



Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering

**A marketing proposal for the
Department for Education**

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Executive Summary

The Department for Education required research that:

- Provided deep and comprehensive insight into the barriers, triggers and motivations that exist in relation to both fostering and adoption.

The research involved:

- Eighteen extended in-home one-on-one interviews with individuals and couples where those people provided their considered thoughts on the barriers to adoption and fostering and discussed their motivators. These depth interviews were conducted in November 2012 in the North, Midlands and South of England.
- This was followed by an online survey of 4,948 adults based in England who were asked to complete a detailed 45-minute questionnaire. This fieldwork was conducted between 30 November and 5 December 2012. Unreliable data was eliminated by using built-in questionnaire timers to filter out respondents that completed the survey too quickly and by the removal of respondents who provided inconsistent demographic information.
- Quotas were imposed within the online survey to ensure the respondents were nationally representative on age, gender and region. To help avoid bias, data was also weighted to reflect the estimated incidence of people who were either adopted as a child or who are currently an approved foster carer. Figures expressed in this proposal which describe a 'number of adults in England,' have been extrapolated from the online survey data.

Respondents were drawn from a highly diverse sample pool including adults from all regions of England, people from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds as well as people with differing relationship statuses.

The project has delivered unprecedented data; for the first time the views of a cross-section of the population were canvassed in sufficient numbers to make clear recommendations on a marketing approach that will help drive greater public engagement with both fostering and adoption and increase the supply of potential foster carers and adoptive parents.

This marketing proposal explains the research findings and next steps needed to begin marketing to the proposed target audiences.

Key findings from the research:

- There could be up to 6.3m people who would say they are 'fairly likely', 'very likely' or 'certain to' consider adopting only (1.67m), fostering only (1.67m), or doing both (3.01m), at some point in the future.
- There could be up to 4.6m people who would say they are 'fairly likely', 'very likely' or 'certain to' consider adopting at some point in the future.
- There could be up to 4.6m people who would say they are 'fairly likely', 'very likely' or 'certain to' consider fostering at some point in the future.
- A key audience has been identified as a priority target, totaling up to 3.6m adults in England. Our findings suggest that, within this group, approximately 658,000 people feel they are very likely or certain to consider adopting at some point in the future, and approximately 590,000 people feel they are very likely or certain to consider fostering at some point in the future.
- There is significant overlap between people's barriers and motivations to adopt, and their barriers and motivations to foster.
- Individuals are motivated to adopt or foster for their own benefit, but also for the benefit of children themselves and society as a whole.
- However, many people are being held back from engaging with adoption or fostering, by anxiety emanating from their perception of:
 - The process of becoming an adopter or foster carer.
 - The experience of adoption or fostering itself and their ability to carry it out successfully.
 - The effect an adopted or fostered child would have on their own life and that of any existing children they may have.
- More must be done to address the anxieties that many people feel about their suitability to adopt or foster, if barriers to adoption and fostering are to be overcome.
- The public requires clearer, more consistent information about adoption and fostering in order to engage with services.

To make rapid inroads into the recruitment challenge, Government communications activity should now focus on achieving the following two objectives:

1) Myth-busting

The research found ingrained misconceptions amongst the adult population about adoption and fostering. These included misapprehensions about the type of people agencies were looking to recruit, a belief that the adoption and fostering application processes were overly complex, and the perception that there was a lack of financial support available.

Motivations to adopt or foster were grouped around a requirement for more information on the respective systems, the type of parents being sought and the type of children who need families.

The barriers, and the benefits of adoption and fostering to the individual and society, must be repositioned so they align with the modern reality of adoption and fostering.

Our research shows that myths about adoption and fostering are upheld by the majority of the adult population. We therefore recommend this objective is met via national communications activity targeting adults across the country. It should focus on myth-busting and updating perceptions of adoption and fostering, in order to generate an increased base level of interest in (and enquiries regarding) both subjects.

2) Reassurance

The research shows that adoption and fostering are emotional topics to engage with because of the intense self-reflection they demand. Barriers include not only personal fears, for example of not bonding with a child, but also the impact on others such as children already in the home. Considering, applying for, and becoming an adopter or foster carer are major life decisions. They create a perception of emotional upheaval that hampers commitment. Communications must successfully overcome these emotional barriers and reassure people they will be supported throughout their journey into adoption or fostering.

We recommend that this objective is met predominantly through local activity targeting seven key audience groups identified in the research. These target audiences are comprised of individuals meeting a series of demographic criteria that stakeholder feedback and the research have indicated create an above average propensity to adopt or foster (or both) at some point in the future, and who are of a significant population size in England.

The media and stakeholder channels that reach these target audiences will vary in different parts of the country. It is important, therefore, that we undertake local communications activity that taps into existing local experience of reaching these audiences, and recognises local recruitment challenges.

The target audience groups are brought to life as a pen portrait on page 12.

Introduction

As part of the Government's strategy for protecting and providing for looked after children, an extensive programme of work has looked at how adoption and fostering services can be improved. In addition, new measures and a clear pathway have been developed to ensure that children, for whom adoption is the right option, are placed with permanent loving families without delay.

However, efforts to support looked after children can be enhanced further by a clearer understanding of the potential market for adopter and foster carer recruitment. In September 2012, a focused insight and market segmentation exercise was, therefore, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to explore:

- The degree of latent interest in adoption and fostering amongst the general population and how this interest is segmented within the population.
- How the demographic of foster carers might be widened.
- How motivations and triggers, as well as real or perceived barriers, vary across audience groups and how these may be harnessed or mitigated.
- What can be learnt from the experiences of people who have already engaged with and proceeded through the adoption or fostering systems.

The insight gathered by this project is intended for national, regional and local decision makers, to inform the development of approaches to adopter and foster carer recruitment, including providing data and insights that may support choices around media channels and decisions on marketing messaging.

The insights should also help policy makers at national and local levels make informed decisions about features of the adoption and fostering systems, processes or practice, that adversely affect levels of public interest and engagement, and identify where possible mitigating actions exist that can address these barriers.

Background

The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services need to recruit a further 7,350 foster families in 2013. However, foster carer shortages and barriers to recruitment are localised. Moreover, in some cases the capacity of the foster carer workforce to meet the often complex needs of looked after children is a greater challenge than a simple shortage of foster carers.

The number of children who would benefit from adoption outstrips the number of available adopters. At 31 March 2012, 4,650 children were on placement orders but waiting to be placed with a permanent family. This number has grown by approximately 820 for each of the last two years (*Statistical First Release – Children Looked After in England, 2012*). To keep up with this growing number of children waiting to be adopted, we need more than 600 additional adopters each year. In summary, we need to generate a larger supply of adopters on a regular basis, and a one-off additional increase to find adoptive families for the backlog of children awaiting adoption.

In devising appropriate actions to increase the supply of adopters and foster carers who can meet children's needs, a lack of market knowledge can hamper effective work at both national and local level. The market segmentation work commissioned has sought to illuminate differences in attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering amongst 'segments' of the market.

Overall objectives

The policy success measures are to deliver the ambitions set out by the Government for looked after children. The objectives for the external communications are to:

- Increase the long-term supply of potential adopters and broaden the range of people who foster.
- Help deliver an immediate boost to numbers of potential adopters and foster carers able to meet children's needs.

Communications objectives

To support these objectives, the specific communications objectives to help deliver the desired increase in numbers are to:

- Raise awareness of adoption and fostering amongst key audience segments, highlighting the need for more potential applicants to adopt or foster children.
- Address the attitudinal barriers preventing engagement, including:
 - Perceptions of the way the systems operate.
 - Perceptions of the type of person who undertakes adoption or fostering.
 - Perceptions of the type of children who are available for adoption or fostering.
- Make both the rational and emotional argument for undertaking adoption or fostering.
- Communicate both the inner-directed (individualistic) and outward-directed (altruistic) benefits of undertaking adoption or fostering.
- Utilise appropriate communications channels to affect behaviour change, in order that the identified key audiences recognise the benefits of fostering and adoption and engage with relevant services.

Segmentation approach

Phase 1 – market audit

To begin the process of gathering insight on the target audiences for the project, an audit of existing research into attitudes, barriers and motivations to adoption and fostering was carried out. Evidence was submitted by both DfE and a variety of stakeholder organisations, ensuring that this project would build on the existing research evidence base.

The key finding from the audit was that there is a substantial, robust evidence base of who currently adopts and fosters, and the reasons why. A clear need emerged, however, to understand more about the barriers, triggers and motivations of people who have not actively engaged with adoption or fostering services. Understanding the propensity of this group to foster and/or adopt, and the factors influencing their attitudes and behaviour would provide vital new insight for DfE and local services into how to address the recruitment challenge.

Phase 2 – qualitative research

Next, DfE worked with stakeholders to identify 'hotspot' audience groups whom it was felt may constitute possible target audiences for future recruitment. A combination of individuals and couples representing these groups were then recruited and interviewed at length in their own homes to develop a range of recruitment hypotheses. Eighteen interviews were conducted in total.

In-home interviews were chosen because they allowed people to tell their stories in an unstructured way, rather than giving answers to prescriptive questions. This technique helps to mitigate against people giving answers they think they *should* give, perhaps due to the influence of others (in a group setting) or concern that their attitude to adoption or fostering may cast them in a negative light.

The findings showed that the personal context is a key influence on propensity to consider adoption or fostering. The people most open to the idea of adoption or fostering had been shaped in some way by their life experiences to date (for example, by working within the not-for-profit sector or becoming a volunteer). For example, they may have had a challenging life, perhaps with direct experience of having been in care themselves, and/or characteristics that suggest an altruistic personality.

The role of profession, life experience, employment status and family status were also explored in the interviews. These characteristics were not necessarily shown to affect propensity to adopt or foster, although the size of the sample meant findings were not taken to be conclusive at this stage.

The qualitative phase delivered a wide-ranging set of attitudes towards adoption and fostering. Key themes cited within the eighteen interviews included:

- The importance of agencies being transparent about eligibility criteria.
- The desire for consistency of message across regions and agencies.
- A request for the process of adopting and fostering to feel human and supportive.
- The value in positioning fostering as a formal profession.
- The benefit of distributing information about adoption and fostering in the community through drop-in centres or information packs.

All insights from the qualitative phase were shared with stakeholders and collectively translated into hypotheses that researchers then built into the online survey that comprised phase 3, the quantitative research phase.

Phase 3 – quantitative research

The subsequent recruitment hypotheses arising from these interviews were then tested on a nationally representative sample through an eighty-question online survey that was undertaken by just under 5,000 people. No information was given to survey respondents about adoption or fostering, prior to them filling in the survey. The results of the survey were extrapolated to the population of adults aged 20-64 in England, where required. This large survey sample has also allowed the ratification of hypotheses from other research projects, giving a high level of confidence in the overall findings.

Software was used to maximise respondent reliability and integrity and eliminate unreliable data. This included the use of built-in questionnaire timers to filter out respondents that completed the survey too quickly and removal of panelists who provided inconsistent demographic information.

The survey gives a clear indication of the common barriers, triggers and motivators to adoption and fostering. The research allows us to identify and focus upon those people who are interested in adopting or fostering at some point in the future. This is particularly important for increasing recruitment, as we are able to target people who we know are more open to adopting or fostering in the future than the average person within the population. By addressing their concerns and motivations, whilst painting a clearer picture of who is eligible for adoption and fostering, careful targeting of the correct messages could nudge high quality candidates to enquire.

This quantitative research phase led to the following five specific insights:

1) One in five adults may have some interest in adopting or fostering in future

The percentage of adults who felt there was some likelihood that they would engage at some point in the future was similar for adoption and fostering. Approximately one per cent of people stated they were certain to at some point in the future, with three per cent very likely to, ten per cent fairly likely, 16 per cent fairly unlikely and 23 per cent very unlikely. Just under half of people stated they were certain not to at any point in the future.

Extrapolated to the population of adults aged 20-64 in England, the research indicates that there could be up to 6.3m people (or 20% of the adult population) who would say they are 'fairly likely', 'very likely' or 'certain to' consider adopting only, fostering only, or doing both at some point in the future.

2) Many myths need busting

Online survey respondents were asked what characteristics they felt would be looked upon most favourably in an application to become an adopter or foster carer. The results showed that many assumptions and generalisations are made about the kind of people adoption and fostering agencies are looking for. Moreover, the qualitative interviews also illustrated that people are very quick to qualify themselves *out* of adoption or fostering. Those who felt they were unlikely to consider adoption or fostering in the future cited a wide range of reasons for this including their age, space at home, being single, being a smoker or being overweight.

The criteria that adoption and fostering applicants need to meet can vary between agencies. Whilst the perceived barriers to fostering/adopting may be accurate in some cases (e.g. having adequate space at home), others are not (e.g. being single). Communications can help to realign attitudes in these areas, for example by explaining the application criteria where agencies are typically flexible and that support will be provided at every stage of the process, from initial enquiry onwards. It is important going forward to illustrate the inclusive nature of adoption and fostering and show that agencies are not seeking what potential audiences might perceive to be 'perfect' candidates. This messaging will reduce the anxiety over suitability that was evident in both the qualitative and quantitative research. There is also a need to communicate, where relevant, the financial support that is available, and also how the application process works in practice, for example by expressing it as a series of stages.

3) Messaging must be simpler and clearer

Clear, consistent information was also cited as an important driver of future engagement with the adoption or fostering systems. The modern consumer is overloaded with information, and brevity is therefore essential to cut-through the marketing noise. Adoption and fostering are complex issues, but there is a need to translate them into more digestible messaging.

Specifically, simple messaging is required to improve understanding of:

- The kind of applicants that adoption and fostering services are looking for.
- How the application process works.
- What non-financial support is available.
- The kind of children who are in need of adoption or fostering.

Simplification of the application process was also cited as something that would drive greater engagement, indicating there is a perception that the process can be complex and overlong.

4) Those predisposed to adopt or foster commonly have an altruistic streak

The qualitative research showed a link between the undertaking of altruistic behaviour and an increased propensity to adopt or foster. This was reinforced within the quantitative survey.

Eleven demographic groups were shown by the survey to have an increased propensity toward adoption or fostering (relative to the overall research sample), including people that volunteer and people active in their local community:

- People with personal experience of adoption or fostering in some form.
- Full-time carers.
- People working in the healthcare and not-for-profit sectors and those in higher managerial roles.
- People in full-time employment, students, volunteers and unemployed people.
- People aged 18-35.
- People in enduring relationships and civil partnerships.
- People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- People who are part of religious communities, particularly those stating their religion as Buddhist, Hindu, Islam or Sikh. Across all religions, those people who were currently actively practicing their religion also had an increased propensity.
- People who are active in their local community.
- People living in London.
- People who are privately renting their home.

5) We should communicate the benefit to both 'me' and 'we'

The research also shows us how messaging can support people's motivations. The qualitative research clearly showed that reasons to undertake adoption or fostering can be placed in two categories: motivations that benefit the individual and motivations that benefit society.

As indicated by point 4 above, the people interviewed in our research were most aware of the altruistic, community-focused (i.e. the 'we') benefits of adopting and fostering, such as the benefits to the child and society as a whole. We need to ensure that we communicate the personal (i.e. inward-looking, or 'me') benefits of undertaking adoption or fostering more strongly, such as the rewards of being loved by a child and having the opportunity to shape their future. Some of these benefits will be specific to adoption or fostering. The latter, for example, can provide a highly rewarding role that allows the foster carer to be based at home, and which is often paid (costs of caring for the child should always be reimbursed and many foster carers also receive a fee).

Our aim should be to ensure that marketing is reinforcing both the altruistic and inward-looking motivations to adopt and foster, in tandem.

Target audiences

The next task was to translate the findings of the quantitative survey into a set of sub-groups which could form potential target audiences, and to understand what messages would inspire these specific audiences and drive both an immediate and ongoing increase in recruits for adoption and fostering.

A set of core demographic criteria were developed to inform the qualitative research. To identify the final target audiences, these were translated into seven discriminators (listed below) upon which the quantitative analysis would focus. The discriminators were used as tools to identify target audiences. All of the target audiences analysed were created using characteristics from either six, or all seven of these discriminators.

1) Altruistic behaviour

People that have done voluntary work, are active in their local community or are currently working for a not-for-profit organisation.

2) Experience of adoption or fostering

People who were adopted as a child, have adopted a child, know someone who has adopted or know someone who is a foster carer or was formerly a foster carer.

3) Age

1 = 25-34 year olds

2 = 35-44 year olds

3 = 45-65 year olds

4) Relationship status

People in a civil partnership, and/or non-married but in an enduring relationship, and/or gay/lesbian/bisexual.

5) Religion

People actively practicing a religion.

6) Socio-economic

People in higher managerial, intermediate managerial or skilled manual work.

7) Region

People living in England - regional breakdown as follows:

- East Anglia
- East Midlands
- London
- North (Yorkshire and Humberside)
- North East
- North West
- South East
- South West
- West Midlands

When all variations of the seven discriminators were mapped out (totaling nearly two thousand potential groups), it became possible to identify the audience groups that had both a high propensity to consider adopting or fostering at some point in the future, and who were of a population size that could generate the recruitment increases required nationally.

It was decided that groups with a sample size of 30 out of the 4948 online survey respondents would be considered viable. This equates to an estimated minimum target audience group size of 192,000 adults aged 20-64 in England. A total of 47 target groups met the population size whilst illustrating a strong propensity. Audience groups which contained six of the seven criteria were also considered in the analysis (taking the total number of potential groups to over 7000).

After further propensity analysis was undertaken to decide upon the priority audiences to meet the recruitment brief, a final list of seven target groups was created. Six of the seven groups were a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment and one, Group 3, a possible target for fostering recruitment only. These seven groups constitute an estimated total target audience of up to 3.6m adults aged 20-64 in England, equivalent to approximately 11% of this population group. It is recommended that these form the 'tier one', or 'priority' groups to target.

These tier one groups are largely similar in their demographic makeup, but there are some interesting exceptions. All seven groups had experience of working for a not-for-profit organisation and/or undertaking voluntary work and/or being active in their local community; reinforcing the link between altruistic behaviour and an increased propensity to adopt or foster. The majority (five of the seven groups) also had experience of adoption or fostering, as outlined above, reinforcing the fact that personal experience of these topics can reduce barriers to entry and showcase the benefits both to the individual, the child, and to society as a whole.

All the tier one groups fitted within the 25 to 44 year old age bracket, including those with the highest propensity towards fostering. This is in contrast to the current demographic makeup of the foster care market where it is common for those in their 50s to foster. Six of the seven were nationally representative groups, with one London-specific group. The members of all

tier one groups identified themselves as actively practicing a religion. From a socio-economic perspective, six of the seven groups featured 'higher managerial, intermediate managerial or skilled manual' workers. Amongst the additional 25 tier two audiences identified, however, six consisted of skilled manual workers alone.

The final piece of analysis needed was to identify, for each of these seven groups, what barriers were preventing their engagement with adoption or fostering respectively, and in contrast, the motivators they cited that would encourage them to engage. This analysis was done by looking at the groups' responses to key attitudinal questions within the 45-minute online survey, including how strongly certain factors were associated with adoption or fostering, the relevance of different criteria when adopting or fostering and what factors would encourage consideration.

Over-arching pen portrait of the seven priority audience groups

The seven priority audience groups identified in this research all share specific demographic and attitudinal criteria. They also over-index in propensity to both adopt and foster at some point in the future, when compared to the overall research sample.

Should they be targeted collectively, we need to consider what characteristics are most common amongst the seven groups. The following demographic criteria are shared by the seven groups:

- Involved in altruistic activities (i.e. have done voluntary work, are active in their local community or are currently working for a not-for-profit organisation).
- Have previous experience of fostering or adoption (i.e. have adopted a child or know someone who has, were adopted as a child, have a brother/sister/relative/friend that were adopted, are currently a foster carer or were formerly a foster carer).
- Aged 25 to 44 years old.
- Married, or heterosexual and single (as opposed to non-married but in an enduring relationship, in a civil partnership, or gay/lesbian/bisexual. These groups do also have an increased propensity to adopt or foster within the total sample, but did not feature as prominently amongst the seven priority audience groups).
- Actively practicing a religion.
- Working in higher managerial, intermediate managerial or skilled manual work.

The following attitudes are shared by all seven groups:

- Anxiety concerning the process of becoming an adopter or foster carer.
- Anxiety concerning the level of emotional stress that could be brought on by the experience of adoption or fostering, agency involvement in their lives, and their ability to successfully fulfill the role.
- Anxiety concerning the potential effect an adopted or fostered child would have on their own life and/or that of any existing children they have.

The following are expressed as motivations to adopt or foster by the seven groups:

- Clearer information on what adoption and fostering agencies are looking for from potential adoptive parents and foster carers.
- Clearer information about how the application process for adoption and fostering works.
- Simplification of the actual process of becoming an adoptive parent or foster carer.
- Better financial support for adopters and foster carers.

Some individual groups within the seven exhibit limited variation from the above. These variations are referenced below, should any of these audience groups need to be targeted through marketing individually. Unless otherwise stated, other characteristics closely replicate the over-arching pen portrait above. Population sizes are calculated from respondent data: Census 2011 data has been used to extrapolate approximate numbers of adults aged 20-64 in the national population.

Variation from the over-arching pen portrait among individual groups

Group 1

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 775,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 18.4% (an estimated 143,000 people aged 20-64 in England)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 15.2% (an estimated 118,000 people aged 20-64 in England)

This group closely replicates the over-arching pen portrait above.

Group 2

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 857,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 20.7% (177,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 17.4% (149,000)

This group closely replicates the over-arching pen portrait above but excludes consideration of relationship status. This means it includes those who are in civil partnerships and/or non-married but in enduring relationships and/or gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Group 3

This group is a possible target for fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 364,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 7.3% (27,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 16.4% (60,000)

This group differs from the over-arching pen portrait as it includes those who do not have any previous experience of adoption or fostering.

In terms of their attitudes, they also feel their lack of time presents a barrier to undertaking foster caring.

Group 4

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 709,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 15.8% (112,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 16% (113,000)

This group is aged 25-34, so at the younger end of the target spectrum.

In terms of their attitudes, they also feel their lack of time presents a barrier to undertaking foster caring.

Group 5

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 345,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 25% (86,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 15.6% (54,000)

This group is aged 25-34, so at the younger end of the target spectrum.

Group 6

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 282,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 19.9% (56,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 17.2% (48,000)

This group comprises skilled manual workers only.

In terms of their attitudes, they also feel their lack of time presents a barrier to undertaking foster caring.

Group 7

This group is a possible target for both adoption and fostering recruitment.

Estimated number of people in England aged 20-64 with these characteristics: 256,000

- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider adopting = 22.2% (57,000)
- Percentage of group that are 'certain' or 'very likely' to consider fostering = 18.8% (48,000)

This group resides in London only.

For further details on the seven priority audience groups identified in this research, please refer to the accompanying document entitled *Adoption and Fostering - Appendix One*.

Messaging territories

In making our audience recommendations we have taken into account the estimated size of the target group (in England) and their propensity to adopt or foster. Our recommended approach to messaging has been developed based on the barriers, triggers and motivations the target audience shared across a number of questions in our quantitative survey.

For marketing activity to gain cut-through, it is recognised that audience segmentation will be vital. This is especially true when considering actively targeting messaging; reaching the identified key groups with relevant information and calls to action that are most likely to engage and motivate them.

To ensure that all activity – whether managed nationally, regionally or locally and by the Department, stakeholders or other agencies – is aligned, a messaging matrix would be recommended. This involves setting out the refined messaging that will be used for each audience group so that any organisation seeking to run a recruitment campaign can deliver consistent communications that meet their specific recruitment need.

This will help to identify the key messages that are shared by both adoption and fostering as well as addressing the specific barriers and potential motivators of each target group. Individual messages can then be developed – and tested through qualitative research – that are relevant and will have salience with priority audiences and their influencers.

Within the recommended audience groups there are clear messaging needs that are shared by both those highly predisposed to adoption and those audience segments that over-index when it comes to fostering. For both groups the barriers can be identified as emotional rather than rational, linked to concerns or fears. The biggest barrier across all identified adoption audience segments is how it might affect relationships with children that they may already have, suggesting that many within these groups are parents already. This is the highest indexing barrier amongst every one of the tier one adoption audience segments, and is similarly the highest indexing barrier shared by the fostering audience segments (although not every fostering segment identified this as one of their top three barriers – Group 3 did not). Other barriers to the adoption audience segments, ranked in order of prevalence, are:

- = 2. Fear that they won't be accepted by the child that they adopt
- = 2. The level of scrutiny from social services
3. Worries about the process of being approved as a suitable adoptive parent

To address the emotional barriers, messages must empathise and reassure people that their concerns are shared. Communications should also seek to bust common myths, for example, around the amount of scrutiny that potential adoptors or foster carers will be exposed to. In addition, profiling real life examples of other foster carers, the birth children of foster carers and looked after children themselves who can share their own positive experiences, will be beneficial.

In contrast to the emotional, inward-focused barriers identified by the adoption audience segments, the motivators they selected are all more rational, information-based triggers. Again, all groups identified one main motivator: a clearer understanding of what adoption agencies are looking for from potential adoptive parents. Similarly, other motivators were shared across these groups, with a desire for clearer information about how the application process works, making the process of applying to adopt simpler and better financial support, all selected. This shows a second messaging territory is needed focusing on providing clear, simple information. The information should be presented in an easy to digest manner and include a clear explanation of the type of person that adoption services are seeking applications from.

There is somewhat less uniformity within fostering audience segments; barriers identified are:

1. How it might affect relationships with children that they may already have
2. Fear that they won't be accepted by the child that they foster
3. Whether they have time to be a foster carer
- =4. Worries about the experience of fostering itself
- =4. Concerns about confidentiality e.g. the fostered child's family wanting to make contact
5. Fear of not being approved to become a foster carer by the fostering agency

As with adoption audiences, these segments identified emotionally-driven fears and concerns as potential barriers to becoming a foster carer. To address these effectively, messaging must acknowledge the concerns, normalise these worries and then provide a call to action that helps these groups to feel they will be supported in their journey with any agency. The barriers of perceived lack of time, and concern about confidentiality, are specific to fostering. Other barriers are shared with adoption, meaning messaging can effectively straddle both adoption and fostering.

Motivators identified by the selected audience segments for fostering are also shared with adoption audience segments. Every tier one fostering audience segment cited a clearer understanding of what fostering services are looking for from potential foster carers, and clearer information about how the application process works, as their main triggers. After this, making the process of applying to be a foster carer simpler and better financial support were the most selected potential motivators by these audience groups.

These potential triggers can, as with adoption, be addressed through information-led campaign messages that bust myths and clearly articulate more about the types of carers sought, the foster care process and the associated elements such as what financial support is available.

The first objective for marketing activity is to ensure that the audience understands that adoption and fostering are relevant to them. This will lead to increased engagement in what is being said about adoption and fostering, and an opportunity to build a clearer understanding amongst the national population of what adoption and fostering services are looking for from potential adopters and foster carers. National communications activity would be most appropriate for showcasing the relevance of adoption and fostering to the widest possible audience, whilst changing the misconceptions and received wisdom that prevent or halt people from coming forward (i.e. 'myth-busting'). The drive to ensure people do not 'self-select out' unnecessarily means that more people should enter the funnel and potentially engage with services. Focused messaging can help ensure that this increased interest comes from the high quality applicants that services are looking for.

Local marketing campaigns can support this myth-busting drive, but we would recommend local activity focuses largely on targeting our tier one audiences with messaging that directly tackles the barriers and motivators set out above.

The messaging matrix could be developed in isolation or could, should channel planning indicate that this would be helpful, sit underneath a core proposition; an engaging central theme which can both connect with our target audiences and inspire partner organisations and individual institutions to get involved, supporting the key strategic aims.

If a creative vehicle is developed it should:

- Be built around a simple central thought with which all key audiences can engage.
- Be broad enough for all partners to find a way of offering their support and encouragement, rather than limit, involvement.
- Be broad enough to engage a range of audiences but have the ability to drill down into specific audience triggers.
- Help simplify campaign messages (so that all audiences find something of interest) yet support the key message areas.

- Give the campaign coherence and a sense of scale.
- Help enthuse and engage third parties, galvanising them to show their active support.

Recommended next steps

Future communications should aim to help people overcome the barriers (or perceived barriers) that they feel prevent them from taking positive action and contacting appropriate adoption or fostering services. The more challenging it is to help an individual overcome their barriers and adopt new behaviour, the more expensive it is to convert them. They require more messages, more motivation, more help and more interaction.

The role of direct communications going forward is to reach audiences who are more motivated and more likely to be persuaded to engage with adoption or fostering. These audience segments have been identified in the audience segmentation exercise commissioned by DfE, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

Having defined and sized the target audience groups, there is now a need to carry out a channel planning exercise. This could involve the commissioning of a media planning agency to map the optimal media channels and marketing disciplines needed to reach each target audience group, and advise on available media space and associated costs.

Upon completion of the channel planning exercise, DfE can develop a detailed communications plan that sets out, for national, regional and local adoption and fostering agencies, which audiences should be targeted by which messages and through which communication channels.