

# Independent Review Mechanism

(Adoption and Fostering)

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2012/13**



Department  
for Education

**irm** | independent  
review  
mechanism  
ENGLAND

**BAAF**  
ADOPTION  
& FOSTERING

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Annual Report 2012/13 for the Independent Review Mechanism for Adoption and Fostering in England.

The Independent Review Mechanism for Adoption and Fostering (IRM) is managed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. Its responsibility is to review qualifying determinations (referred to hereafter as QDs) made by an adoption agency or fostering service provider about a person's suitability to adopt or foster and to make recommendations to the provider or agency. It also considers applications from people applying to receive information from adoption records (where the adoption agency has made a determination not to accept their application or to disclose or withhold information against the wishes of the person to whom the information relates).

The IRM has now completed its fourth year of providing applicants with an independent review of their suitability to foster. For prospective adopters, the service has been in place for nine years.

We hope you find the information included in this report helpful, interesting and informative.

**Donal Mullally**

IRM Contract Manager

**Louise Hocking**

Director of Child Placement, BAAF

# Executive summary

- The IRM saw a 22 per cent (22 cases) increase in applications in 2012/13. The rise was almost exclusively from foster carers, with a significant rise in family and friends applications. Adoption applications remained static.
- A total of 42 per cent (5 cases) of adoption cases resulted in a positive outcome for the applicant(s).
- A total of 30 per cent (22 cases) of fostering cases resulted in a positive outcome for the applicant(s).
- A total of 22 per cent of applicants (42) were from a black, Asian or mixed ethnicity background.
- The most common areas for review of adoption cases were: ability to understand or meet the needs of looked after children; medical issues; safeguarding issues; issues surrounding emotional resilience/capacity; and adverse impact on existing family members.
- In fostering, the key areas for review were: safeguarding concerns and allegations; ability to continue to meet the physical and emotional needs of children in the care system; withholding information; and breakdown in working partnership with the fostering service provider.
- In a number of fostering cases, children are still being immediately removed from carers when an allegation has been made against the carers, despite the children not being at risk of significant harm.
- Applicants require access to independent support during the IRM process. Not all agencies have policies in place to provide this support.
- Agency decision makers need to ensure that they comply with the regulatory guidance when making QDs.

# Section 1

## Learning from the work of the IRM

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE IRM

The primary role of the IRM is to provide an independent review of QDs made by adoption and fostering agencies (QDs cover the approval of adopters and foster carers). Our feedback suggests that this independence is valued by everyone involved, with applicants seeing this as a final opportunity to be heard. Many of the cases reviewed by the IRM are complex, and the IRM's remit is important as it offers a range of experience and knowledge in complex areas of work and outcomes that impact on individual lives.

It provides the opportunity for a fresh look at the applicant's case, and delivers an independent recommendation that the agency must take into consideration in reaching a final decision.

In addition to delivering a recommendation in each case, the IRM provides feedback for each agency on their policy and practice. Over the course of a year, this reveals themes from which all providers and agencies can learn. The IRM considers cases across England and therefore benefits from a unique overview of current practice.

2012/13 has been the busiest year to date in the history of the IRM. Overall, the number of cases accepted has risen by 22 per cent (22 cases) and the number of cases heard has risen by 20 per cent (17 cases), compared to 2011/12. The number of adoption cases has remained relatively static; the increase has been within the fostering sector, with a noticeable rise in family and friends applications. During a period when increasing numbers of children are being cared for by adopters and foster carers, it is important that the sector is responsive to the needs of people undertaking these vital and demanding roles. The IRM continues to provide an independent route for carers to request a review of the QDs of agencies when they review or seek to terminate their role as foster carers or adopters. Feedback indicates that this is valued even when the IRM confirms the view of the agency.

From the perspective of agencies, the IRM is able to validate good practice and procedures and often provides advice on improvements that can be made to the delivery of their service. Ultimately, this can play an important role in encouraging consistent practice that will benefit the children whose safe care must remain the goal of all agencies and carers.

The IRM seeks to ensure public confidence in the fostering and adoption process. At a time of increasingly high profile proposed regulatory changes in the recruitment and assessment processes, the IRM continues to strive

to offer a good service. We take this role seriously and have recently undertaken a further round of recruitment of IRM panel members to ensure that the central IRM list continues to offer high quality deliberation and wide diverse representation for the consideration of each case.

Reviewing cases England-wide provides a unique perspective and one that can help to support the drive to reflect on and improve practice in fostering and adoption. The IRM team has a role to play in disseminating good practice. In September 2012, the IRM Contract Manager gave a presentation on the role of the IRM at the Independent Fostering Providers Conference in Birmingham and welcomes the opportunity to speak to groups of service users on the role of the IRM.

## ACCEPTED APPLICATIONS

Between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013, a total of 121 cases were accepted by the IRM – 105 fostering and 16 adoptions. Ten of those accepted cases have since been withdrawn.

The remit of the IRM enables it to consider any aspect of suitability of an applicant and it is not limited to the reasons provided in the QD issues that led to the application. There is value therefore in considering in detail the reasons given in QDs and the issues of concern as raised by the IRM.

The tables in the appendix consider the issues in IRM cases heard in 2012/13 in adoption and fostering. They provide information on the broad areas of concern and detail which led to a recommendation of suitable or not suitable by the IRM. This appendix also shows the similarities and differences in the issues raised by the QD and the IRM.

### Adoption

The number of adoption cases remains very small compared to the number of fostering cases. Primarily, this reflects the fact that the number of adoptive families is considerably smaller than those that foster. This also reflects the fact that an adopter, generally, has a shorter period of time actively involved with an agency than a foster carer does.

The majority of adoption cases related to suitability in the assessment stage and not considering to terminate an existing approval. In the main, IRM panels considered assessments of high quality carried out by experienced social workers committed to putting the child at the centre of their practice. The inability to understand the needs of a looked after child featured significantly and most agencies went to considerable lengths to ensure applicants had access to high quality training to increase their understanding and develop their skills. Given that this inability was often linked to a lack of childcare experience, it raised the importance of providing applicants with the opportunity to demonstrate potential as well

as concrete experience.

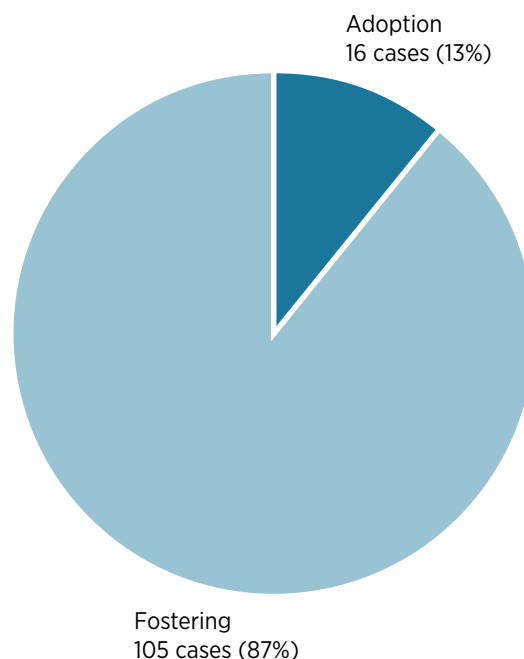
Medical issues were an active theme in the cases considered. Adoption is a lifelong commitment and ensuring that applicants have a reasonable prospect of remaining in good enough health until the child reaches adulthood is an important consideration. It is essential to assess each situation individually and provide opportunities for applicants to address any lifestyle issues.

The importance of thoroughly assessing the impact of adoption on existing children in the family was a key theme to emerge from adoption reviews. Assessments that clearly evidenced the views of children significantly enhanced agency decision-making.

## Fostering

As Figure 1 illustrates, fostering accounts for the great majority of IRM cases. The majority of cases (67 cases; 64%) involve the termination of existing approval and foster carers are likely to have been with a provider for a number of years and cared for a range of children.

**Figure 1: Applications accepted 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013**



The importance of establishing a robust and mutually respectful working relationship figured prominently in IRM cases. The IRM shows that good working relationships are key to a successful fostering service with a responsibility on both social workers and foster carers to make this relationship work. Effective fostering requires a true teamwork approach to maintain safe, secure and nurturing placements. The IRM saw examples of excellent practice in this area but it also considered situations where the

relationship between fostering provider and foster carer had deteriorated to a point where safe and accountable caring was compromised.

The safeguarding of children is the primary responsibility of foster carers and providers, and allegations against carers and concerns about the ability to provide safe care featured in a significant number of cases. Generally, fostering providers act promptly when these issues arise. However, it is also apparent that occasionally children long established in placement are moved from their foster home before matters have been fully investigated. It is important that children's circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis and that they are only moved if they are perceived as being at risk of immediate harm.

Foster carers can work for an agency over many years and it is essential that their knowledge and skills are updated through good quality training and supervision. IRM reviews confirm the importance of annual foster carer reviews for monitoring this progress and ensuring that any issues are addressed in a timely fashion.

## TYPES OF AGENCY OR PROVIDER

Between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013, the IRM heard 104 cases made up of 90 fostering and 14 adoption cases. The breakdown of cases in relation to the local authority or voluntary adoption agencies, and local authority fostering services and independent fostering providers, is as follows:

- Seventy-nine per cent of the adoption cases heard involved local authorities.
- The remaining 21 per cent involved voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs).  
This broadly reflects the distribution of voluntary and local authority adoption agencies.
- Sixty-eight per cent of the fostering cases heard involved local authorities.
- The remaining 32 per cent involved independent fostering providers (IFPs).  
This accurately reflects the relative distribution of the fostering services.

## OUTCOMES

### IRM recommendations

#### Adoption

- In seven out of the 14 cases (50%), the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were suitable to adopt or to continue to a full assessment.
- In seven out of the 14 cases (50%), the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were not suitable to adopt or to continue to a full assessment.



### **Fostering**

- In 40 out of the 90 cases (44%), the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were suitable to foster.
- In 49 out of the 90 cases (55%), the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were not suitable to foster.
- One case (1%) was withdrawn at panel.

### **Final decisions**

#### **Adoption**

- In five of the seven adoption cases (71%) where the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were suitable to adopt or should proceed to a full assessment, the agency agreed with the recommendation.
- In all of the seven adoption cases (100%) where the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were not suitable, the agency agreed with the recommendation.
- We are still awaiting the final decision in two cases as of 30 April 2013.

#### **Fostering**

- In 22 of the 40 fostering cases (55%) where the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were suitable to foster, the fostering service provider (FSP) agreed with the recommendation.
- In 45 of the 49 fostering cases (92%) where the IRM recommended that the applicant/s were not suitable, the FSP agreed with the recommendation.
- In 16 of the 40 fostering cases (40%), the FSP disagreed with the IRM recommendation and decided that the applicant/s were not suitable to foster.
- We are still awaiting the final decision in six cases as of 30 April 2013.

## **ENQUIRIES**

Part of the IRM's remit is to offer support and advice to potential applicants and agencies. In 2012/13, we responded to 87 enquiries. This comprised 44 (51%) potential applicants and 43 (49%) FSPs, agencies or other professionals. Providing an open and transparent service is a key priority and we pride ourselves in responding quickly to all enquiries.

Most queries related to questions about the application of the IRM to particular circumstances, and timely enquiries do help both potential applicants and agencies to make decisions confidently and with the assurance that they have understood the role of the IRM.

### **Applications not accepted**

During the period of 2012/13, we received six applications that we were unable to accept. All of these were with regards to fostering. Reasons included: applications being beyond the timescale of 28 calendar days; failure to complete the full assessment before issuing a QD; delay in advising the applicant of the proposed agency decision; and incorrect application of the regulations. In each case, the IRM Contract Manager was able to provide advice to the applicant and, where appropriate, direct liaison with the fostering provider.

## Section 2

# The experience of the IRM for applicants and agencies

The context of an IRM review is inevitably a demanding one for applicants and agencies. Applying to the IRM represents an independent and final opportunity for consideration of an applicant's suitability to adopt or foster to be reviewed. It is a fair, thorough and therefore rigorous process for both the applicants and the agency, and as such can be experienced as a helpful but stressful process. The IRM seeks to offer a clear, helpful, informative and efficient service to ensure an appropriate level of support to all applicants and agencies. Feedback from our service users informs us that feeling valued, listened to and respected throughout the process has a significant impact, irrespective of the outcome of the review. Feedback is an important indicator of how well we meet these objectives and an opportunity for the IRM to learn from these experiences as we seek to improve the service.

### FEEDBACK FROM APPLICANTS

Questionnaires were provided to all applicants within the 104 heard cases. A total of 48 responses were received.

#### The IRM process

All respondents were positive about their contact with the IRM office, both in written communication and response to telephone calls. Applicants found the available information helpful and the clarity on when and where their review would take place built confidence in the process.

However, the prospect of coming to a panel review was sometimes seen as daunting, as was the concentrated nature of the panel. Some applicants felt that they were disadvantaged by lacking the resources available to their agencies.

#### Practical arrangements for the review panel

The IRM draws applicants from across the country so most applicants have to travel some distance to reviews. Applicants' responses to a question about venues and travel arrangements were very largely positive with most being content with the facilities and the timing of the panel. By its nature, the IRM is an unfamiliar experience for applicants and providing good quality information on what to expect is important. The provision of a profile of individual members of the panel has been well received and positive comments included those shown on this page.

*They have responded to all our emails and enquiries in a very professional way.*

*Gave a clear picture of their expertise.*

*A great way of assuring us that the panel was made up of people from all walks of life and experience.*

## Conduct of the review

The panel review is the culmination of a stressful and difficult period for applicants, so the responses to a question about how they experienced the actual review are important. A total of 45 of the 48 replies confirmed that applicants felt well received and treated with respect by the panel.

There is evidence that the actual process of having a fresh opportunity to state their case to an independent panel is of value:

*Irrespective of the outcome, my husband and I felt we were able to speak out and get our case across.*

Answering detailed questions put by a panel is a demanding experience, but most applicants regarded them as fair and relevant and felt that they had the time to reflect and reply without feeling hurried. However, a number of applicants felt that they had insufficient time at the end of the review to summarise their case:

*Surprising how quickly five minutes goes at the end!*

## FEEDBACK FROM AGENCIES

Questionnaires were provided to all agencies within the 104 cases heard, and of this number 67 agencies responded and 37 did not. Agencies were asked to provide feedback about their contact with the IRM office staff and the information received about the IRM role, process and panel members. Additionally, they contributed their views on the paperwork provided and the practical arrangements for the review panel. Finally, they commented on the conduct of the review panel in their individual case. The feedback is summarised below.

### The IRM process

An IRM review is a relatively rare event for agencies and it is reassuring that 64 out of the 67 agencies that responded were satisfied with their contact with the IRM office and the administration of their review. Agencies felt that they received clear written guidance on procedures and found the IRM team responsive to additional queries arising from the case. In a process where great emphasis is placed on avoiding delay, the vast majority of agencies received all communication within the stipulated period and, equally importantly, were able to meet the timescales for submitting paperwork requested by the IRM. In the few cases where problems arose, these occurred when the liaison officer for the agency was a different person to the agency representative who attended the panel.

### Practical arrangements for the review panel

Clarity about the role of the panel and the expectation of agencies and applicants is important. Agencies were overwhelmingly positive about the arrangements for their panel and reported that they felt that the paperwork was well presented and they received all the written material

on time. Anecdotally, a few agencies experienced difficulties in gaining consent from third party organisations to share information and felt that the administrative demands on them were excessive.

### **Conduct of the review panel**

Agencies reported a high degree of satisfaction with their experience at panel, with 63 (94%) out of the 67 who replied saying that they were treated with respect and understanding by the panel. A number of agencies (six (10%)) did express concern about the amount of time they had to answer complex questions and a further point was made about a preference for an opportunity to address the panel without the applicants being present (five (8%)). Individual cases can be complex and the amount of evidence submitted can vary considerably. However, the high level of satisfaction of 94 per cent of responding agencies gives an indication that the IRM reviews are largely a positive learning experience for agency representatives.

### **Quality assurance at the IRM**

The IRM values all feedback from applicants and agencies as it provides a barometer of satisfaction with the process and valuable observations on how it might be refined or improved.

All IRM panels reach a recommendation and although this might not be the one that applicants are hoping for, only a very small number express dissatisfaction with the IRM process. It is instructive that most applicants place a high value on the opportunity that the IRM affords them to make their case, irrespective of the outcome.

During 2012/13, the IRM received seven complaints, some of which were from agencies and some from applicants. The complaints were all responded to by the IRM Contract Manager at Stage 1 of the complaints process. A small number progressed beyond Stage 1.

The IRM also received five commendations from applicants pleased with the handling of their case.

## Section 3

# Themes for policy and practice from independent reviews 2012/13

### ISSUES IN FOSTERING AND ADOPTION

A key aspect of the work of the IRM is to provide feedback to adoption agencies and fostering service providers on their practice and procedures, as observed through the IRM procedure. Typically, the IRM examines how agencies have dealt with complex and challenging cases, and patterns observed through the IRM can help to contribute to the development of good practice and robust procedures through individual agency feedback or through the overview experience.

### LEARNING FROM INDEPENDENT REVIEWS

The existence of the IRM provides reassurance for foster carers and adopters, and confidence in the system that considers their suitability. Evaluation of applicants' experiences indicates the importance of this, even when the original recommendation is upheld.

We are currently in a period of major legislative reform and change in adoption and fostering, introducing a stronger regulatory regime designed to meet the needs of children who have experienced disruption and often trauma in their past. Effectively implementing this regulatory framework is the responsibility of all agencies and the IRM contributes a unique overview on this process.

### GOOD PRACTICE ISSUES

#### Importance of matching criteria

IRM reviews provide confirmation of the crucial importance of effective matching to successful fostering. A consistent contributory factor in termination cases has been foster carers lacking the skills or experience to meet the needs of the children placed. Whilst the range and quality of training is generally very good, foster carers benefit from building experience patiently with close and supportive supervision and training.

#### Partnership working

In many cases, the issue of agencies working effectively together was a key factor. Thorough assessment and exchange of information is important when foster carers move between agencies and the onus remains with the receiving agency to complete a full assessment.

In cases where one agency has responsibility for the looked after child and another provides the placement, good communication between managers and workers in both agencies is the key to successful management of placements and effective care planning.

Robust annual foster care reviews are a vital quality assurance tool and an opportunity to address concerns constructively. They must reflect not only the views of the agency and the carers, but also the views of children and their social workers.

### **Independent support to applicants**

All applicants to the IRM are inevitably experiencing a very stressful and emotional episode in their lives, and supporting them through this sets a challenge for all agencies.

The majority of agencies provided independent support to foster carers or adopters subject to an IRM review. This has been very important as applicants without such support report significant feelings of isolation and additional stress while awaiting the review. It also means that applicants have access to professional support services which have experience and understanding of the IRM process.

### **Family and friends applications**

An increasing trend in the work of the IRM is applications by family and friends carers, also known as kinship carers. This year, it accounted for nearly 20 per cent of applications to the IRM. These cases present additional challenges for agencies as they relate to specified children and assessment decisions around whether they can remain within their family network are required within tight timeframes. Some cases presented before the IRM have shown that agencies can on occasion struggle to prioritise assessment to meet the regulatory timescales.

### **Representation at the IRM**

In the majority of cases, adoption agencies and fostering service providers are represented by workers and managers involved in the original decision with a detailed understanding of how and why decisions were made. However, on occasion representatives from the agency have not been able to provide a clear and detailed narrative of their agency's actions. It is important that representatives attending reviews are able to combine direct knowledge of the case and a managerial oversight of the process. The IRM manager is available for advice and consultation if agencies are unsure about who would be the most appropriate person to attend.

### **Breaches of regulations and guidance: fostering**

There is evidence that the majority of agencies work very hard to ensure that they meet their responsibilities in relation to the IRM and their broader regulatory responsibilities to foster carers and adopters. In a minority of

cases, there are very clear breaches of regulation and guidance. These include those listed below.

- **Breaches of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010).** This is particularly in relation to the immediate removal of children when an allegation has been made against the carers, despite the children not being assessed as at risk of significant harm. In the case of children placed with carers who are subject to a QD proposing termination of approval, the children should remain in placement until after the final decision, unless they are designated as at risk of immediate harm.
- **Providing foster carers with the opportunity to attend the fostering panel to put their case in person.** This is essential to an open and transparent process. In a small but significant number of cases, this did not happen.
- A significant problem remains in relation to **QD letters**. Breaches include:
  - the agency decision maker (ADM) not providing reasons for their proposed decision;
  - giving inaccurate information on timescales;
  - not being issued by the ADM;
  - not informing the applicant that the QD is a recommendation, not a final decision.

As the QD is the starting point for all possible IRM cases, it is important that the ADMs apply the procedure set out in the Guidance. For fostering, this is set out in the *Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4: Fostering services*, 5:40, and for adoption in Paragraph 65 of the Statutory Guidance on adoption.

### Full disclosure of background information

The majority of agencies understand and are fully committed to the value and purpose of the IRM and work fully and co-operatively with the process. Most agencies work co-operatively with the IRM to provide the information required for the review. However, in a very small number of cases, there have been some difficulties following requests to share confidential material. This could include, for example, strategy meetings or where agencies have struggled to gain permission from external agencies to share papers.

The remit of the IRM entitles it to seek any other relevant information which the panel considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities, and this extends to documents held by other relevant agencies.

Non-disclosure can hamper a full re-examination of the facts and the IRM will respect all appropriate requests for the non-disclosure of third party confidential information. Early liaison with the IRM caseworker or manager is helpful in overcoming obstacles to the appropriate disclosure of relevant documents.



# Section 4

## Management information

### STATISTICS

(Please note that figures under five have been suppressed or conflated to ensure individual cases cannot be identified.)

#### Types of applications

**Table 1a: Adoption cases**

TYPE	TOTAL	%
Full PAR report	6	37
Brief prospective adopter's report	3	19
Review report on adopter	4	25
Intercountry adoption application	0	0
Application in relation to a specific child	3	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1b: Fostering cases**

TYPE	TOTAL	%
Full PAR or Form F fostering report	14	13
Review report on foster carer	67	64
Kinship carer	20	19
Short break foster carer	0	0
Change of terms of fostering approval	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Status of all applicant/s**

STATUS	TOTAL	GROUP TOTALS	%
Single applicant – male*	8	8	7
Single applicant – female heterosexual	33	40	33
Single applicant – female, lesbian or unrecorded	7		
Couple – married	58	58	47
Couple – same-sex – female, male and civil partnerships	5	5	5
Couple – unmarried heterosexual	10	10	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100</b>

\*These figures include gay applicants where the number has been suppressed due to it being less than five.

**Table 3: Ethnicity of all applicants**

White	Ethnicity	Total	Total group	Percentage %
	White – self-identified as White, White American, White Asian, White European, White Scottish, White Welsh and White other	11	128	66
	White British	84		
	White English	16		
	White UK	17		
Black	Black – self-identified as Black African, Black British, Black British/Caribbean, Black Ethiopian, Black Eritrean, Black Guyanese, Black Ibo-Nigerian, Black Jamaican and Black other	14	20	10
	Black African Caribbean	6		
Asian	Asian – self-identified as Asian, Asian British, Asian Pakistani, British Pakistani, Asian Muslim	11	16	8
	Asian Indian	5		
Mixed	Self-identified as English Caribbean, Chinese English, Mayan UK, Danish British, English Indian, White English Black Jamaican	6	6	3
Other	Self-identified as Albanian, British, British Irish, Caucasian, Danish, Norwegian, South African	11	17	9
	English	6		
Unknown	No ethnicity recorded	8	8	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>195</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

## Commentary

The number of adoption cases is too low to draw conclusions from these data. However, in relation to fostering, the following observations are relevant. The 2011 Ofsted survey of foster carers identified 85 per cent of foster carers coming from a White/British background; 66 per cent of IRM applicants shared this background. Applicants of a Black, Asian or mixed ethnicity represented 21 per cent of applicants, compared to the Ofsted figure of 14 per cent representation in the fostering population.

## OVERVIEW OF SERVICE SINCE 1 APRIL 2009

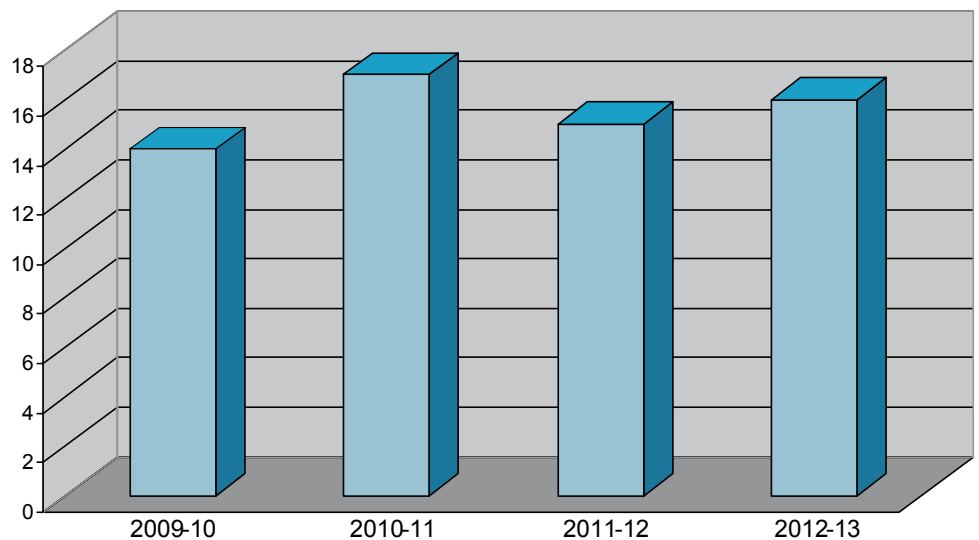
### Cases accepted since 1 April 2009

Please note that the years run from 1 April to 31 March.

### ADOPTION CASES

We received 14 adoption cases in 2009/10, 17 cases in 2010/11, 15 cases in 2011/12 and 16 cases in 2012/13.

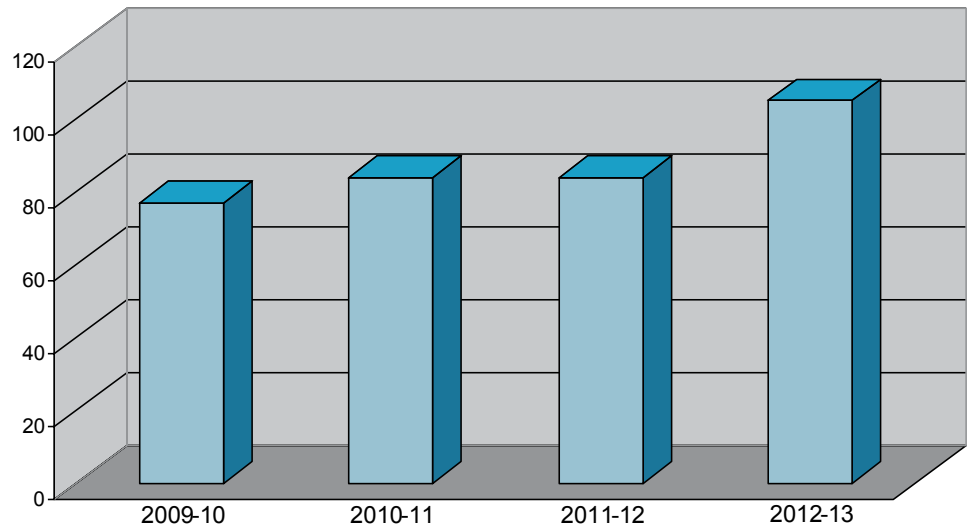
**Figure 2: Adoption cases accepted since 2009**



## FOSTERING CASES

We received 77 fostering cases in 2009/10, 84 cases in 2010/11, 84 cases in 2011/12 and 105 cases in 2012/13.

**Figure 3: Fostering cases accepted since 2009**

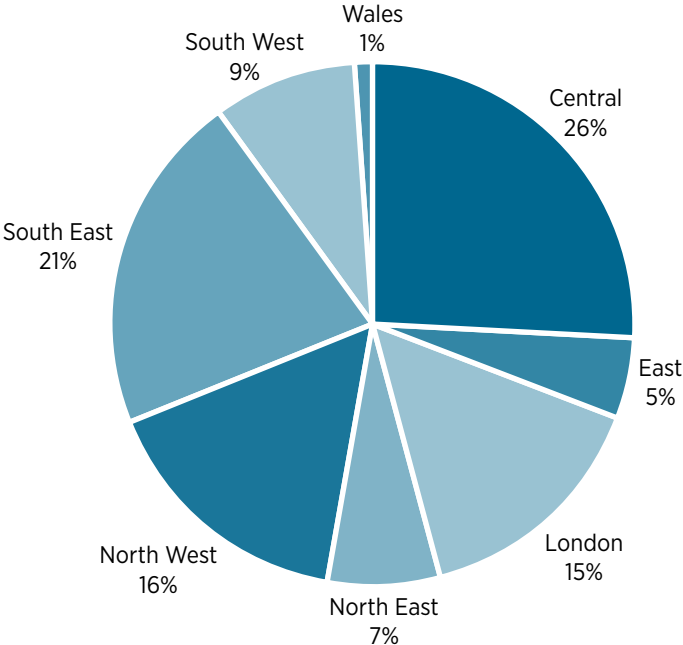


### GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF APPLICANT/S

The following is a breakdown of the geographical location of the applicant/s of the applications accepted.

Central	32
East	6
London	18
North East	9
North West	19
South East	25
South West	11
Wales	1 (agency based within England)

Figure 4: Geographical location of applicant/s

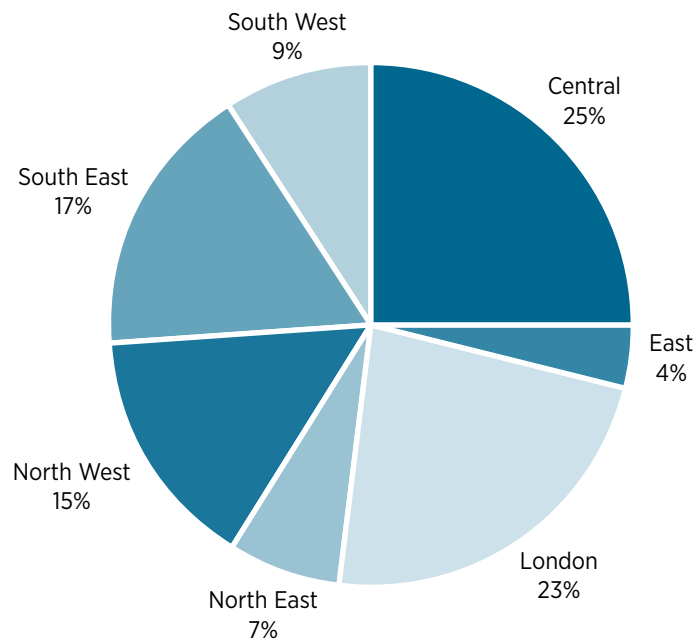


## GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF AGENCY/FSP

The following is a breakdown of the geographical location of agencies/ fostering service providers of the applications accepted.

Central	29
East	5
London	28
North East	9
North West	18
South East	21
South West	11

**Figure 5: Geographical location of agency/FSP**



# Summary

The IRM provides a valuable function based on principles of fairness, transparency, public confidence and quality assurance. The IRM is not an appeal process but provides a professional, considered and balanced fresh look at a case and, based on the review process, makes a recommendation to an adoption agency or fostering service provider.

The IRM occupies a unique position in fostering and adoption practice. As a service, it accepts cases from across England and is able to observe through reviews the quality of practice set against the nationally agreed standards. Fostering and adoption are complex areas of social work practice with the expectations on foster carers and adopters being high. The IRM panel membership is drawn from a wide range of professional and lay members with access to legal and medical advice, and the powers afforded the IRM by regulation enable access to all information considered relevant, even when this was not part of the original consideration.

We receive consistent feedback from applicants that even when they have been unsuccessful in their application, they have valued and benefited from the experience of having their case heard independently. Equally, adoption agencies and fostering providers work well and co-operatively with the IRM service and generally show a willingness to resolve any differences in relation to their expectations. The response by agencies to the feedback provided by the IRM after a case is overwhelmingly positive and has on occasion led to changes in policy and procedure which have improved practice.

The IRM came into existence in 2004 with an initial brief for adoption. This was expanded to include fostering in 2009. Today, as policymakers and practitioners seek to establish consistently high standards in family placement practice, the IRM continues to provide a valuable and unique insight.

# Appendix

## Concerns from agencies and IRM in adoption cases

**Table 4a: Adoption** An explanatory key is provided under Table 4b.

<b>(i) Reason for concern as stated by adoption agency or IRM</b>	<b>(ii) QD in cases not recommended by IRM</b>	<b>(iii) IRM concerns</b>	<b>(iv) QD in cases with a positive IRM recommendation of suitability</b>
Inability to work with agency/professionals	0	1	2
Accommodation issues	1	-	0
Allegation of abuse against applicant/s or applicant/s family/serious criminal conviction	1	1	0
Ability to parent a looked after child	0	2	1
Financial concerns	0	-	1
Impact on existing child/family	3	4	1
Inability to change/reflect/learn/inflexible views	1	-	0
Inability to understand the needs of a looked after child	2	3	4
Lack of emotional resilience/emotional capacity to parent a looked after child	3	2	2
Lifestyle issues – drinking, smoking, etc	1	-	0
Medical issues of applicant/s family	3	1	2
Motivation/commitment to adopt	2	1	1
Safeguarding issues, potential risk factors, including inability to provide safe care	3	-	1
Stability/permanence of relationship	2	-	1
Standard of care issues	0	-	0
Inadequate support networks	1	3	1
Inability to prioritise children's needs above one's own/one's family	1	-	2
Inability to understand role of adopter/maintain professional boundaries	1	-	2
Use of corporal punishment/restraint/discipline issues/emotional abuse	0	-	1
Withholding, or refusal to discuss information/issue re communication	2	1	1
Ability to manage stress	2	1	0



Lack of childcare experience/previous parenting concerns	3	1	0
Lack of commitment to the adoption process	0	1	0

## Concerns from providers and IRM in fostering cases

**Table 4b: Fostering**

<b>(i) Reason for concern as stated in QD or by IRM</b>	<b>(ii) QD in cases not recommended by IRM</b>	<b>(iii) IRM concerns</b>	<b>(iv) QD in cases with a positive IRM recommendation of suitability</b>
Inability to work with FSP/professionals	14	14	13
Accommodation issues	1	-	2
Allegation of abuse against applicant/s or applicant/s family/serious conviction/domestic abuse	13	5	8
Ability to parent a looked after child/meet child's emotional needs	12	11	16
Financial concerns	1	1	1
Impact on existing child/family	5	7	1
Inability to change/reflect/learn/inflexible views	6	19	7
Inability to understand the needs of a looked after child	9	8	3
Lack of emotional resilience/emotional capacity to parent a looked after child	1	5	5
Lifestyle issues - drinking, smoking, etc	0	2	2
Medical issues of applicant/s family	3	3	4
Motivation/commitment to foster	0	2	1
Safeguarding issues, potential risk factors, including inability to provide safe caring	26	26	14
References	2	-	1
Stability/permanence of relationship(s)	9	1	7
Standard of care issues	10	4	3
Support networks	1	2	0
Inability to prioritise children's needs above one's own/one's family	5	2	2
Unwillingness to train	2	2	4
Inability to understand role of a foster carer/maintain professional boundaries	8	15	7
Use of corporal punishment/restraint/discipline issues/emotional abuse	4	1	4

Withholding, or refusal to discuss information/issue re communication	23	11	5
Work commitments	2	-	0
Ability to manage stress	0	6	0
Lack of childcare experience/previous parenting concerns	3	-	2
Inability to accurately record information	1	2	0
Belief/political views which breach equal opportunities policies	2	2	-

### Key

**(i)** This column refers to the full range of reasons given for concerns expressed by agencies in their QDs and concerns raised by the IRM at reviews.

**(ii)** This column shows, where the IRM has made a recommendation that the adopter/foster carer is not suitable, the reasons given by the agency/fostering provider.

**(iii)** This column shows, where the IRM has recommended that the adopter/foster carer is not suitable, the reasons given by the IRM.

**(iv)** This column shows, where the IRM has recommended the adopter/foster carer as suitable, the reason given by the agency/fostering provider.

## CONTACT DETAILS

The IRM Contract Manager undertakes a number of presentations at key stakeholder events during the year to discuss issues related to practice and learning from the IRM.

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