

Good voluntary adoption provision

Consultation document

This is a consultation document on proposals for revisions to the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies. Ofsted seeks the widest possible range of views from those who have an interest in, or expertise relating to, adoption provision in order to ensure that the changes proposed take proper account of the needs and circumstances of all interested parties.

The closing date for the consultation is **12 July 2013**.

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About Ofsted

1. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages.

Purpose and background to the consultation

2. This consultation seeks your views on proposals to revise the framework for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies. Your views will help to refine and develop the framework.
3. Ofsted registers and inspects voluntary adoption agencies. Where appropriate, it takes enforcement action in cases where regulations are breached or standards are not met. Voluntary adoption agencies recruit, assess, approve, train and support adopters. Their services are used by local authorities who may place looked after children for adoption with adoptive families approved by the agency.
4. Some branches of voluntary adoption agencies only provide adoption support and the consultation asks separate questions about the inspection of these branches.
5. Children and young people who live with adoptive families are often vulnerable and face considerable disadvantages. They deserve to be protected and cared for by people and services whose practice is judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. Voluntary adoption agencies that do not demonstrate enough of the characteristics of a good adoption agency will require improvement. This is to promote the need for all voluntary adoption agencies to provide a good or better service – one that performs over and above the minimum standards and ensures that children placed for adoption settle with their new family, make good progress and are happy.
6. Compliance with regulations and the national minimum standards is not enough to improve children's life chances. Adoption agencies should demonstrate that they are meeting the standards in such a way that they have a positive impact on the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people, adoptive families and adults who have been adopted.
7. The judgement of 'requires improvement' relates to improvement in order to be 'good', not in order to comply with the regulations or national minimum standards. A judgement of 'requires improvement' will not result in any enforcement action by Ofsted. We will make recommendations and requirements to support services to improve in order to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. We will continue to take enforcement action as necessary in services judged 'inadequate' and in these circumstances we will require services to make improvements in order to comply with regulations.

8. The national minimum standards underpin the inspection and providers should continue to observe these standards. The way in which the standards are implemented and the impact this has on the progress of, and outcomes for, children, young people and adults involved with adoption will provide evidence for all the judgements.
9. We are seeking views and comments to help us to describe 'good' and to base that on the knowledge and experience of all those with an interest in adoption. We are not consulting on our decision to replace 'adequate' with a 'requires improvement' judgement. We are convinced it is right to emphasise that each child should receive a service from good or better voluntary adoption agencies and any that are not yet 'good' will by definition 'require improvement'. They should be taking immediate and decisive action to improve.
10. In April 2012, a new framework for the inspection of local authority and voluntary adoption agencies was introduced following wide consultation. From September 2013 we propose to introduce a new inspection in local authorities that takes into account the range of children's services including adoption and fostering. This means that this proposed revised framework will apply only to voluntary adoption agencies. We intend that the judgements continue to align with our local authority inspections; therefore we are consulting on and plan to introduce the frameworks during the same inspection period.
11. The judgements proposed in this framework have not significantly changed from the framework in use at the present time and which has been the subject of wide consultation referred to in paragraph 10 above. The responses, particularly those from children and young people, have informed our description of a 'good' agency. We have also taken into account responses to other consultations, including the consultation on the proposed inspection of services for children and young people looked after and care leavers, and publications from the Director of Children's Rights which have helped us to understand what matters to children and young people.
12. The consultation sets out the characteristics of a good service in each judgement area. Inspectors will use these criteria to evaluate the experiences of children, young people and families, and the services they receive. Inspectors will make a judgement of 'good' where there is evidence that the characteristics of 'good' are in place, reflect current practice and are demonstrably leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. When considering the effectiveness and impact of the adoption agency, inspectors will use the descriptors of 'good' as the benchmark from which to grade performance.

13. Inspectors will make their judgements on a four-point scale:
 - outstanding
 - good
 - requires improvement¹
 - inadequate.
14. In this framework, we propose a separate set of grade descriptors for branches of voluntary adoption agencies that offer only adoption support.
15. We propose that a judgement of 'inadequate' in any area should lead to a judgement of 'inadequate' overall.
16. We will use the information from consultation to finalise the revised arrangements for inspection. In September 2013 we will publish the main findings from the consultation on our website.

Changes to the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies

17. From September 2013 the framework will include:
 - a single judgement of 'requires improvement' which will replace the current 'adequate' judgement
 - one set of grade descriptors to describe 'good' in voluntary adoption agencies offering a range of adoption services and another set to describe 'good' in their branches that offer only adoption support. The proposed judgement areas are:
 - the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people (in voluntary adoption agencies offering a range of adoption services)²
 - the quality of the service
 - safeguarding
 - leadership and management.
 - grade descriptors for 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' that are derived from 'good' as the benchmark
 - an 'overall effectiveness' judgement that will be made based on the evaluation of performance in the other judgement areas. A judgement of 'inadequate' in any of the four judgement areas will mean that overall effectiveness will also be judged 'inadequate'.

¹ The 'requires improvement' judgement is made in relation to improvement to become 'good'.

² For those adoption branches which only undertake adoption support, the judgement area is: the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, service users.

18. We are seeking your views on four changes.

- The division of our adoption evaluation schedule into two parts: one for adoption agencies and branches that provide a range of adoption services and the other for branches that provide only adoption support. The grade descriptors for an adoption agency branch that only provides adoption support have been revised to describe the service offered. We want to know if this separation is helpful and accurately reflects the way services operate.
- The grade descriptors for the judgement of 'good'. We want to know if, in your opinion, they describe good experiences, care and progress for children and services for adopters. The descriptors for 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are also set out for information.
- The description of a judgement of 'requires improvement'. This category could include an agency that is meeting the requirements set out in the regulations and national minimum standards. We want to know your opinion on the implications and benefits of the new judgement of 'requires improvement'.
- The judgement of 'inadequate'. We propose that inadequacy in any of the four judgement areas should limit the overall effectiveness judgement to 'inadequate'. We want to know whether you agree with this proposal.

19. You can read about the consultation process on page 28. The consultation questions that we would like you to answer start on page 29.

Proposal (I): That for the purpose of inspection there are separate evaluations of voluntary adoption agencies offering a range of adoption services and the branches offering adoption support

Question 1 of the consultation

20. The adoption inspection framework introduced in April 2012 contains one set of grade descriptors for any type of adoption agency. The review of that framework showed that it would be helpful to have different grade descriptors for adoption agency branches that only provide adoption support. Both sets of grade descriptors are included in this consultation.

Proposal (II): The definition of 'good'

Grade descriptors for an adoption agency that provides a range of adoption services: questions 2 to 6 of the consultation

21. Judgement 1: The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people³ – this judgement is likely to be 'good' where the criteria below best describe the experiences of children and young people.

- Children have their needs met by suitable adults in carefully matched adoptive placements with their brothers and sisters where appropriate. They live in safe, stable and secure adoptive families, where they remain without disruption, progress emotionally and develop secure attachments with the adults caring for them. Children also progress well in their social, emotional, physical and educational development and quickly receive the support they need in any of these areas. They develop a positive identity and have access to written records about their life history when they are needed. Their individual needs dictate the service provided and are regularly assessed to ensure that services provided remain appropriate. Their needs are very carefully considered when access to their records is requested so that the unique circumstances of their situations are recognised and care is taken to help them to understand their experiences. Where appropriate, they have contact with brothers, sisters and other family members, and people who are significant to them.

22. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people placed for adoption is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if it is evident that children and young people are making exceptional progress in their social, emotional and educational development. In addition, the characteristics of a 'good' judgement must be met.

³ This proposed judgement covers the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children who are placed for adoption with families approved by the adoption agency or who are receiving adoption support from the agency. It also includes any other adoption support services provided. The adoption agency is not responsible for any early care planning for children. Its responsibilities begin when it identifies families to be matched with children and continue once the child is placed and beyond. The agency must do all it can to ensure that children have positive experiences and make progress; however, measurable outcomes are often not achieved until after an adoption order has been made and contact with the agency has ceased. Therefore the grade descriptors for this judgement relate only to, and describe generally, what children, young people and adults should experience in a good adoption agency.

Requires improvement:

- The agency is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a 'good' judgement. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate:

- There are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

23. Judgement 2: The quality of service is likely to be 'good' if the following characteristics best describe the service provided:

- Prospective adopters feel highly valued and welcomed by the agency. They are sent clear and comprehensive written information, are offered an interview (which may be by telephone), or are invited to an information event within a reasonable timescale.
- Preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters are effective. This enables them, in many cases, to consider a wide range of children and young people and to manage the task of adoption. This includes support of contact with birth relatives and, where appropriate, the needs of children and young people placed through inter-country arrangements.
- The prospective adopter report is clear, concise and analytical and contains all the required information. This high-quality social work analysis of prospective adopter parenting capacity informs the matching processes and help is available for adopters who need additional support/training prior to approval.
- Prospective adopters are subject to an agency decision on suitability within the timescale set out in the regulations, unless the delay is instigated by the adopters or is beyond the control of the agency. They are referred to the adoption register within three months of approval unless they are already linked with a child.
- Assessments of the needs of children and young people, including those in relation to age, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, language, religious belief and sexual orientation, are required from placing local authorities by the agency and are shared with prospective adopters prior to placement. Prospective adopters can meet with anyone involved with a child to make an informed judgement about whether they have the capacity to parent a particular child.
- Every six months, the panel provides the agency with an analysis of the performance that actively drives improvement. The six-monthly analysis includes an oversight of the approval of adopters and the panel carefully monitors the agency's responses and actions to the issues identified in the reports.
- Adopters understand their right to an assessment of their adoption support needs. They know that any request for support will be welcomed and will result in the provision of a service. Any direct work undertaken, or arranged, by the agency is skilled, sensitive and purposeful.
- Effective support is provided throughout adoption to children and young people, the whole adoptive family and birth relatives (when the agency provides direct services to them). This is valued by the families involved.

- Adopted adults and birth relatives are satisfied with the quality of adoption support services provided. This includes birth records counselling and intermediary services, which are provided in a timely manner by agencies carrying out this work. Adopted adults and birth relatives are appropriately supported to understand their histories. They clearly benefit from the adoption support provided, where a branch provides these services.
- The manager and staff are well trained, demonstrating an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of adoption issues relating to the services they provide. Staff knowledge and training have a positive impact on relationships with, and outcomes for, service users.

24. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- The quality of service provision is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that professional practice exceeds the standard of 'good' and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children and young people. Research informs practice, some of which will be innovative, and makes an exceptional difference to the recruitment, assessment, support and training of adopters and the stability of adoptive families.

Requires improvement:

- The quality of service provision is likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of 'good' are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted or in a significant loss of prospective adopters. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate:

- The quality of service provision is likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

25. **Judgement 3: Safeguarding children and young people is likely to be 'good' if the following criteria best describe the agency's safeguarding practice:**

- The agency is able to demonstrate a deep and effective knowledge about child protection and action to take where there are concerns or actual harm to a child.
- There is evidence of high-quality training for staff and adopters in respect of child protection procedures and the minimisation of risk to children. This includes action to take where children are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters have a very strong focus on child protection, including help to ensure that children and young people living in adoptive homes are safe and feel safe. Preparation of adopters explains the potential impact of abuse and neglect on the behaviour and needs of children and young people. This includes how to manage the risk of unwanted or unsolicited contact through the internet.
- On-going appropriate adoption support ensures that adopters are able to manage contact effectively and continue to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect on their adopted child's behaviour as they grow older.
- Adopters are aware of the need for children to take age-appropriate risks and to develop an understanding of how to protect themselves. Adopters, children and young people know how to complain and feel able to do so. They know who they can talk to about any concerns they have and adopters will advocate on behalf of the child placed with them. They feel confident that they will be supported and listened to and that their concerns will be addressed without putting the adoptive placement at risk of disruption.
- All staff and panel member recruitment and vetting is thorough and complies with statutory requirements. As much as possible is done to assure the suitability of people working in the agency, including staff who do not work directly with children and where Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are unavailable. Working practices and panel procedures also help to prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and young people.
- Staff display high levels of expertise in and awareness of child protection. They demonstrate an understanding of the implications of historic abuse and neglect. They are supported by an open culture where leaders and managers constantly strive to improve safeguarding practice.

- Allegations against, or suspicions of harm by, adopters or staff are handled fairly, quickly and consistently. They are referred immediately to the local authority child protection service. The voluntary adoption agency protects and supports children, young people and adopters and helps to ensure that child-centred decisions are made and unnecessary moves are avoided.
- Agency safeguarding procedures are systematically followed and comply with statutory regulations. They address abuse and historic abuse reported by children and young people and adults who have been adopted. Where agencies offer birth records counselling and intermediary services these are delivered to ensure the safety of all those involved. The agency maintains contact with local authority child protection teams, adult safeguarding services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer. This leads to easily accessible and effective liaison on any concerns about children and promotes a safe service.
- The agency learns from complaints and feedback from children and adults and there is evidence that improvements are made in response.

26. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- Safeguarding is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, the agency's safeguarding practice, including their work with adopters, is informed by research and developments in the area of safeguarding and child protection. This results in adopters who demonstrate a comprehensive and impressive understanding of safeguarding and of the impact of abuse on children, young people and adults. They, therefore, effectively support children and young people even in the most difficult and demanding circumstances and are prepared for future potential difficulties.

Requires improvement:

- Safeguarding is likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of 'good' are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate:

- Safeguarding is likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

27. Judgement 4: Leadership and management are likely to be good if the following characteristics best describe agency practice:

- Senior managers, leaders and trustees show a strong commitment to adoption and deliver an ambitious service to children, young people, adults affected by adoption, adopters and birth families. They develop highly effective working relationships with placing local authorities and social workers in particular. They also have effective relationships with commissioners, partner organisations and with other adoption agencies. This improves the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults and prompt and effective action is taken if children are unhappy or unsafe.
- Leaders and managers monitor service delivery and conduct a thorough and insightful review of the voluntary adoption agency at the frequency set out in the national minimum standards. The views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders inform this review; as do complaints, which are welcomed as an opportunity to learn and develop. Leaders and managers use the results of the review to drive continuous improvement in the agency and can demonstrate the improvements that have been made. Annual quality and performance data forms are promptly completed and submitted to Ofsted.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate a capacity for continuing improvement. This is based on the agency's track record and performance since its previous inspection and evidence of the impact of improvements on outcomes for children and young people. Leaders and managers have a well-developed sense of the needs of the local authorities that they serve and continually review how the services and placements they offer meet those needs.
- Recruitment of adopters is well planned and successful. It takes full account of children waiting for families and national initiatives in adoption. Managers keep under review the trends and patterns in the number of adopters they have available and how placements are made and supported.
- The voluntary adoption agency manages its resources effectively to meet the needs of the children, young people and their adoptive families, avoids any disruptions and promotes family stability. It is also sufficiently resourced to provide any adoption support to adults who require this.
- The statement of purpose and children's guide are clear, accessible and comprehensive. This helps children and young people, birth parents and relatives, adopters, adoptees and staff to be clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and what services it provides.

- Staff, managers and panel members are appropriately qualified, experienced and supervised. They receive up-to-date relevant training to enable them to prepare, assess and support adopters so they provide good-quality, stable and safe care for children and young people. Staff and panel members' appraisals are held on time and include the views of children, young people and adopters, as appropriate. Appraisals clearly link to improved staff performance.
- Staff training and supervision reflect new legislation and practice developments, including research, and result in improved outcomes for children, young people and adoptive families.
- Records are clear, up to date, contribute to an understanding of the child's life and are stored securely. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and evidence of effective administrative systems. Regulatory notifications are made as required by regulations and the agency can demonstrate that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.
- There is evidence that effective action has been taken in relation to any requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection.

28. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- Leadership and management are likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious, innovative and influential in changing the lives of children and young people placed with the agency. Professional relationships between the agency and the local authority and other partner organisations are highly effective. The agency can demonstrate that it makes an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of children and young people.

Requires improvement:

- Leadership and management are likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of 'good' are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate:

- Leadership and management are likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people. Where there is no registered manager this is likely to lead to a judgement of 'inadequate'.

Grade descriptors for an adoption agency that provides only adoption support: questions 7 to 11 of the consultation.

29. Judgement 1: The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, those using the service – this judgement is likely to be 'good' where the criteria below best reflect the experiences of people using the service:⁴

- People receiving an adoption support service influence the delivery of the services that they receive which lead to positive changes in their circumstances. They may not achieve their desired outcome but, if this is the case, they are very carefully supported to understand why. The adoption support overall meets their needs and leaves people feeling positive about the service and that they have been helped and supported.

30. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, those using the service is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if it is evident that they are making exceptional progress in having their needs met. In addition, the characteristics of a 'good' judgement must be met.

Requires improvement:

- The agency is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a 'good' judgement. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in people using the service not having their needs met. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate:

- There are widespread or serious failures that result people using the service being put at risk. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on outcomes.

⁴ This proposed judgement describes the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, people receiving adoption support from the agency. This includes children, adults and families. Branches only offering adoption support may be providing services commissioned by local authorities or providing services directly to families and individuals with a link to the agency. The purposes of the adoption support may vary and may include, for example, helping adoptive families to stay together, helping people find out about their background and helping people to trace relatives. Therefore the outcomes sought and any progress made will be different for each individual and their personal histories and situations. The grade descriptors for this judgement describe generally what people receiving adoption support should experience in a good adoption agency.

31. Judgement 2: The quality of service is likely to be 'good' if the following characteristics best describe the service provided:

- There is a prompt, welcoming, professional, person-centred service that is accessible to all irrespective of age, ability, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and religious belief.
- The branch has a detailed strategy and clear plans to achieve the desired outcomes for each service user. The branch works through a three-way relationship with the service user and the local authority, where services have been commissioned yet support is individually designed, enabling people using the service to progress at their own pace.
- The manager and staff are very well trained, demonstrating an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of adoption issues relating to the services they provide. Their knowledge and training have a positive impact on relationships with, and outcomes for, service users. They provide a prompt, professional and highly sensitive service which makes a difference to people's lives and results in people using the service developing an improved understanding of issues affecting them and an ability to deal with any difficulties that may arise.
- Service users are helped to understand the possible effects of adoption on themselves and their family and, if appropriate, the potential outcomes of a search and/or a reunion with a member of their birth family.

32. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- The quality of service provision is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that professional practice exceeds the standard of 'good' and results in sustained improvement to the lives of people using the adoption support service. Research informs practice, some of which will be innovative, and makes an exceptional difference to people using the service.

Requires improvement:

- The quality of service provision is likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of good are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in the welfare of people using the service not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Inadequate:

- The quality of service provision is likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

33. Judgement 3: Safeguarding people using adoption support services is likely to be 'good' if the following criteria best describe the agency's safeguarding practice:

- The agency is able to demonstrate a deep and effective knowledge about child protection and the action to take where there are concerns or actual harm to a child or adult.
- There is evidence of high-quality training for staff and adopters in respect of child protection procedures and the minimisation of risk to children. This includes action to take where children are missing or at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Staff display high levels of expertise in, and awareness of, child protection. They demonstrate an understanding of the implications of historic abuse and neglect. They are supported by an open culture where leaders and managers constantly strive to improve safeguarding practice. Before work commences, service users are told of the branch approach to child protection and historic abuse. Where relevant, adopters are helped to understand the impact of children's past experiences and this has a positive effect on their child's behaviour and/or on their parenting.
- Children, young people and adult service users know who they can talk to if they have concerns or complaints and have confidence that they are taken seriously. The agency learns from complaints and feedback from children and adults and there is evidence that improvements are made in response.
- Current or historic allegations or suspicions of harm are handled sensitively and in accordance with procedures, including, where appropriate, vulnerable adult procedures. All relevant agencies are involved and staff understand their roles and know what to do, and children and young people and/or adult service users what to expect.
- The agency maintains contact with local authority with child protection teams, adult safeguarding services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer, as appropriate. This leads to easily accessible and effective liaison on any concerns about children and promotes a safe service. The agency's safeguarding policy is submitted to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer located in the area of the registered branch.
- Staff recruitment and vetting are thorough and conform to safer recruitment practices.

34. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- Safeguarding is likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, the agency's safeguarding practice is informed by research and developments in the area of safeguarding and child protection. This results in those who receive adoption support benefiting from highly effective safeguarding practice, for example:
 - adopters who demonstrate a comprehensive and impressive understanding of safeguarding and of the impact of abuse on children, young people and adults
 - adults understanding how abuse may have affected them in their past and being very effectively helped to cope with the impact.

Requires improvement:

- Safeguarding is likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of 'good' are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on the welfare of children and young people.

Inadequate:

- Safeguarding is likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result in people's welfare being at risk. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the adoption support service.

35. Judgement 4: Leadership and management are likely to be 'good' if the following characteristics best describe agency practice:

- Senior managers, leaders and trustees show a strong commitment to adoption support and deliver an ambitious service to children and young people, adults affected by adoption, adopters and birth families. They develop highly effective working relationships with placing local authorities and social workers in particular. They also have effective relationships with commissioners, partner organisations and with other adoption agencies. This improves the experience and progress of children, young people and adults who are receiving adoption support. Prompt and effective action is taken if children are unhappy or unsafe. With the agreement of people using their service, they update the commissioners about their progress.
- Leaders and managers monitor service delivery and conduct a thorough and insightful review of the branch at the frequency set out in the national minimum standards. The views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders inform this review; as do complaints, which are welcomed as an opportunity to learn and develop. Leaders and managers use the results of the review to drive continuous improvement in the services that are provided. Annual quality and performance data forms are promptly completed and submitted to Ofsted.
- The branch manages its resources effectively to meet the needs of the children, young people, adoptive families and adults affected by adoption. Their work aims to reduce disruptions and promote family stability. It is also sufficiently resourced to provide any adoption support to adults who require this.
- The statement of purpose and children's guide, if required, are clear, accessible and comprehensive. This enables service users and staff to be clear about the aims and objectives of the branch and the services available.
- Staff and managers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They have regular supervision and receive up-to-date relevant training to enable them to work effectively with service users. Staff appraisals are held on time and include the views of service users, as appropriate. Appraisals clearly link to improved staff performance.
- Records are clear, up to date and are stored securely. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and effective administrative systems are in place.
- Regulatory notifications are made as required by regulations and the branch can demonstrate that appropriate follow-up action has been taken.
- Effective action has been taken in relation to any requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection.

36. The grade descriptors for the judgements of 'outstanding', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' are set out below.

Outstanding:

- Leadership and management are likely to be judged 'outstanding' if, in addition to meeting the characteristics of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious, innovative and influential in changing the lives of children and young people placed through the agency. Professional relationships between the agency and the local authority and other partner organisations are highly effective. The agency can demonstrate that it makes an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of people using the service.

Requires improvement:

- Leadership and management are likely to 'require improvement' when the characteristics of 'good' are not in place. However, there are no widespread or serious failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. Regulatory requirements are met or, if they are not, any breaches do not have a negative impact on people using the service.

Inadequate:

- Leadership and management are likely to be 'inadequate' if there are widespread or serious failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. There are breaches of regulations which have a negative impact on the welfare of people using the service.

Proposal (III): The definition of 'requires improvement'

Question 12 of the consultation

37. Any agency that is not demonstrating the characteristics of a 'good' service will be judged to 'require improvement'. If there is evidence of widespread or serious failures which result in children, young people or adults not being safeguarded or their welfare not being promoted they will be judged 'inadequate'.

Proposal (IV): 'Inadequate' judgements

Question 13 of the consultation

38. It is proposed that inadequacy in any of the four judgement areas limits the overall effectiveness judgement to 'inadequate'. The judgements are:
- the experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people or service users
 - the quality of the service
 - safeguarding
 - leadership and management.

The consultation process

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper. The consultation opens on 14 June 2013 and closes on 12 July 2013.

The information you provide us with will inform our consideration of changes to the framework for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.

We will publish a response to the consultation at the same time that we intend to implement inspections in September 2013.

Sending back your response

There are three ways of completing and submitting your response.

Online electronic questionnaire

Visit our website to complete and submit an electronic version of the response form: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ofsted-voladopt2013>.

Print and post

Visit our website to print a Word or PDF version of the response form that can be filled in by hand: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130165. When you have completed it please post it to:

8th floor
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE.

Download and email

Visit our website to download a Word version of the response form that you can complete on your computer: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130165. When you have completed the form, please email it to socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk with the consultation name in the subject line.

Response form for 'Good voluntary adoption provision' consultation

Confidentiality

The information you provide will be held by us. It will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research to help us to become more effective, shape policies and inform inspection and regulatory practice.

We will treat your identity in confidence, if you disclose it to us. However, we may publish an organisation's views.

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes ☐ please complete Section 1 and then go to Section 3

No ☐ please complete Section 2 and then go to Section 3

Section 1

If you are completing the consultation on behalf of an organisation and would like us to consider publishing the views of your organisation, please indicate this below.

Organisation:

Section 2

Which of the below best describes you? Please tick one option.

I am:

a child or young person who is or was adopted	<input type="checkbox"/>	a voluntary adoption agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
a parent of a child or young person who is going to be or has been adopted	<input type="checkbox"/>	a local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
a relative of a child or young person who is going to be or was adopted	<input type="checkbox"/>	an employee of an adoption agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
an adoptive or prospective adoptive parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	a social worker or manager working with children and young people who are or should be adopted	<input type="checkbox"/>
a member of an adoptive or prospective adoptive family	<input type="checkbox"/>	a member of an adoption panel	<input type="checkbox"/>
a representative member of a national or regional adoption organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (please tell us)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Section 3

Question 1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the evaluation schedule should be divided into two parts: one for voluntary adoption agencies offering a range of adoption services and the other for branches only offering adoption support?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Comments:

Questions 2 to 6 refer to voluntary adoption agencies offering a range of adoption services. Questions 7 to 11 refer to voluntary adoption agency branches offering only adoption support. All other questions refer to both.

Question 2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 21 describe good **experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people** who are placed for adoption with an adoptive family approved by a voluntary adoption agency?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 23 describe a good **quality of service** in a voluntary adoption agency?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 25 describe good practice in **safeguarding children and young people** in a voluntary adoption agency?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 27 describe good **leadership and management** in a voluntary adoption agency?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 6. Do you have any further comments or suggestions about our proposals for the grade descriptors described in questions 2 to 5?

Comments:

Question 7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 29 describe good **experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, service users** in voluntary adoption agency branches offering only adoption support?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 31 describe a good **quality of service** in voluntary adoption agency branches offering only adoption support?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 33 describe good practice in **safeguarding** in voluntary adoption agency branches offering only adoption support?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grade descriptors in paragraph 35 describe good **leadership and management** in voluntary adoption agency branches offering only adoption support?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Question 11. Do you have any further comments or suggestions about our proposals for the grade descriptors described in questions 7 to 10?

Comments:

Question 12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the description of the judgement of 'requires improvement' as set out in paragraph 37?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a judgement of 'inadequate' in any judgement area listed in paragraph 38 should limit the overall effectiveness judgement to 'inadequate'?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Q.14 Do you have any further comments? Please include them here.

What did you think of this consultation?

One of the commitments in our strategic plan is to monitor whether our consultations are accessible to those wishing to take part.

Please tell us what you thought of this consultation by answering the questions below.

	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Don't know
I found the consultation information clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found the consultation easy to find on the Ofsted website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had enough information about the consultation topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How did you hear about this consultation?

- ☐ Ofsted website
- ☐ *Ofsted News*
- ☐ Ofsted email alerts service
- ☐ Ofsted conference
- ☐ Another organisation (please specify, if known)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Is there anything you would like us to improve on or do differently for future consultations? If so, please tell us below.

Thank you for taking part in our consultation.

Additional questions about you

Your answers to the following questions will help us to evaluate how successfully we are communicating messages from inspection to all sections of society. **We would like to assure you that all responses are confidential and you do not have to answer every question.**

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Age

Under 14 <input type="checkbox"/>	14–18 <input type="checkbox"/>	19–24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25–34 <input type="checkbox"/>	35–44 <input type="checkbox"/>	45–54 <input type="checkbox"/>	55–64 <input type="checkbox"/>	65+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Ethnic origin

a) How would you describe your national group?

British or mixed British	<input type="checkbox"/>	English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

b) How would you describe your ethnic group?

Asian		Mixed ethnic origin	
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other mixed ethnic background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Black		White	
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any White background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other ethnic background	
Any other Black background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese			
Any Chinese background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

4. Sexual orientation

Heterosexual <input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian <input type="checkbox"/>	Gay <input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Religion/Belief

Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other, please state:	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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