quality of adoption support
- clarity of process and information sharing
- professionalism of staff, and
- any concerns or barriers to accessing services, issues around contact, life story work and information sharing including potential opportunities for improved support

All service users will be invited to share their views, participate in activities and inform service delivery through a variety of means including organised events such as focus groups and workshops, support groups and regular evaluation questionnaires and surveys.

OUTCOMES

This strategy demonstrates a commitment to learn from and build upon the work of the regions, local authorities and VAA's and as such aims to work towards the following outcomes:

- Increasing the influence of service users and staff members in the on-going development of adoption services
- Improving service user experience through actively engaging with and acting on feedback from staff and service users
- Supporting regions, VAA's and local authorities with the collection and use of service user feedback to understand and continually improve user experience
- Ensuring service user perspectives are heard at all levels of NAS
- Enabling service users to influence, and sometimes lead, the development, governance, policy and practice in NAS

Engagement will involve the following:

NATIONAL

- Adoption Voices: Adoption UK Cymru
- AUK Annual Adoption Barometer
- National surveys
- The 'Connect' Service (including Adoption Voices)
- Special Interest Groups – AfA Cymru
- Annual NAS Newsletter
- Life Journey Work Newsletter
- Adopter Champions

REGIONAL AND VAA

- Adopters as active members of service development working groups
- Adopter Champions recruited to participate in service design and delivery
- Adopters, adult adoptees and birth parents as members of Adoption Panels
- Adopters, adult adoptees and birth parents involved in the delivery of training and peer-to-peer support
- Involvement of children and young people through Connected groups
- Birth parent engagement through routine events
- Regular, routine feedback on adoption processes e.g. recruitment, assessment, panel and preparation training, and adoption support
- Adopter newsletters – regional, VAA

KEY SERVICE USER ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

ADOPTION VOICES
Adoption Voices is the mechanism through which NAS has sought to embed active listening and co-production with its service users. Adoption UK Cymru in collaboration with the regional adoption agencies run organised events for adopters, adopted adults and children and young people (see Connect below), as well as small focus groups, support groups, stakeholder events and surveys. These services provide opportunities to gather the experiences and views of adopted young people and adults to inform service development further. The regions will work closely with AUK to publicise and promote any events and any issues identified will be addressed via wider consultations.
AUK Annual Adoption Barometer
Annually Adoption UK carries out a UK wide survey involving adoptive families as well as an audit of adoption policies across all 4 nations of the UK to assess the current adoption climate and publishes the Adoption Barometer report. Through the use of social media the NAS Central Team, Regional Adoption Agencies, Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies actively encourage adopters to participate in the survey each year. The findings in the report provide the basis on which the Adoption Voices work is agreed. In addition the findings are shared with the NAS Governance Board and Regional Management Boards and any actions arising become part of the annual service plan.
Connect
The National Service for Adopted Children and Young People, which is coordinated and run on behalf of NAS, by AUK Cymru places significant emphasis on collaborative working and operates within four elements and can be accessed by adopted children and young people regardless of which Regional Adoption Service is responsible for their adoption support. These elements include the Connected support groups, provision of information and guidance, raising awareness and skills and gathering of views and voices of adopted young people.
Adopted Youth Councils – currently there are two engagement groups of young people who will be supported to share the views of the group and when possible attend governance board events with the National Adoption Service and other regional management events at least once a year. In addition a senior member of the NAS management team will be invited to attend the Youth Council meetings to hear their views and take responsibility for reporting and responding to issues raised.
Adopter Champions
Experienced adopters are regularly recruited as Adopter Champions to help promote and share a realistic view of adoption, and to empower others to consider applying. The group are involved in developing recruitment collateral and campaigns both on a national and local level.
Annual NAS Newsletter
A general newsletter which consists of information from all five regions, the VAA's and AfA Cymru is published annually. Future editions will also include the voice of an adopter.
Life Journey Work Newsletter
A newsletter which consists of information from all five regions and the VAA's is published annually. Future editions will also include voices of service users where it is possible to do so.

REGION/VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY

ROUTINE ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK (*Information, Consultation and Participation/Involvement*)

ACTIVITY	METHOD	RESPONSE	OUTCOME
Prospective adopters			
<p>Potential and prospective adopters' voice is heard.</p>	<p>Service User evaluations are completed at the following stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial enquiry • Information events • Adopter assessment • Pre-adoption training • Adoption Panel <p>Complaints and compliments leaflets are routinely provided as part of information packs.</p>	<p>Feedback is collated on a regular basis by Team Managers in the regions and VAAs.</p> <p>Information is shared with practitioners on an individual and group basis.</p> <p>Processes are modified where appropriate.</p> <p>Feedback relating to panel is routinely shared with members of the central list and action plans are developed where necessary to address any themes or issues.</p> <p>Regional Management Boards are updated via Regulation 39¹ reports and any actions agreed as part of the ongoing service plan on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>Service gains an understanding of adopters experience at various stages of referral and assessment process.</p> <p>The adopters' voice is heard and informs the development of the service locally and nationally. Service user experience is improved.</p>
Approved adopters			
<p>Adopters inform, participate and have direct involvement in service delivery.</p>	<p>Adopters complete evaluation questionnaires following linking, matching and introductions.</p> <p>Adopters invited to be part of central list of adoption panel members.</p>	<p>Feedback is collated on a regular basis by Team Managers in the regions and VAAs.</p> <p>Region/VAA ensures all panels have an experienced adopter in attendance.</p>	<p>Adopters experience of linking, matching and introductions are understood and used to inform practice. Adopters and children's experience of service is improved.</p>

¹ The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019/Review of service report

	<p>Adopters deliver training as part of pre- and post-approval adoption training.</p> <p>Adopters complete evaluation questionnaires following attendance at support groups' pre- and post-placement.</p> <p>Adopters involved in providing peer support either on 1:1 or group basis.</p> <p>Adopter champions involved in recruitment through videos, podcasts, social media and other events e.g. National Adoption Week</p>	<p>Where possible an adopter is involved in the delivery of pre- and post-adoption training.</p> <p>Adopters' views are used to determine training and support programmes.</p> <p>Regional Management Boards are updated via Regulation 39² reports and any actions agreed as part of the ongoing service plan on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>Adopters directly inform service delivery.</p> <p>The 'lived experience' of adopters provides a realistic picture for any potential prospective adopters.</p>
Birth Parents and other relatives			
<p>Birth parents and relatives inform, participate and have direct involvement in service delivery.</p>	<p>Birth parents and/or other relatives are part of central list of adoption panel members.</p> <p>Each pre-adoption training programme includes input from a birth family member.</p>	<p>The voice of birth parents is captured via appropriate media and utilised in the training and support of adoption panel members and where suitable in training for practitioners.</p>	<p>Birth parents and other relatives have their voices heard and their experience is used to inform service development and delivery. Birth families' experience of the service is improved.</p>
Adult Adoptees			
<p>Adult adoptees have an opportunity to share their experience of being adopted.</p>	<p>AUK run groups for adult adoptees and any issues are addressed via the wider NAS consultation arrangements.</p> <p>An adult adoptee is part of some of the regional central lists of adoption panel members.</p> <p>Adult adoptees are encouraged and supported, where possible to become involved in pre-adoption training.</p>	<p>Regions and VAA's encourage any adult adoptees to join with these groups where possible to do so.</p>	<p>Adult adoptees provide historical and contemporary information which is invaluable to the development of services to support adopters, adopted young people and birth families.</p> <p>Adult adoptees experience of the service is improved.</p>

² The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019/Review of service report

Children and young people			
Children and young people have an opportunity with appropriate support and encouragement to share their experience of the service.	<p>See above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Voices • Adoption Barometer • Connected <p>Children and young people will be referred by regions and VAA's to appropriate groups where they can share issues and information.</p> <p>Adopted Youth Council will share views and concerns with NAS.</p>	<p>Region/VAA will ensure all children and young people with a need for adoption support are referred to the appropriate group/service.</p> <p>When necessary advocates may be commissioned through usual channels to provide appropriate support to a child or young person wishing to share their views.</p> <p>A senior member of NAS will attend meetings of the youth council and share issues with the wider group. Any actions arising will be addressed via the appropriate fora and taken back to the council.</p>	<p>The experience of children and young people is understood and used to inform and develop practices particularly in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact • Life Journey Work • Adoption Support
Staff and practitioners			
Staff views and experience is known and utilised for service improvement where appropriate.	<p>Social workers complete experience of panel questionnaires</p> <p>Social workers complete evaluation questionnaires following all NAS training and events.</p> <p>Staff and practitioners are involved in working groups in relation to the development of the service.</p>	<p>Information regarding panel experience is used to improve panel processes and attendee experience.</p> <p>Information from developmental groups is used to update and modify practices when appropriate. Where significant changes are recommended these are reported to the Regional Management Board.</p>	Staff in the regions and VAA's feel supported and engage, on a regular basis, with service development and improvement.

IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW

This strategy will be delivered via positive leadership from the NAS Governance Board, Regional Management Boards, Managers in the regions, VAA's and local authorities as well as from the Central Team. The strategy will be kept under annual review alongside the Optimal Models for service delivery as we continue to develop and strengthen engagement networks.

Appendix 1 – Legal Context

The legal powers that give rise to the National Adoption Service are the Adoption and Children Act 2002 Joint Adoption Arrangements (Wales) Directions 2015 commonly known as the 'Directions Powers'. These highlight that there is a duty on the local authorities that make up each region to actively engage with service users *“to ensure that the views and the experience of service users are taken into account in carrying out the partnership functions” 7 (4) (j)*”.

The Directions Powers also require service users to be part of the governance arrangements nationally and regionally: *12 (2)(i) Local authorities must invite, and use their best endeavours to ensure that, the following become members of the Advisory Group:*

a service user representative (a person who has adopted a child, an adopted person, the birth parent of an adopted child, a person who has sought approval or is seeking approval as a prospective adopter, a child for whom an adoptive placement is being sought

Regional collaboration – partnership between local authorities: the matters which must be contained in a partnership agreement are as follows:

(1) Arrangements to ensure that the views and the experience of services users are taken into account in carrying out the partnership functions;”

In addition Adoption Regulations place duties on adoption agencies to seek the views of children and adults. The most pertinent of these being The Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007:

Regulation 22 - ‘Review of Quality of Care’:

“(1)The local authority must make suitable arrangements to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of adoption services provided by the local authority.

(2) The system...must make provision by the local authority for (b) the local authority to obtain the views of

- (i) adoptive and natural parents and children being adopted;*
- (ii) any person receiving services from the local authority or their representatives in relation to adoption”*