



Department  
for Education

# **Quarterly adoption survey**

**Quarter 4 2011-12 (Jan to Mar 2012)  
to quarter 1 2012-13 (April to June 2012)  
November 2012**

# Quarterly Adoption Survey

## Quarter 1 of 2012-13

### Background

The quarterly adoption survey was introduced to give us a better understanding about the number of children and prospective adopters at different stages in the adoption system. The frequency of the survey will allow us to understand how the system is changing, and in particular to take a regular view of how the number of adopters is likely to meet the needs of children awaiting adoption. It will also, in due course, allow us to monitor impact of the Government's reforms to the adoption system.

Voluntary data was requested from all 152 local authorities in England on the number of children and adopters at any stage in the adoption process between 1 April 2012 and 30 June 2012. Data were also requested for the final quarter of 2011-12 for comparison purposes (i.e. between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012). Aggregate data was collected on adopters and child level information was collected on children.

96 local authorities provided a response to the survey, representing over 60% of all local authorities, however there were issues identified in a number of the responses, therefore not all returns were usable. The findings below are based on the usable returns only and show the findings for the local authorities who provided data for both quarters, so that comparisons can be made.

- 70 returns were used to compare data on adopted children
- 78 returns were used to compare data on adopters

Usable child level response rates varied greatly with over 60% of local authorities in the South West providing data, at least half of the local authorities in the West Midlands, Outer London and the North East providing responses and less than half of all other regions providing a response (with a minimum response rate of 26% in the North West). Usable adopter level response rates also varied, from 30% in the North West to 75% in the North East.

Estimates of the national figures have been calculated by scaling the survey figures up. To do this we have used the number of children adopted in each local authority in 2011-12 according to the SDA903 as multiplying factor. Estimates of national figures and of monthly and quarterly averages have been rounded to the nearest 100. Figures which show the data from the local authorities who provided a response to the survey have been rounded to the nearest 10.

This report contains analysis of the data collected, covering the characteristics of children who were at any stage in the adoption process and analysis of the timeliness of their progress in the adoption system.

### Summary

- Between quarter 4 of 2011-12 and quarter 1 of 2012-13 there was a small rise in the number of new decisions (2%), but there was a small fall in the number of matches and placements (6% and 3% respectively). It is difficult at this early stage in the voluntary quarterly survey to know if these changes represent seasonal differences, delays in recording information or genuine changes in trends.
- The adoption process for older children, disabled children and sibling groups takes longer than the national average. It takes an extra 12 months for children aged 5 and over, an extra

4 months if the child is disabled and an extra 2 months if the child is considered for adoption as part of a sibling group.

- In the first quarter of 2012-13 more older children were placed with adoptive parents compared to the previous quarter (Increasing by over 40%). Please note however that the number of older children placed each quarter is relatively low (less than 100) therefore this percentage change should be treated with caution.
- The time from entering care to placement with adoptive parents increased by 2 months (from 593 to 652 days) between the two quarters. Some of this increase could be explained by the increased number of older children placed in the first quarter of 2012-13.
- On 30 June there were considerably more children awaiting adoption than there were adopters awaiting a child/children (approximately 6,000 compared to 1,400). When considering this apparent difference it should be noted that some adopters will adopt more than one child and many LAs find adopters through voluntary adoption agencies. Figures from voluntary adoption agencies were not included in this survey.
- The number of applications and approvals for new adopters has increased between the two quarters (11% and 18% respectively), however the number of initial enquiries has fallen slightly (by 5%).
- The timeliness for application to approval and from approval to matching has improved slightly between the two quarters for prospective adopters.

## **Key findings**

### **Number of children**

The Statistical First Release for the year ending 31 March 2012 found a total of 3,450 children were adopted, representing a 12% rise from the previous year. This increase reflects a rise in the number of children placed for adoption between 2010 and 2011, from 2,510 to 2,710 children. The number of children on a placement order at 31 March 2012 was 7,160, an increase of 15% in the last year.

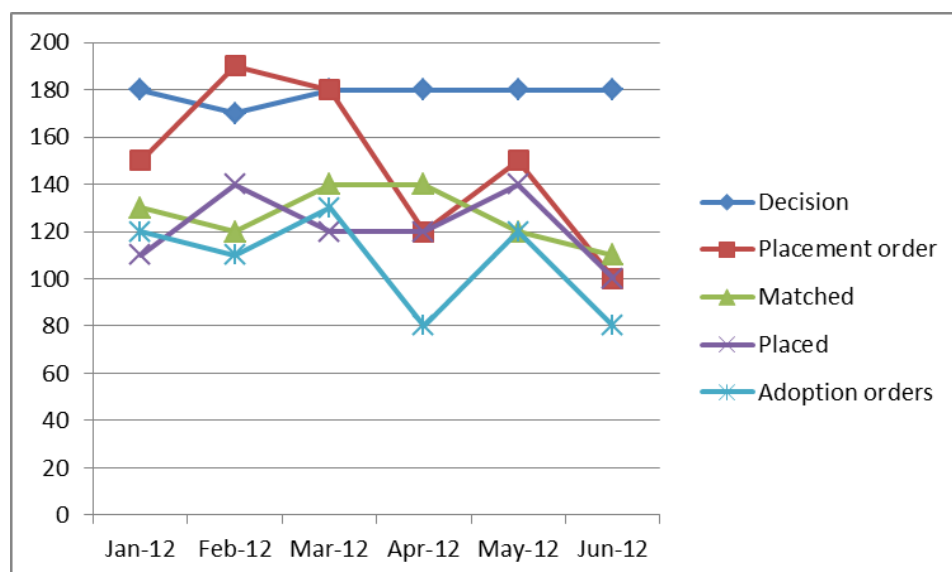
Returns from 70 local authorities for the quarterly adoption survey showed information for approximately 3,900 children who were at some stage in the adoption process during each of the two quarters. A total of 1,060 children had been the subject of a decision that adoption was the best option between January and June, with a very small rise of 2% between the two quarters. During the same period, 890 new placement orders were made, 750 children were matched with prospective adopters and a further 720 were placed with an adoptive family.

The number of children with new placement orders fell by nearly 30% between the two quarters, the number of children matched fell by 6% and the number of children placed fell by 3%. The number of adoption orders also fell between the two quarters (by 22%). The survey data shows that the number of matches and placements is approximately 30% lower than the number of decisions.

It is difficult at this early stage in the voluntary quarterly survey to know if these changes represent seasonal differences, delays in recording information or genuine changes in trends.

Figure 1 - Survey data

Numbers of children with new decisions, placement orders, matches to adoptive families, placements with adoptive families and adoption orders each month



This suggests that nationally there are approximately:

- 400 children each month who have decisions that adoption is the best option for them, an average of 1,300 each quarter (increasing numbers between quarters)
- 400 placement orders made each month, and average of 1,100 each quarter (decreasing numbers between quarters)
- 300 children matched each month to their adoptive family, an average of 900 each quarter (decreasing numbers between quarters)
- 300 children placed with their adoptive families, an average of 900 each quarter (decreasing numbers between quarters)
- 300 adoption orders made each month, an average of 800 each quarter (decreasing numbers between quarters)

#### Timeliness from entering care to being placed with an adoptive family

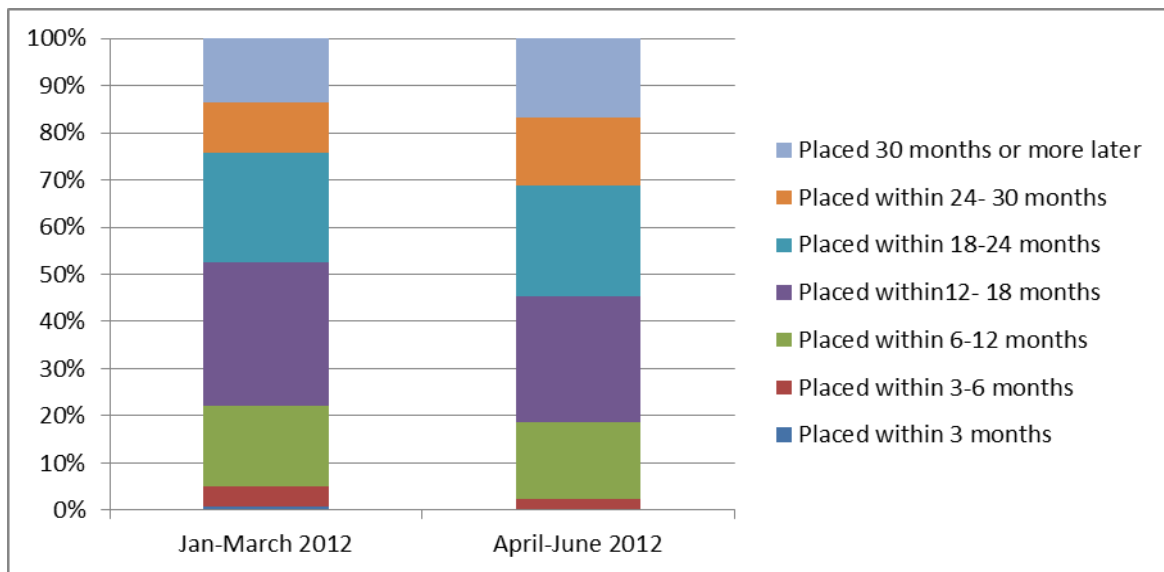
Adoption scorecards were published for the first time in May 2012, these scorecards showed that the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 1 year and 9 months for the three years 2008-11 to 2010-11 (625 days).

Of the 720 children in the quarterly survey who moved in with their adoptive families (i.e. children who were placed within the 6 month period), on average they entered care 1 year and 8 months earlier (622 days). This is very similar to the timeliness seen in the scorecards.

The data suggests an overall increase of 2 months in the average time taken for a child to move in with an adoptive family between the two quarters. The average time for the children who moved in with their adoptive family between January and March was 593 days, increasing to 652 days between April to June.

Figure 2 - Survey data

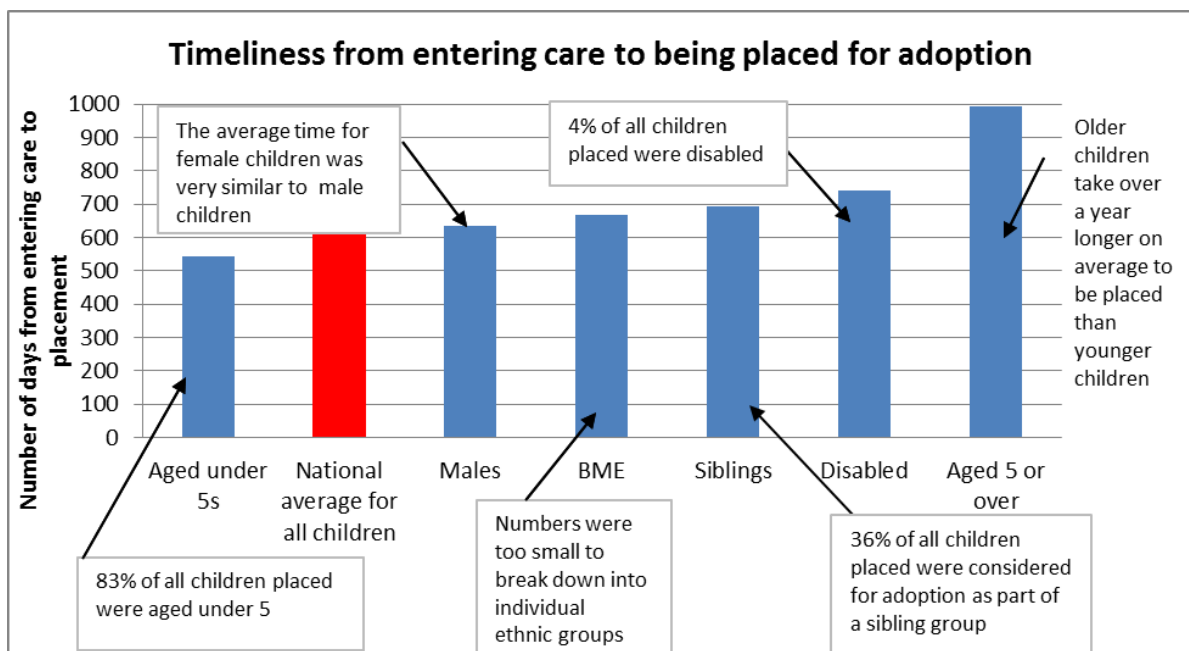
Time from entering care to date placed with adoptive families, for children placed within the 6 months between January 2012 and June 2012



The timeliness of the adoption process varies depending on the different characteristics of the children concerned. The annual SFR found that the majority of adopted children are aged between 1 and 4 years at adoption. Of all looked after children adopted, 74 per cent are in this age group with the average age at adoption being 3 years and 8 months. The SFR found that 70 infants aged under one year old were adopted in 2011-12, with 140 infants in this age group placed for adoption at 31 March 2012, and 360 with a placement order.

Figure 3- Survey data (average time across the 6 month period)

Timeliness of the adoption process by child characteristics



## Age

Information from the quarterly survey suggests that the adoption process takes considerably longer for older children. Children aged 5 and over take on average 2 years and 9 months to be placed with their adoptive family, over a year longer than children aged under 5. The number of older children being placed for adoption in the 6 month period represented 17% (130 children) of all adoptions. The number of older children who were placed with their adoptive family in quarter 1 of 2012-13 was higher than in the previous quarter, with over 40% more children in quarter 1 being older children. Please note however that the number of older children placed each quarter is relatively low (less than 100) therefore this percentage change should be treated with caution.

There was also a small increase in the number of older children with an adoption decision in quarter 1 compared to quarter 4 (8% increase).

## Siblings

The survey found that the adoption process for sibling groups is slightly longer than for all children, taking on average 1 year and 11 months. Over a third of children who were placed with their adoptive families in the 6 month period were considered for adoption as part of a sibling group (36%, 260 children). Sibling groups represented 44% of all the decisions in the 6 month period and 36% of all the children matched in the period. The number of children placed in quarter 1 of 2012-13 who were part of a sibling group was slightly lower than in the previous quarter (3% lower), but the number of new decisions for children who are part of a sibling group was higher than the previous quarter (12% higher).

When scaling to the national average the survey data suggests that in each quarter approximately 500 children who are part of a sibling group have a new decision made that they should be adopted and they will be considered for adoption as part of a sibling group. Approximately 300 children who were considered for adoption with their siblings are placed with an adoptive family in each quarter.

## Disability

The adoption process for disabled children is slightly longer than for all children, taking 2 years. 4% of children placed with their adoptive parents in the 6 month period were disabled. This proportion seems low compared to the proportion of children in need (i.e. receiving a social care service) who are disabled (14%), however it is not possible to determine from the data available if disability is always recorded for adopted children and therefore it is difficult to determine if disabled children represent a disproportionately low percentage of children who adopted. Disabled children represented 4% of all children who had a decision in the 6 month period and for a further 3% of children it was unknown if the child was disabled. The number of decisions for disabled children is very small each quarter, around 20, with even fewer disabled children being placed, therefore it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between quarters.

When scaling to the national average the survey data suggests that each quarter around 50 disabled children have a decision made that they should be adopted and 30 disabled children are placed with an adoptive family each quarter.

## Ethnicity

Children from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups took on average 1 year and 10 months to be placed for adoption. Unfortunately due to the small number of BME children within the survey local authorities it is not possible to break down the timeliness for black children only and make meaningful comparisons. BME children represent 13% of all children who are placed with their adoptive family in the 6 month period and 17% of all children who have a decision within the 6 month period. The number of BME children who were newly placed for adoption is very similar across the two quarters.

## Children who are awaiting adoption and have not yet been placed

At 31 March 2012 there were 2,290 children who had not yet been placed with their adoptive family. This number increased by 6% to 2,420 at the end of the June 2012. Children who had not yet been placed by the end of June had on average entered care 23 months before. This average is already beyond the threshold set in the adoption scorecards of 21 months (640 days). Of the children awaiting adoption, who had not yet been placed at the 30 June, 6% are disabled, 47% are sibling groups, 33% are aged 5 and over at the end of the quarter and 17% were from black minority ethnic groups. The proportion of children who were placed with their adoptive family who were also disabled, or part of a sibling group or older children was lower than the proportions seen in the children awaiting adoption. (Of the children placed in the 6 month period 4% were disabled, 36% were siblings and 17% were aged 5 and over).

## **Adopters**

*Figure 4 - Survey data*

*Numbers of prospective adopters in each quarter in each part of the system from survey<sup>1</sup>*

	<i>Enquiries</i>	<i>Applications</i>	<i>Approvals</i>
<i>Jan – Mar</i>	<i>2,400</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>370</i>
<i>Apr - Jun</i>	<i>2,280</i>	<i>550</i>	<i>430</i>

Returns from 78 LAs for the quarterly adoption survey showed that the number of initial enquiries fell slightly by around 5% between the two quarters.

The number of applications from potential adopters rose by 11% between quarter 4 of 2011-12 and quarter 1 of 2012-13. In total there were 800 adopters approved between January and June 2012 and the number of adopters approved between April and June was 18% higher than in the previous quarter.

The number of approved adopters who were matched by the end of the quarter has increased by 6%.

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<sup>1</sup> Note this does not include any adopters who are found by agencies other than the local authority

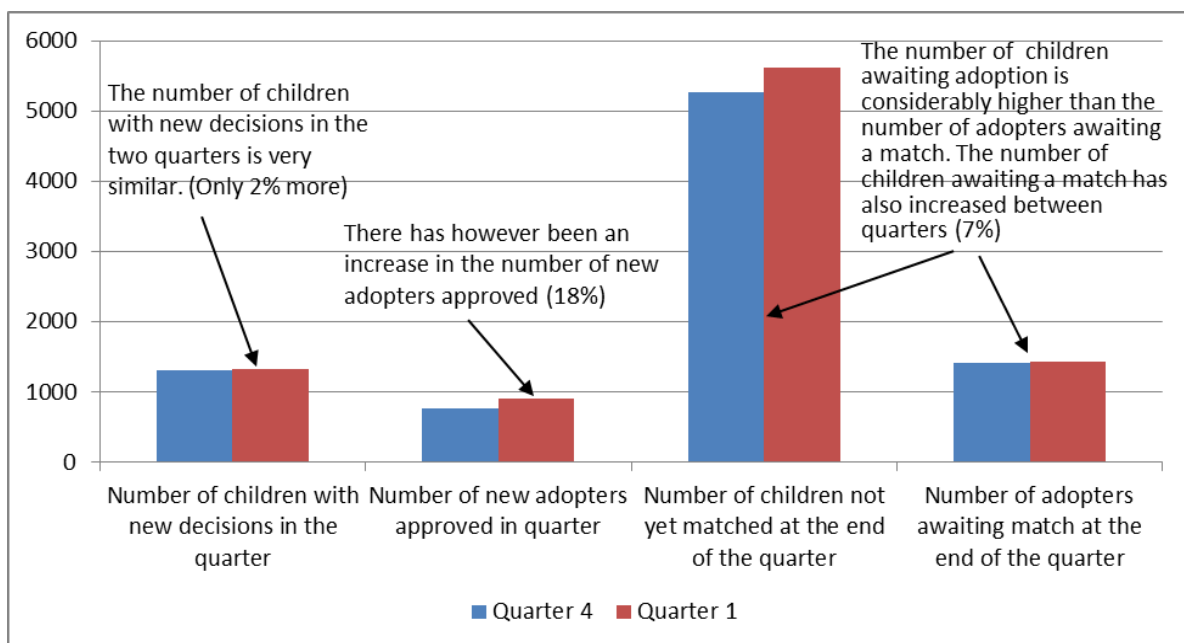
As we have no previous data on adopters it is difficult to say if these changes represent genuine changes or if they reflect existing seasonal changes.

Scaling the findings above to the national level the survey data suggests that there are on average:

- 4,800 new initial enquires each quarter (decreasing numbers between quarters)
- 1,100 new applications to be an adopter each quarter (increasing numbers between quarters)
- 800 new adopters are approved each quarter (increasing numbers between quarters)
- 1,700 adopters at the end of the quarters who have been matched to a child/children (increasing numbers between quarters)
- 1,400 adopters at the end of the quarters who have not yet been matched to a child/children (increasing numbers between quarters)

Overall there were around 4.5 times as many enquiries as applications, and a little over 1.3 times as many applications as approvals.

*Figure 5 - Survey figures scaled to national level  
Comparing supply and demand for adoption*



**Note:** these figures are for local authorities only and do not include data from voluntary adoption agencies

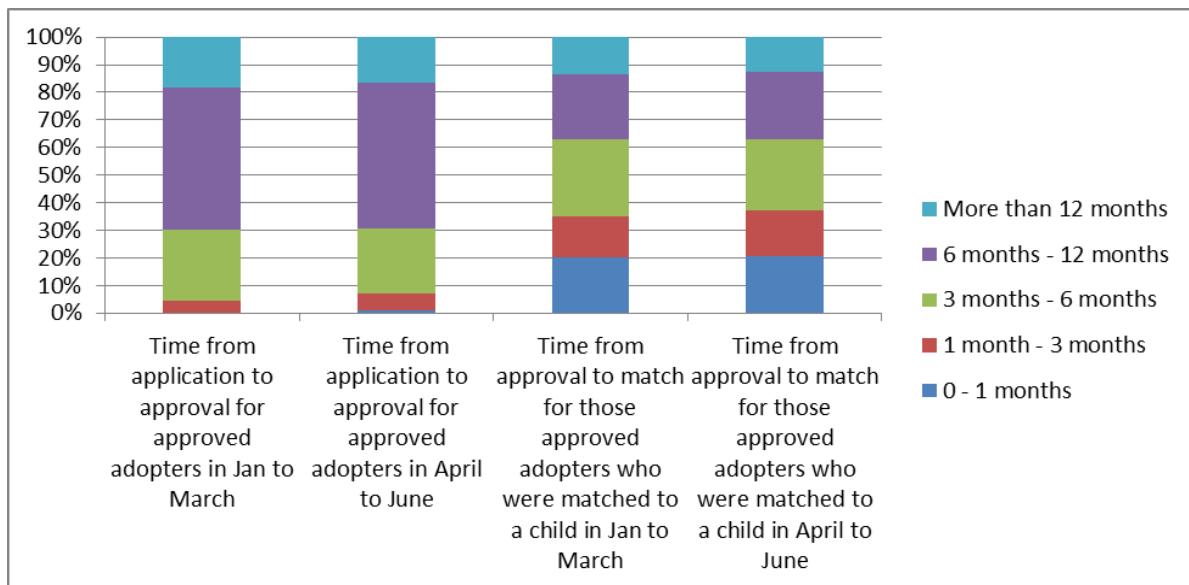
### Prospective adopters: timeliness of approval and matching

The quarterly survey suggests slightly improved timeliness between the quarters, both in terms of time from application to approval and time from approval to match. Between January and March 18% of adopters took more than 12 months from application to approval, but between April and June 16% took more than 12 months. Similarly the time from approval to matching improved slightly, with 37% of matches happening within 3 months of approval compared to 35%.



Figure 6 - Survey figures

Timeliness from application to approval and approval to match for prospective adopters



The time from application to approval is 6 to 12 months for the majority of adopters. There is more variation in the time from approval to match, but for the majority of adopters this stage of the process is complete within 6 months. Therefore for the majority of adopters the time from application to being matched with a child will be between 6 and 18 months.

**Next survey data**

Data for July to September 2012 is currently being analysed and we hope to publish a report on these data in early 2013.