ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2017
Annual Report 2017

To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.

Report of
Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland
for 2017

To: Dr Katharine Zappone
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs,
Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

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Foreword

In 2017, the Adoption Authority of Ireland ('the Authority') had a busy year pursuing a number of new initiatives alongside its ongoing statutory responsibilities. Several changes to procedures and systems were put in place prior to the enactment of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 ('the 2017 Act').

The 2017 Act places the best interests of the child and the voice of the child at the centre of adoption legislation. It acknowledges today's experience of family life, by allowing single, co-habiting and married adults to adopt. It gives effect to a birth father's connection to his children, regardless of his marital status, and allows him to be fully involved in any adoption process about his child.

The 2017 Act provides a clear legal framework that will allow the adoption of children of marriage where this is in the children's best interests. This is likely to have the effect of raising the number of children adopted from long term foster care in Ireland.

During 2017, the Authority maintained its focus on hearing the voice of the child in all adoption-related matters and participated in collaborative initiatives with both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. In particular, the Authority devoted a significant amount of time to promoting the voice of the child in all adoption matters.

Children need clear information about any process affecting them. The Authority therefore instigated several measures to hear the voice of the child, including the production of new videos and leaflets highlighting children's voices at adoption order hearings. The *Year in Review* section (pages 35-49) of the report provides details of these and other developments during the year.

Figures for operational matters in 2017 and comparative figures for previous years are found in the statistics section starting at page 50, where we highlight that the Authority granted 72 domestic adoptions in 2017. The Authority continued its oversight of Intercountry adoptions, which totalled 53 in 2017. In terms of Information and Tracing, the Authority received 100 requests for the release of birth certificates. It processed 667 applications on the voluntary adoption contact register, the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR), with 121 matches on the NACPR made in 2017.

The Authority in 2017 continued its focus on Corporate Governance which included a review of compliance with the Authority's Business and Corporate Plans. It also engaged in comprehensive planning for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance. Furthermore, significant work was undertaken by the Risk and Audit Committee on all areas of risk vulnerability.

Planning for the anticipated implementation of Information and Tracing legislation continued, which involved the Authority working closely with the DCYA and the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) to ensure readiness for the commencement of any new legislation in this area.

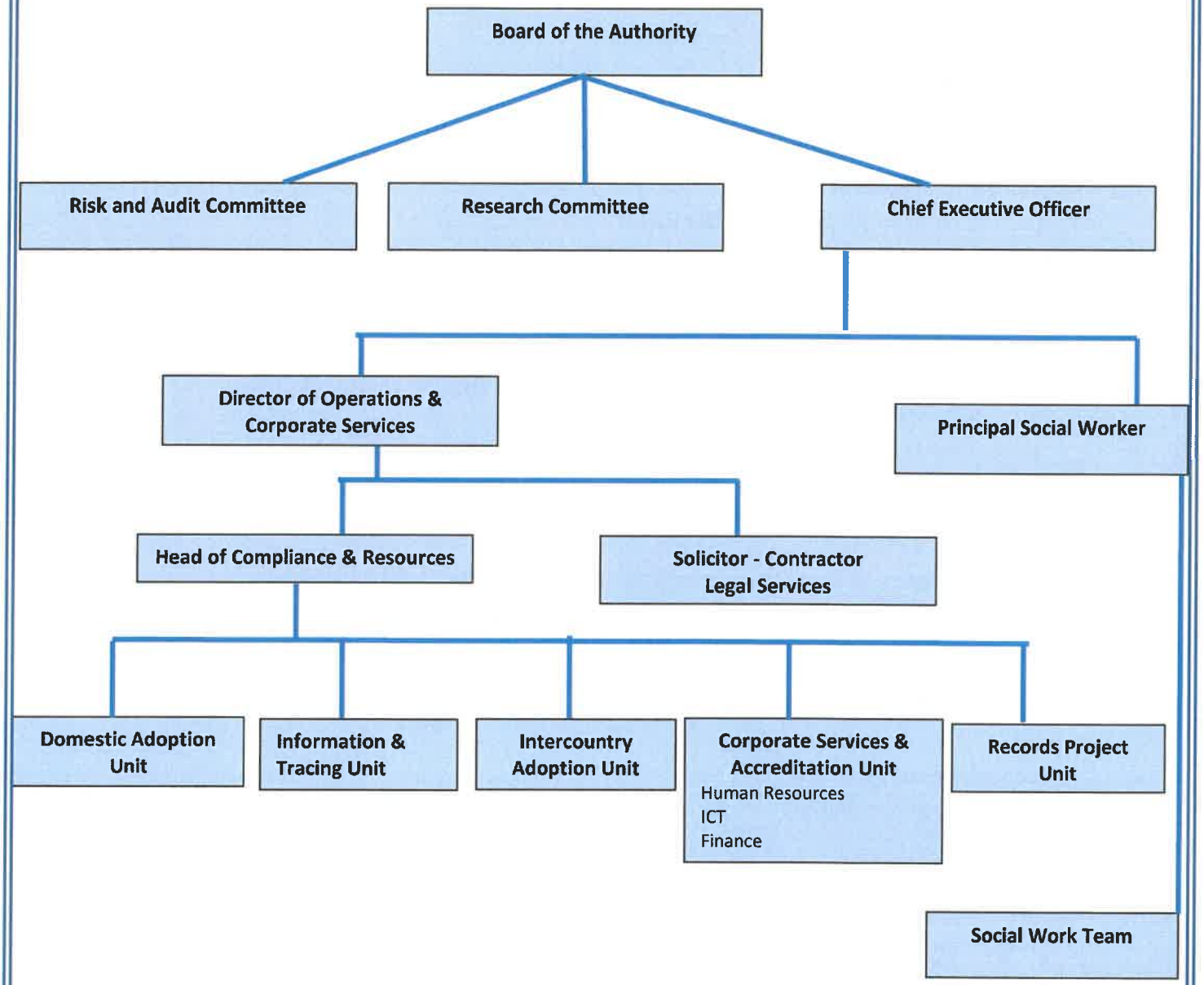
The Authority published its Post Adoption Services Directory and held meetings with various stakeholder groups. Among the Authority stakeholders are the Accredited Agencies - the providers of services such as tracing, counselling or mediation for adopted persons or relatives of adopted persons - with which the Authority maintains close links as it fulfils its statutory role of regulation and evaluation. The Board held a two-day meeting in Galway as part of an initiative to provide greater accessibility to the Board for stakeholders with a presence outside Dublin. Successful visits were also undertaken by AAI delegates to the USA, Bulgaria and Haiti.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Board members and Executive of the Authority for their commitment and dedication to the work of the Authority. We also wish to acknowledge the continued support and assistance of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the staff of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Dr Geoffrey Shannon
Chairman

Ms Patricia Carey
CEO

Organisation & Management Structure



Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team 2017

Chief Executive Officer:	Patricia Carey
Director of Operations and Corporate Services:	Kiernan Gildea (to November 2017)
Head of Compliance and Resources	Fiona Monaghan
Principal Social Worker:	Celia Loftus

Board of the Adoption Authority

Membership of the Board - 2017

Dr. Geoffrey Shannon, Chairperson
Ms. Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chairperson
Prof. Helen Buckley
Mr. Paul Harrison
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.)
Ms. Anne O'Flaherty
Dr. Imelda Ryan (to 30 September 2017)
Dr. Margo Anglim (from 26 October 2017)

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board shall consist of 7 members, being the chairperson, the deputy chairperson and 5 ordinary members, appointed by the Minister. The term of office of the Board is for a period not exceeding five years. An appointed member who completes a term of office is eligible for reappointment to the Board, but may not serve as a member for more than 2 consecutive terms. The current Board was established on 01 November 2015.

The attendance of the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson and 2 ordinary members one of whom shall be a social worker shall constitute a quorum.

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board may appoint committees to advise it in relation to the performance of its functions as it thinks fit.

Committees of the Board

Risk and Audit Committee
Ms. Claire Byrne (Chair)
Mr. Aidan Browne, Member
Dr. Geoffrey Shannon, Chairman of the Authority
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.), Member of the Authority

Research Sub committee
Prof. Helen Buckley (Chair), Member of the Authority
Ms. Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chair of the Authority
Ms. Anne O'Flaherty, Member of the Authority
Professor Gordon Harold, Andrew and Virginia Rudd Chair in Psychology, University of Sussex
Ms. Celia Loftus, Principal Social Worker, Adoption Authority
Professor Sheila Greene, Fellow Emeritus, School of Psychology , Trinity College Dublin (from October 2017)

Governance

The Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland was established under the Adoption Act 2010. The functions of the Board are set out in section 96 of this Act. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and is responsible for ensuring good governance. It performs this task by setting strategic objectives and targets and taking strategic decisions on all key business issues. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the Adoption Authority of Ireland are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the senior management team. The CEO and the senior management team must follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board, and must ensure that all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to the entity, and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Board and staff and management of the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Board Responsibilities

The work and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the Adoption Authority of Ireland's Code of Governance. Standing items considered by the Board include:

- declaration of interests;
- reports from sub-committees;
- financial reports/management accounts;
- performance reports; and
- reserved matters.

Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010 requires the Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland to keep, in such form as may be approved by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, all proper and usual accounts of money received and expended by it.

In preparing these financial statements, the Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that it will continue in operation; and
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.

The Board is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and enables it to ensure that the financial statements comply with Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010. The maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information on the Adoption Authority of Ireland's website is the responsibility of the Board.

The Board is responsible for approving the annual plan and budget. Evaluation of the performance of the Adoption Authority of Ireland by reference to the annual plan and budget is regularly considered at Board meetings.

The Board is also responsible for safeguarding its assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Meetings of the Board of the Authority

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board shall hold as many meetings as are necessary for performing its functions but shall hold at least 12 meetings a year. The Board held 23 meetings during 2017 including one meeting outside of Dublin which was held in Galway in March.

Meetings of the Board are scheduled in such a way to facilitate one 'full' board meeting each month at which matters other than the granting of Adoption Orders are dealt with. The second meeting of the month is reserved for the granting of Adoption Orders and any other urgent business which may need to be dealt with on the day. In general, only a quorate Board is required to attend on the Adoption Order days and this is reflected in the attendance report on page 12.

Standing items on the agenda for 'full' meetings of the Board include:

- Declaration of conflict of interest;
- Minutes of the previous meeting;
- Risk and Governance;
- Accredited Bodies;
- CEO Report;
- Domestic Adoption;
- Information and Tracing;
- Intercountry Adoption;
- Other Business.

In 2017 the Risk and Governance section of the agenda widened significantly in recognition of the increased role and responsibility of the Board under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Matters considered under this part of the agenda during the year included regular matters such as

- Annual Reports;
- Business Plan;
- Corporate Plan;
- Risk Register and;
- Quarterly Management Accounts.

New matters this year included:

- Gap Analysis report on Compliance with the Code of Governance;
- Revision of the Authority's Code of Governance;
- Oversight Agreement with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs;
- Revised Protected Disclosure Policy and procedure; and
- Planning for compliance with General Data Protection Regulations.

The Board passed a resolution to have a minimum of one meeting each year for Governance matters only. The Governance meeting was held on 25 April 2017.

The CEO Report on the agenda provides information and updates to the Board on the operation of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the implementation of Board policy, the implementation of the annual Business Plan, expenditure and budgetary matters and other relevant issues and/or developments.

Part 4 of the Adoption Act outlines the powers vested in the Board including:

- The power to issue Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability to prospective adopters;
- Hearing applications in relation to adoption orders and making adoption orders;
- The power to recognise intercountry adoptions effected outside the State.

These matters form part of the agenda for meetings of the Board and are dealt with under the Domestic and Intercountry sections of the agenda.

On circuit in Galway as well as conducting the normal business of the Board and granting adoption orders, the Board took the opportunity to meet with intercountry adoption support groups – Western Intercountry Adoption Organisation (WIAO) and Network of Adoption Support Group Ireland (NAGSI). The Board also met adoption service providers in the area, including Tusla - Child and Family Agency social workers and local adoption committee representatives.

As required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Board met without the Executive (that is, the CEO, the Board Secretary and any other member of staff or management) on a number of occasions in 2017. On 16th February (Strategy Day) the latter part of the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive. On 25th April (Governance) the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive. With effect from the meeting of 9th May 2017 on each of the 'full' board meeting dates the Board met without the Executive from 9.45am for such period as was required to discuss matters. This practice will continue into 2018.

Committees of the Board

Risk and Audit Committee

The Committee meets at least 4 times a year, with authority to convene additional meetings as circumstances require. The attendance of 2 non-executive committee members shall constitute a quorum. In 2017 the Committee met four times.

The Committee invited members of the Executive, auditors or others to attend meetings and to provide pertinent information, as necessary. The Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Compliance and Resources attend all meetings. Secretarial support is provided by CrowleysDFK.

Meeting agendas were prepared and provided in advance to committee members along with appropriate briefing materials. The Risk and Audit Committee maintained minutes or other reports of its meetings and activities. Audits commissioned by the Risk and Audit Committee included a review of the effectiveness of internal financial controls and for the first time a GDPR readiness audit. The 2016 Annual Report of the Risk and Audit Committee was formally presented to the Board at their meeting on 9 May 2017. The 2017 Annual Report was agreed by the Committee at their meeting in December and will be presented to Board in Q1 2018.

Further details of the work of the committee are on page 17.

Research Committee

The Research Committee met on three occasions in 2017. One meeting had to be postponed due to Storm Ophelia.

Secretarial support for the Research Committee was provided by Mr. Ronan Keegan, Social Worker, Adoption Authority.

The Committee commissioned a researcher to carry out two pieces of research in 2017 which will be completed and published in 2018. The first, an audit of Irish Research and the second an overview of policy and legislative change in relation to Adoption. The Committee also assisted the Executive in drawing up a job specification for a Research Officer post in the Authority. Discussions with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for sanction for the post commenced in 2017 and were ongoing at the end of the year.

The frequency of meetings of the Board and its committees and the attendance of each Board member at Board meetings is reported below in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Meetings 2017		Board of the Authority
3rd January		Emergency matter – quorate only required G Shannon, H Buckley, P Harrison attended
10th January	Full	All members attended
24th January		G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, I Ryan attended
2nd February		Emergency Matter – quorate only required G Shannon, H Buckley, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty attended
7th February	Full	All members attended
16th February		Board Strategy Day – all members attended
21st February		G Shannon, P Harrison, P McMahon, A O'Flaherty attended
14th March	Full	All members attended
28th March - Galway		G Shannon, H Buckley , P Harrison, I Ryan attended
11th April	Full	All members attended
25th April		Governance AM – Adoption Orders in PM G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, P Harrison, P McMahon, A O'Flaherty attended
9th May	Full	G Shannon, H Buckley, P Harrison, P McMahon, A O'Flaherty, I Ryan attended
23rd May		G Shannon, O Traynor, P Harrison, P McMahon, I Ryan attended
13th June	Full	G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, A O'Flaherty attended
27th June		G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley A O'Flaherty, P McMahon attended
11th July	Full	G Shannon, P Harrison, P McMahon, A O'Flaherty, I Ryan attended
25th July		G Shannon, O Traynor, P Harrison, P McMahon, I Ryan attended
12th September	Full	G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley P McMahon, A O'Flaherty, I Ryan attended
12th October	Full	All members attended (Dr I Ryan no longer a member)
24th October		G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley ,P Harrison attended
7th November	Full	G Shannon, H Buckley, P Harrison, P McMahon, A O'Flaherty attended
22st November		All members in attendance
19th December	Full	All members in attendance

Meetings 2017	Risk and Audit Committee
21st March	Full Attendance
30th May	Full Attendance
6th November	Ms C Byrne and Dr G Shannon in attendance
18th December	Full Attendance

Dates of meetings 2017	Research Sub Committee
24th April	Ms Orlaith Traynor not in attendance on this date
13th June	Full attendance
22nd November	Prof Gordon Harold not in attendance on this date.

Board Stipend

An annual fee is payable to Board members in the sum of €7,965 together with travel and subsistence expenses at rates sanctioned by the Department of Finance. In accordance with Department of Finance regulations, fees are not paid to Board members who are public servants. In recognition of the quasi-judicial nature of the Board of the Authority €63,120 per annum is paid to the Chair. All payments are made quarterly in arrears.

Roles and responsibilities

Chairperson

The primary role of the Chairperson is providing leadership to the Board and the Adoption Authority of Ireland in discharging the responsibilities assigned to it under its establishment statute. The specific duties of the Chairperson relate to:

Managing the Authority by:

- appropriate agenda setting, management and support of Board meetings;
- chairing Board meetings characterised by clear decisions and the balancing of contributions from Board Members and the CEO/Executive;
- ensuring that the minutes of the meeting accurately record the decisions taken;
- conducting all meetings of the Board in accordance with the Authority's Code of Business Conduct and appropriately evaluating the Board's performance;
- ensuring Board members understand their respective roles and responsibilities and that the Board works effectively and efficiently;
- furnishing a Comprehensive Report to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with the annual report and financial statements of the State body in compliance with Financial and Reporting arrangements under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies;

Managing key relationships/communications with:

- the CEO; including performance evaluation of the CEO;
- the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and Department of Children and Youth Affairs;
- other key external parties and by promoting the work and mission of the Authority;
- the Board, reflecting a tone of respect, trust and candour that allows for challenging questions and inputs;
- the appropriate Oireachtas Sub-Committee(s).

Chief Executive Officer

The Adoption Act 2010 provides that the Chief Executive Officer is the Accounting Officer for the Adoption Authority of Ireland and clearly defines the accountability framework in which the Adoption Authority of Ireland operates. This is supported by the governance framework and corporate governance arrangements within the organisation.

The Board is accountable to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and through the Minister, to the Government. It is also accountable through the Chief Executive Officer as Accounting Officer to the Oireachtas under the Committee of Public Accounts and other committees of the Oireachtas. The Board must submit an annual report and such other information as the Minister may require.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for

- the implementation of policies approved by the Board;
- the day-to-day management of the staff;
- administration and business of the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- preparation of the annual budget for approval by the Board and its submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs;
- providing updates to the Board, and other committees of the Board, in regard to the management of the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- implementation of policy and progress on the strategic plan.

Corporate Governance

General

The Adoption Act 2010 is the legislative basis for the establishment of the Authority. The Authority operates in accordance with best practice corporate governance principles in line with the Adoption Act 2010 and, where applicable, the guidelines as set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016.

Financial Control

The budget of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is allocated through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. In 2017 the financial allocation of the Adoption authority was €3.8 million.

As set out in Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010 the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for preparing Financial Statements and for ensuring the regularity of the Authority's transactions.

The functions underpinning these responsibilities include authorising and monitoring payments for goods and services, tendering processes and compilation of monthly returns to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The Financial Statements are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Financial Statements for a particular year are generally not audited at the time of the relevant annual report's publication. The audit of the 2017 accounts will commence in June 2018. Once approved by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General the 2017 Statements will be published on the Authority's website.

Crowley's DFK Chartered Accountants provided accountancy services to the Authority during 2017.

Internal financial control

The Board has overall responsibility for the internal financial control of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. It delegates responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of risk management and the internal control environment to the Risk and Audit Committee. The committee receives regular reports from management, the Chief Risk Officer, internal audit, and external auditors. Such arrangements are designed to manage rather than eliminate the risks facing the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Budget management

The Chief Executive Officer and the Senior Management Team prepare an annual budget based on the operational and developmental needs of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The annual budget is recommended for approval by Chief Executive Officer to the Board. Day-to-day responsibility for managing expenditure within budget limits is assigned to CEO and Head of Compliance and Resources with

support from the Authority's finance consultants Crowley's DFK. Budgets are monitored closely with monthly reports furnished to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the CEO.

Risk and Audit Committee

The Risk and Audit Committee is chaired by an external person and includes the Chair of the Board, a member of the board and one other external member with significant business expertise and experience within the public and private sectors.

The Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Compliance and Resources attend all meetings of the committee. The Committee sat four times during 2017 and met with representatives from the Comptroller and Auditor General and internal auditors. In their Annual Report 2017 the Committee expressed satisfaction with the general financial control environment operating with the Authority.

The Committee plays a fundamental role in ensuring that the Adoption Authority of Ireland functions according to good governance, accounting and auditing standards and adopts appropriate management and risk arrangements. It does this by overseeing and advising the Board and the Chief Executive Officer as Accounting Officer on the following matters

- the strategic processes for risk, internal control and governance;
- the accounting policies, the financial statements, and the annual report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, including the process for review of the financial statements prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and management's letter of representation to the external auditors;
- the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter of representation;
- assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- proposals for tendering for either internal or external audit services or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;
- anti-fraud policies, protected disclosure processes, and arrangements for special investigations; and
- the Risk and Audit Committee periodically reviews its own effectiveness and reports the results of that review to the Board.

The Committees agenda in 2017 included:

- Presentation of draft 2016 annual financial statements for discussion and approval;

- Internal Audit 2016 Review of the effectiveness of the system of internal financial controls;
- Internal Audit 2016 Revised Report on Core Business Processes review;
- Results of the self-assessment review of effectiveness;
- Draft RAC Annual Report to the Board;
- Discussion and approval of 2017 Risks Register;
- Discussion and approval of 2017 Internal Audit Plan;
- Checklist of Internal Controls;
- Management Accounts;
- Internal Audit Report – GDPR readiness;
- Code of Practice 2016 Gap Analysis & progress reports on compliance
- 2018 Master Budget;
- RAC Work Plan 2017;
- C&AG Audit on 2016 Financial Statements.

Internal audit function

Internal audit is an independent appraisal function whose role is to provide assurance to the Board, Risk and Audit Committee, Chief Executive Officer and all levels of management as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems on governance, risk and internal controls operating within the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The Internal Audit function is outsourced. It operates in accordance with an audit charter approved by the Board and an annual audit plan approved by the Chief Executive Officer and the Risk and Audit Committee. In carrying out audits, the contractor complies with the Institute of Internal Audit Standards, as adapted by the Department of Public Reform and Expenditure for use in government departments. All audit reports are submitted directly to the Chief Executive Officer and to the Risk and Audit Committee who also receive periodic reports showing progress against the plan. The internal auditors completed 2 audits in 2017 – an audit of internal financial controls in March 2017 and General Data Protection Regulations readiness review in October 2017. Both audits resulted in 'satisfactory' ratings. Recommendations made in respect of GDPR readiness were accepted and implementation was ongoing at the end of 2017.

Risk management

Effective risk management supports good governance. The Authority has a proactive management-led risk management process as part of its governance framework. The Board, supported by the Risk and Audit Committee and the Senior Management Team, provides the leadership in promoting risk management. The risk management framework and policy of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is approved by the Board.

This provides for a planned and systematic approach to identifying and managing a range of risk categories: financial, service delivery, infrastructure (buildings and ICT), people, compliance and governance, and projects.

The Chief Risk Officer is a member of the Senior Management Team and reports directly to the Audit Committee and the Board. A revised Risk Register was drafted in March 2017 and submitted to the Risk and Audit Committee for their approval at the meeting in May. The Register sets out the major risks facing the Adoption Authority of Ireland together with existing controls and actions to mitigate them, and identifies owners and target dates for completion. Risks are categorised High, Medium and Low. A report on the High Risk items was provided to the Board each month.

Procurement

The Adoption Authority of Ireland operates under the Public Procurement Guidelines which provides the direction for all procurement policy activity and ensures that the objectives and key principles of competition, equality of treatment and transparency which underpins national and EU rules are complied with and observed. The Adoption Authority of Ireland avails of centralised managed contracts that have been put in place by the Office of Government Procurement including the provision of stationery and office supplies, photocopying, and foreign travel. The Adoption Authority of Ireland continues to engage with the Office of Government Procurement for advice on current and future procurement requirements. A procurement exercise for Legal Services commenced at the end of 2017 and a new contract is expected to be in place in early 2018.

Annual Report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 facilitates workers in raising a concern regarding wrongdoing or potential wrongdoing in the workplace by providing them with certain forms of protection from action which might be taken against them for so doing.

The Act provides for different methods of protected disclosure depending on the circumstances and protects disclosures by workers including current or former employees, contractors, consultants, trainees, agency staff and interns.

A policy on protected disclosures was approved by the Board at their meeting in May 2017. The policy was brought to the attention of all staff, it is published in the Authority's Operations Manual and information on the policy is also provided in the Employee Handbook.

Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires the publication of an Annual Report each year relating to the number of protected disclosures made in the preceding year and any actions taken in response to such disclosures.

Pursuant to this requirement, the Adoption Authority of Ireland confirms that no reports were received and/or are under investigation in accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 for the financial year from 1st January 2017 to 31st December 2017.

REVIEW OF THE AUTHORITY'S 2016-2019 CORPORATE PLAN & 2017 BUSINESS PLAN

Overview

2017 is the second year of the 3-year Corporate Plan. There has been a significant number of changes in the area of adoption since the 2016-2019 Plan was published. The Adoption Authority of Ireland has continued to meet the targets set out in the Plan, where possible, and has absorbed the changes into the Corporate Plan and Annual Business Plans as required.

Principles

When devising the 2016 – 2019 Corporate Plan the Adoption Authority of Ireland identified four key principles which would guide its mission, its high level goals, its objectives and the work that was to be carried out. By applying these principles, the Adoption Authority of Ireland would ensure that all of its decisions had the welfare of the child as its first and paramount consideration, in accordance with Section 19 of the Adoption Act 2010. The four principles identified were -

- *Child - Centeredness*
- *Excellence*
- *Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency*
- *Respect*

Goals

Five key goals and a number of specific objectives were identified and are incorporated into each annual business plan.

Business Plan

The annual business plans are designed to focus on the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan by identifying tasks to be completed throughout the year. The business plan is reviewed periodically and updated as required. Business Plan reviews and updates will be submitted to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on a quarterly basis in 2018 in compliance with the Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department.

Goal #1 - "To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland."

Building on the work started in 2016 the Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to carry out scheduled inspections of accredited bodies. A new aspect to the work with accredited bodies this year involved the organised wind down of a number of accredited bodies who had made the decision to discontinue provision of the services for which they were accredited. No new applications were received for accreditation in 2017.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and the Government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services. Following a

project undertaken in conjunction with the Ombudsman for Children Office and a number of young people who had recently been adopted a new section was created on our website specifically for young people. In November 2017 two new information leaflets one for children under the age of 7 and one for those over 7 were formally launched and are available to download from the website. The first video presentation on our website was also launched and is published in the young person's section of the website https://www.aai.gov.ie/young-people.

Actions	Progress at end 2017
Subject to legislation being passed and enacted, finalise forms and guidelines which have had to be revised to comply with new legislation. Update relevant sections of website.	As a result of the enactment of the Adoption Amendment Act 2017 revised pre-placement consent forms were required. These were in place following the signing of S.I. No. 606 of 2017 in November 2017. Other relevant non – statutory forms were revised to include married couples, civil partnered couples and co-habitees. The Authority engaged with NALA to ensure Plain English was used on as many documents as was practical. All revised forms were published on website. In November the Authority published FAQs on Adoption Amendment Act to the website.
Publish executive summary of 2016 inspections on website. Reaccredit and re- register all agencies providing adoption services. Monitor self-reporting of accredited agencies and keep Board informed of status of accredited agencies on a monthly basis. Accredit new applicant agencies Devolve mediation services for Thailand & Philippines to HHAMA. Write to both countries to seek approval for HHAMA operations in-country	Completed. Only one agency reaccredited in 2017. Deadlines for submission of reports monitored and accredited agencies contacted immediately if deadlines are not met. Reports and updates are included as Agenda items on all Board 'full' days No new applications in 2017. HHAMA to begin negotiations with the Philippines in 2018. Awaiting response from Thai Central Authority and Embassy.
Hold/ Host Seminars & Forums	Seminars held May 3rd – Exploring Information and Tracing

Arrange speakers, facilities and supporting documentation for each event.	November 30th - Adoption Practice in the aftermath of the Amendment Act. See page 47 for more details. Fora held March 30th - Information and Tracing April 4th - Social Worker and Medical Advisor October 25th – Information and Tracing November 16th- Social Worker and Medical Advisor See page 43 for more details.
Consultation with stakeholders. Schedule two Board meetings outside Dublin one in Galway and one in Waterford. Follow up with participants in 2016 Ombudsman for Children workshop for feedback on the improvements made to facilities and our website for younger people.	Galway circuit completed, Waterford circuit deferred pending appointment of new Principal Officer/Board Secretary. To be rescheduled in April 2018. Follow up on Voice of the Child consultation was delayed pending the publication of leaflets and videos for the young person's section on website. Those leaflets and videos were published at the end of November and formally launched at seminar on 30th November. Follow-up to be scheduled at earliest practical opportunity in 2018.
Improve public areas of the Authority.	The three meeting rooms were redecorated to make them more comfortable and client friendly. One room was designed and decorated specifically to appeal to 12-17 year olds. The main reception area was revamped with colourful furniture. The children's waiting area of reception was stocked with new books and toys. Board Room and training room were redecorated and more appropriate artwork was provided by the OPW and installed throughout all public areas.
Promote and develop website. Create and develop section of the website specifically for younger people.	Young person's section on the website was published in June with very positive feedback to date. In November/December the young person's leaflets and videos published on the website. Colour scheme and layout updated.

Goal #2 - "To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice."

The Adoption Authority of Ireland met regularly with the Child and Family Agency and accredited bodies to discuss the impact of legislative changes. Discussions were focussed on ensuring that procedures and processes were revised and streamlined to allow us to maintain the objective of making informed and timely decisions.

Internally the Authority's Operations Manual was updated as required. The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to maintain contact and relationships through strategic visits with foreign National Central Authorities. In 2017 visits were made to Haiti and Bulgaria. More details about the visits are on pages 38 and 39.

Actions	Progress at end 2017
Make informed and timely and timely decisions regarding: - the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt - the making of adoption orders - the recognition of intercountry adoption orders - Article 17 referrals	To assist the Board in decision making processes the Executive apply consistency in the format of cases presented. Board decisions are relayed to the Executive as quickly as possible to allow applications to progress and to maintain turnaround times. All processes and procedures are monitored with a view to making improvements where necessary. The Operations Manual is updated accordingly. Protocols for dealing with emerging anomalies are dealt with as quickly as possible. Progress reflected in monthly and annual statistics published on website.
All adoptions completed for those reaching 18.	To date all adoption applications for children, close to age 18 have been completed. Tusla and AAI have early warning system in place to advise of children reaching 18. Adoption process prioritised and the Board are advised on critical cases. An agreed set of criteria for Board review of such cases has been put in place between Tusla and AAI. Where relevant the High Court, through AAI legal advisors, are informed of urgency of relevant cases.
Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.	Maintain turnaround times in delegated decisions. Consultation between I&T unit, SW unit and accredited bodies to provide timely responses to requests. Comprehensive case sheets provided to the Board to allow them make decisions when required in a timely manner.
Continue to implement the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts.	Key staff have been trained appropriately and all other staff are updated as required. Data Protection Officer has been appointed. A number of staff have attended briefings and training in preparation for GDPR and staff have been updated on the implications of the new Regulations.

	The Authority has obtained legal opinion on high level areas of GDPR which might cause difficulty for the Authority. GDPR readiness audit was carried out in September 2017. FOI statistics are published on the website.
Establish integrated data and document management system.	Detailed scoping has been completed and this will be progressed in early / mid 2018 depending on resource availability.
ICT risks monitored and addressed	ICT Risk Assessment is included as part of the Internal Audit plan 2017/2018 Risks have been identified in Risk Register. AAI maintains an ongoing relationship with ICT in Department of Health and is in the process of revising SLA in light of GDPR.
Engaging with Hague Convention National Central Authorities in accordance with the Corporate Plan. Seek to establish possibility of ICA programme with Haiti & South Africa.	Visit to Bulgaria completed in September 2017 details are on page 38 and a full summary report is published on the website. https://www.aai.gov.ie/adoption/intercountry/country-information/bulgaria.html Haiti visit completed and programme is now open. Notice to this effect published on website on 20 June 2017. At end of 2017 engagement with South Africa had not progressed.

Goal #3 - "To inform and influence adoption policy and service delivery through provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework."

Our website is developing as a source of comprehensive information for members of the public. Statistics are published on a monthly basis. The post adoption services directory which was established in 2016 was reviewed and updated as required.

In February we won 'highly commended document' at the NALA Plain English Awards held at the Law Library in Blackhall Place, Dublin 7. The award was specifically for a Glossary-of-Terms published on our website to help users navigate through some of the jargon that surrounds adoption in Ireland. More importantly, the award symbolises our commitment to Plain English in our general publications and in our day-to-day interaction with the public. It is the Adoption Authority of Ireland's

ongoing responsibility to simplify access, especially for members of the public, to our various legislative roles and functions.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland continues to respond to requests from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for assistance with Parliamentary Questions. In respect of policy matters we provide information and submit recommendations for changes to policy and legislation. Under our remit to undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity we have commissioned two pieces of research and are in the process of securing a Research Officer post for the first time since the establishment of the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Actions	**Progress at end 2017**
Improve and develop website as primary source of information to the public	Website is monitored and maintained by Corporate Services. Updates and corrections carried out on notification from colleagues or other users. Information for young people published. Immediately visible on home page. Post Adoption Services Directory published and updated as required. Notices published on behalf of accredited bodies and other stakeholders throughout the year.
Undertake research projects, promote research opportunities	Contract in place and first research project, collation of Irish research on adoption, commenced Q4. Job specification for Research Officer (3-year contract) has been drawn up. Sanction received from DCYA, advertisement of post planned for 2018.
Clarity of communication with the public & stakeholders to include a corporate identity.	Evaluate current oral, written and electronic communication. Prepare a strategy to address deficiencies including engagement with NALA. Ongoing work with NALA as required. New headed paper and complimentary slips have been printed to coordinate with AAI logo on website. Report cover templates and presentation templates in place. AAI logo is attached to all signatures on outgoing emails.
Support DCYA in the development of adoption related policy and legislation	Ongoing. AAI continues to provide statistics and submissions as requested.

Goal #4 - "To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes"

2017 was a particularly busy year in respect of legislative changes, throughout the year preparation for the Adoption Amendment Act included the redesign of forms and the amendment of statutory consent forms. The Act was enacted on 19th of October 2017. Due to the timing of the commencement of the Act it did not have a substantive effect on the adoption orders granted or applications made for Domestic Adoptions in 2017.

A number of applications for entry in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions could not be processed under the 2010 Act. In early 2018 these applications will be reviewed in line with the Adoption Amendment Act 2017 and progressed where possible.

The possible consequences of the passing of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill were also considered in great detail during the year. Issues such as the accommodation requirements of the Authority into the future and potential changes to the functions of the Authority were considered. There was regular engagement with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla - Child and Family Agency through joint working groups to prepare for the legislation.

Information about the General Data Protection Regulations which come into law on 25 May 2018 was disseminated to staff. Training and information sessions were attended by a number of staff and the Internal Auditors carried out a GDPR readiness review in September 2017. The recommendations made following the review will form the basis for a GDPR Plan which will be worked on in early 2018.

Actions	Progress at end 2017
Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2016	Enacted on 19 October 2017 as Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017. All stakeholders informed of commencement of legislation and its implications. FAQs published on website. Regular, speedy responses to new enquiries provided. Conference held for all stakeholders.
Preparation for Information and Tracing legislation	The AAI continues to participate in Adoption Records Working Group (ARWG) with Tusla and DCYA. Staff of the AAI also participate in The Register of Adoption Contact Enquiries (TRACE) sub-group and the media sub-group in conjunction with TUSLA and DCYA.

	Two meetings with accredited bodies took place in conjunction with DCYA and a number of individual meetings with Council for Adoption Agencies (CIAA) and accredited bodies have taken place.
Records and Organisation implications	AAI has a draft document in place identifying potentially up to 200 locations of files. The AAI has met with National Archives, Military Archives, Mercy Sisters Archives, Mother and Baby Home Commission and DCYA. Draft document compiled showing minimum places of deposit requirements and resources to comply with the Authority's new remit when legislation is passed. Discussions have begun with DCYA/OPW regarding the requirements of premises for AAI. Project Manager engaged December 2017 to assist in preparation for cataloguing, scanning of records etc. Consideration has been given during the year to the organisational and resource impact of new legislation insofar as it affects staff roles and responsibilities. More work will be done on this area in 2018.
Preparation for implementation of Children First Act 2015	Representatives from the AAI attended the DCYA Implementation Group. Child Safety Safeguarding statement updated for submission to the Board for approval in January 2018. A Designated Liaison Person was appointed. Update information will be added to the Operations Manual and all staff will be appraised of their responsibilities under the Act.

Goal #5 - "To maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation."

Much of the work in this area in 2017 focussed on full compliance with Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Risk Register was updated and is monitored by the Risk and Audit Committee and by the Board.

The Authority achieved full compliance with Children First Guidelines. A Designated Liaison Person has been appointed and all staff completed the online training provided through TUSLA's website.

In respect of financial accountability, variance analysis reports are provided to DCYA monthly. Our procurement policy is adhered to, is reviewed annually and subjected to Internal Audit Check. The Internal Audit Plan was approved by the Risk and Audit Committee and is being implemented. The Annual Report of the Risk and Audit Committee is formally presented to the Board. The Board and the Risk and Audit Committee both conducted self-assessment reviews.

Actions	Progress at end 2017
Develop HR function Draw up succession plan Fill vacancies	Due to resource issues the succession plan is not in place, will be completed in early 2018. Consultants were engaged and assisted in open recruitment competitions for HEO and PO in in 2017. EO posts were filled from panels in the Public Appointments Service.
Have functional database to allow accurate recording of personnel data as required under Civil and Public Service Regulations and Employment Law Regulations (SAGE).	Database being populated on an ongoing basis.
Staff in HR to undergo training in various HR functions.	One member of staff has commenced professional HR training course with IPA, 2 staff members have attended training with DPER in relation to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme (SPSPS).
Training plan in place for all staff for 2017.	Several general training course have been conducted and attended by staff – IT/Fire Safety/ First Aid Various staff members have attended conferences and seminars specific to their roles in AAI – Data Protection/Governance/ Finance One staff member attended a Business Irish Language course.
Carry out survey of staff to establish database of staff qualifications and experience	Deferred due to resource issues, will be carried out in Q3 2018.
Maintain a learning environment In house workshops and seminars arranged and staff encouraged to attend or participate.	Lunch and Learn seminars were conducted during the year and will continue in 2018. Professional Membership paid by AAI where appropriate.

Support professional memberships/CPD for relevant staff Record kept of AAI attendance and participation in outside events	Ongoing.
Filling of post of Director of Operations and Corporate Services/Board Secretary	Sanction granted by DCYA to fill post which became vacant as a result of retirement. Post advertised in May, interviews conducted over June/July, preferred candidate turned down the offer of the post. Post re-advertised in November. Interviews will take place early in the new year. Expect to have post filled by March 2018 at the latest.
Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources	Staff in Corporate Services are aware of procurement guidelines and procedures. Information on procurement policy included in Operations Manual and all staff have been made aware of the procedure for procurement which is managed centrally by Corporate Services. Financial procedures manual is in place and is updated as required. Procurement procedures are included in Financial Procedures manual. OGP have been engaged to assist with Legal Services Contract.
Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity	Staff dealing directly with FOI and DP requests are aware of responsibilities. Staff are trained and informed on standards required in respect of Data Protection, Records management, confidentiality and data integrity. The Operations Manual and Employee Handbooks provide guidelines to all staff. The AAI has cooperated with Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required.
Ensure full compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	Gap Analysis report provided to the Board, reviewed throughout the year and monitored by Risk and Audit Committee. Oversight Agreement in place with DCYA. Internal Audit plan includes annual compliance checks against the Code. Any non-compliance with Code identified and reported to RAC and Board.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

DOMESTIC ADOPTION

Activity Analysis

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

In all adoption cases it is a requirement that the applicants have a valid Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability. 79 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted in 2017. In most cases Declarations were granted within 3-4 weeks of receipt of the application.

Standards and guidelines produced by the Adoption Authority of Ireland for use by the various stakeholders are informed by trends compiled from reviews of all applications for Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability. They are also informed by best practice nationally and internationally; and by the Adoption Act 2010; statutory regulations' Hague Convention standards in adoption; and international research such as that of the International Social Services.

Adoption Orders

72 Adoption orders were granted in 2017. The majority, 37, were made in stepfamily adoptions. There was an increase in the number of adoption orders made in respect of children who had been in long term foster care 21 in 2017 from 19 in 2016. The balance (14) was made up of a combination of adoptions of infants placed for adoption in Ireland (7), the formalisation of adoptions in respect of children who were placed in the care of Irish couples from abroad (2), and 2 situations where the child had been placed privately.

Adoption Orders cannot be granted once a child turns 18 years of age and is legally considered an adult. Of the 72 Adoption orders granted in 2017, in 27 cases the child was 17 years of age. In 21 cases they were aged between 12 and 16 years, in 14 cases they were aged between 7 and 11 years, in 5 cases they were aged between 2 and 6 years, and in 5 cases the child was 1 year old.

Applications to the High Court

Under the Adoption Act 2010, a High Court order is required before certain adoption applications can proceed to the granting of the adoption order.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland must make an application to the High Court seeking to dispense with birth father notification and consultation in the following instances –

- where the Authority does not know the identity of a birth father, or

- where the Authority has been unable to locate the birth father in order to notify and consult him, or
- where due to the nature of the relationship between the birth mother and father it would be inappropriate to notify and consult the birth father

In 2017, 5 applications were made to the High Court under Section 18 of the Act to allow an infant to be placed for adoption without consultation with the birth father. The 5 applications were granted. These cases required, or will require, a subsequent order under Section 30 to proceed to Adoption Order.

In 2017, 15 applications were made to the High Court under Section 30 of the Act to allow an adoption application to proceed without consultation with the birth father. 14 applications were granted, with one still progressing before the courts into 2018.

To allow the Authority to make an adoption order, the Child and Family Agency (or in certain instances, the applicants), must make an application to the High Court in the following instances –

- where parental consents are not forthcoming;
- prior to the commencement of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 (see below), where the child was born to married parents;
- where there is an issue with regard to the placement of the child with the prospective adoptive parents; and

it can be demonstrated that the parent(s) have failed in their duty to their child and adoption is in the child's best interests.

In 2017, 20 applications were made to the High Court under Sections 53/54 of the Act. 19 applications were granted in 2017, with one still progressing before the courts into 2018.

Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017

The Adoption (Amendment) Bill was passed into law on 19th of July, 2017, and was commenced as the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 on 19th of October 2017. The Amendment has brought about a number of key changes to Domestic Adoptions, including;

- It recognises the best interests of the child as the most important consideration in any adoption application, and set out criteria by which to consider this;
- It removed a restriction on the adoption of children born to married parents or who were adopted previously;
- It allows for couples living together in a civil partnership or co-habiting to adopt;
- It establishes separate provisions for step-parent adoptions, allowing for a step-parent to adopt their partner's child without requiring for that partner (who is already the parent of the child) to also apply to adopt the child;

- It defines the role of the 'relevant non-guardian' in adoption cases; and extends to them the rights of birth fathers in such cases; and
- It expands on the criteria for a case before the High Court under Section 54.

Due to the timing of the commencement of the Amendment it did not have a substantive effect on the adoption orders granted, or court cases, in 2017. Some applicants in step-parent adoptions choose to be reassessed under the new criteria which meant that their cases did not proceed to adoption order before the end of 2017.

INFORMATION and TRACING

Activity Analysis

Requests for the release of Birth Certificates

In 2017, the Authority received 100 requests from adopted persons for the release of their birth certificate and these are being actively considered. This represents an increase of 43% on the 2016 figure of 70.

During the year, 39 birth certificates were released (23 in 2016) and 9 requests were refused (8 in 2016). Of the 39 birth certificates released some were in respect of requests made prior to 2017. 4 of the requests which were refused were in respect of requests received before 2017.

National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)

In 2017, applications to the National Adoption Contact Register increased to 667 compared to the 538 received in 2016. In 121 cases a match was identified between the new applicants and family members who had joined the Register previously. In 2016 this figure was 102.

The Adoption Authority has operated and maintained the NACPR since 2005. The NACPR remains a critical tool in enabling agreed contact between adopted persons and birth relatives. At the end of 2017 there were 13,550 entries on the NACPR.

Preparation for Information and Tracing Legislation

The Adoption Authority of Ireland has a comprehensive plan in place in readiness for the impact which this impending legislation will have on the functions of the Authority. The Authority is leading the Adoption Records Working Group (ARWG) which includes members from the Adoption Authority, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla- Child and Family Agency in preparation for the responsibility of holding, preserving and conserving all adoption records.

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

Activity Analysis

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

The Authority granted 68 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2017 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad and extended 23 existing Declarations by one year.

Register of Intercountry Adoptions

A total of 324 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of all relevant sections of the Adoption Act 2010. This represents a significant increase on the 2016 figure of 214. 53 entries were in respect of adoptions into Ireland carried out under the terms and conditions of the 1993 Hague Convention.

Matching of children

Social workers work with administrative staff and a medical advisor, to advise on the matching of children's needs with the abilities of prospective Irish parents. In 2017, 40 children were referred into Ireland from other countries. All referrals of children for adoption are reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team which comprises the Principal Social Worker, the Medical Advisor and the Manager of the Intercountry Adoption Unit.

In countries where Ireland does not have an accredited agency in operation, for example the Philippines and Thailand, social work staff from the Authority contacted the prospective parents to discuss their ability to meet the specific children's needs.

Country Specific Updates

Bulgaria: In 2017, 2 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Bulgaria; 4 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention). 8 Adoptions completed in Bulgaria were entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in 2017.

A delegation of three representatives from the Adoption Authority of Ireland visited Bulgaria from 19-23 September 2017, to report on the current status of intercountry adoption. The delegation comprised of Dr Imelda Ryan, Board member, Des Tracey, Manager ICA Unit and Celia Loftus, Principal Social Worker. They met with several parties during the visit including the Irish Ambassador to Bulgaria, Michael Forbes, Catherine Lawlor, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Ireland the Director and the Head of the Department 'Social Affairs' of the International Legal Child Support

and Intercountry Adoptions Directorate at the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice. The delegation also met with the Directors and staff of the **Vesta NGO** and the Child Protection Specialist and Children's Rights Monitoring Specialist of **UNICEF**. UNICEF has been operating in Bulgaria for the past 17 years and the. Vesta is the accredited body in Bulgaria that facilitates intercountry adoptions for Irish families, in conjunction with Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency in Ireland. A more detailed report about the visit is published on our website https://www.aai.gov.ie/adoption/intercountry/country-information/bulgaria.html

China: In 2017, 9 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in China; 4 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 10 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

Haiti: In 2017, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Haiti.

In May 2017 a delegation of three representatives of the Adoption Authority of Ireland visited Haiti to examine the adoption infrastructure and report back to the wider Board on the matter. The delegation consisted of Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chair of the Authority, Patricia Carey, Chief Executive Officer and Kiernan Gildea, Director of Operations.

The delegation met with Madame Arielle Villedrouin, Director General of the Central Authority (ISBER). Haiti ratified the 1993 Hague Convention in April 2014 moving from a system of large scale private adoption to a system based on the 1993 Hague Convention. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of intercountry adoptions from 1,500 to 270 last year. This is a clear indicator of much more robust regulation of intercountry adoption

The delegation also met with Mark Vincent, head of Haiti UNICEF offices. Mr Vincent provided an account of the child protection infrastructure in Haiti and indicated that it was assisting the ISBER with developing a child protection code and with building its capacity as a Central Authority.

India: in 2017, 2 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in India. One adoption effected in India by Irish residents was entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

Philippines: In 2017, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the Philippines; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention). Under current arrangements, Filipino children may be subsequently adopted in Ireland.
Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency (HHAMA) has been approved to mediate adoptions from the Philippines and it is expected that HHAMA will commence activities with the Philippines shortly.

Poland: In 2017, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Poland; No Agreement to Place was granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no entries were made in the Register of Intercountry adoptions in respect of adoptions effected in Poland.

Thailand: In 2017, 6 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Thailand; 1 Agreement to Place was granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 2 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. HHAMA is in the process of obtaining accreditation to work with the Thai authorities to mediate adoptions from Thailand and it is expected that HHAMA will commence activities this year.

United States of America: In 2017, 11 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the U.S.A.; 8 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 9 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

Vietnam: In 2017, 28 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Vietnam; 24 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 22 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

REGISTER OF GENDER RECOGNITION of INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

Persons holding a valid Certificate of Gender Recognition issued by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and whose adoption is registered in the Register of Foreign Adoptions (RFA) or the Register of Intercountry Adoptions (RICA) may apply to the Adoption Authority of Ireland for an entry in the Register of Gender Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions.

Applications must be made in writing and the following documentation is required with the application:

- The original copy of the Gender Recognition Certificate as issued by the DSP;
- A copy of the notification letter from the DSP which accompanied the Gender Recognition Certificate;
- A copy of the entry in the RFA or the RICA (if available).

Two entries made in this Register in 2017.

SOCIAL WORK TEAM

The social work team organises four professional development fora each year. In 2017 they were held on 30 March, 4 April, 25 October and 16 November. The fora are open to social work teams and medical advisors working in the Tusla - Child and Family Agency and accredited bodies. Expert national and international speakers are engaged to address the fora.

The purpose of a forum is to:

- provide current information on issues in Information and Tracing work, and on medical issues related to adults and children in adoption;
- achieve professional and best practice consensus from in-depth discussion on ethical dilemmas in assessment and support services;
- share professional practice experience and form connections with social workers and other professionals in the area of adoption work; and
- offer continuous professional development opportunities for practitioners in adoption.

The topics covered in 2017 included:

- attachment, loss, shame in adoption;
- therapeutic parenting;
- neurological development in adopted children;
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome;
- creating good care plans for assessment reports;
- data protection implications for social workers working in adoption.

Information and Tracing

The Social Work Team dealt with 327 new referrals for information, counselling, tracing services and matches on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register.

CORPORATE SERVICES AND ACCREDITATION UNIT

ACCREDITATION

Activity Analysis

The maintenance of a 'Register of Accredited Bodies' by the Authority is provided for under Section 126 of the Adoption Act 2010.

At the end of 2017, the following was the status of the ten registered accredited bodies:

International Adoption Association Terenure Enterprise Centre 17 Rathfarnham Road Dublin 14	Closed
PACT 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 10 March 2016
Cúnamh CPRSI House 30 South Anne Street Dublin 2	Reaccredited 7 March 2016
Barnardos Post Adoption Service 23/24 Buckingham Street Dublin 1	Reaccredited 7 June 2016
St. Mura's Adoption Society Pastoral Centre Monastery Avenue Letterkenny Co Donegal	Closed
Clarecare Harmony row Ennis Co Clare	Closed
Arabella Counselling, t/a Here2Help 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 18 October 2016

Helping Hands Adoption Facilitation Agency t/a Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency The Loft, Bessboro Centre Blackrock Road Cork	Reaccredited 12 June 2017
St. Brigid's Information and Tracing Agency Holy Faith Sisters Aylward House Glasnevin Dublin 11	Accredited 1/12/2016
Not active:	
Families for Children Adoption Agency Ltd. Suite 206, The Capel Building Mary's Abbey Dublin 1	Reaccredited 7 June 2016

Six-monthly self-assessment reports were submitted by all accredited bodies during 2017. Audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2016 were also submitted.

Closure of Accredited Bodies

At the end of 2017, 3 Accredited Bodies had closed. The files of St Mura's Adoption Society and Clarecare Adoption Services were in the process of being transferred to TUSLA. No files are held by IAA. No accredited bodies were removed from the Register in 2017.

Name of Accredited Body	Date of Closure
St Mura's Adoption Society	30 September 2017
Clarecare Adoption Services	31 October 2017
International Adoption Association (Ireland)	30 November 2017

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Employee Handbook is updated on an on-going basis subject to any changes in employment law or Department of Public Expenditure and Reform policy changes

We continue to provide a dedicated Employee Assistance Service which is available to all staff and their family members as required.

To supplement the Employee Handbook further training was provided for managers to ensure they understood their roles in respect of Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures. Staff in the HR team and senior management team also completed training in HRM, pensions administration and competency based interviewing.

Under its recruitment licence and with sanction from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs the Authority ran two recruitment competitions, one to fill a vacancy at Higher Executive Officer (HEO) level and one for a Principal Officer (PO) post which became vacant as a result of a retirement. The HEO post was filled and the PO post is expected to be filled in early 2018.

Training

Three Lunch and Learn sessions took place during the year. Staff are encouraged to make presentations themselves and to suggest topics for the sessions. Of the three sessions two were delivered by staff - **The Vikings in Dublin** and the **History of Scouting Ireland** - and the third **Ireland's Support in the context of the Greek Migration Crisis** was delivered by David Costello from the Department of Justice's International Protection Office.

On-site training was also provided in the following areas:

- MS Word intermediate;
- MS excel intermediate;
- Time management;
- Fire warden training and EVAC chair use.

Various staff members also attended external training ranging from seminars and talks to Professional certificates and Masters courses. Topics included;

- Risk management;
- Governance;
- Data protection;
- Project management and other management topics;
- Finance;
- Media skills;
- Document management;
- Public service grade specific training courses.

WEBSITE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 2017 development of the website continued with a substantial new young person's section added. As well as including a targeted Q&A section, information leaflets for young people and two video clips were published. The layout and content of other areas of the website was improved in addition to posting the usual updates on statistics and reports. The main areas of improvements were in the Contact Us form, a new map tool and a photo gallery.

We will continue to develop the website to include more statistics and support information throughout 2018. There is a section on the website which allows users to provide feedback to us.

The Corporate Services team carried out a number of important upgrades to our network in conjunction with our colleagues in the ICT unit in the Department of Health. The team continues to work closely with the other business sections of the organisation to ensure the security of all ICT services. We commenced a major project to redesign our database platform towards the end of 2017 and it is envisaged that this will be completed by the end of 2018.

INFORMATION

Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

25 PQs were directed to the Adoption Authority of Ireland. In the majority of cases the question came through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Authority provided material for the Minister to respond accordingly.

Freedom of Information Requests (FOI)

In 2017 the Adoption Authority received 17 requests under the Freedom of Information Acts

- 4 granted
- 1 referred to Tusla
- 1 referred to Data Protection
- 1 information not available
- 9 Declined

The reason for the high rate of declined requests is that the 2014 Act designates the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a 'Partially Included Agency'. This means that the Freedom of Information Acts do not apply to 'records concerning, or arising from, the making of an adoption order or in the recognition of an intercountry adoption effected outside the State, within the meaning of the Adoption Act 2010'.

Data Protection Requests

In 2017 we received 8 Data Protection requests and all were responded to. Only one request was declined as the request was not in respect of 'personal information' as defined in the Acts.

Press/Media

All press queries and requests for interviews are handled by the CEO and Chairman.

Seminars

On 3 May 2017 the Authority hosted a seminar, *'Exploring Information & Tracing'*. Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, launched the seminar, and Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chair of the Authority, delivered the keynote address. Ms Philomena Lee, whose story was brought to international attention by the movie *Philomena*, spoke about mothers and the new legislation, and birth mother Maria Moylett addressed the audience about her own experience. Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chair of Adoption Authority, made a presentation on birth fathers' perspectives, and Susan Lohan, Adoption Rights Alliance, spoke about adoptees' rights to information. The presentations made by the speakers are available on our website at https://www.aai.gov.ie/component/k2/item/101-exploring-information-tracing-seminar-3-may-2017.html

On 30 November the Authority held a conference entitled *'Adoption Practice in the Aftermath of the Adoption Amendment Act'*. Minister Zappone opened the seminar, and Judge Rosemary Horgan, President of the District Court, addressed the attendees on Voice of the Child. Other speakers were Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chair of the Authority, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, and Dr Karen McAuley, Head of Policy, Ombudsman for Children's Office, Tanya Ward, CEO, Children's Rights Alliance, Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chair of the Authority; and Norah Gibbons, Chairperson of Tusla - Child & Family Agency.

This seminar was used to formally launch the Authority's bespoke video on children's voices at adoption order hearings and two new leaflets which have been designed specifically for children and young people about adoption order hearings.

STATISTICS

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Table 1. Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953-2017

Year	Total Births	Non-Marital Births	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1953	62,558	1,340	2.14	381
1954	62,534	1,310	2.09	888
1955	61,662	1,234	2.00	786
1956	60,740	1,173	1.93	565
1957	61,242	1,032	1.69	752
1958	59,510	976	1.64	592
1959	60,188	959	1.59	501
1960	60,735	968	1.59	505
1961	59,825	975	1.63	547
1962	61,782	1,111	1.80	699
1963	63,246	1,157	1.83	840
1964	64,072	1,292	2.02	1,003
1965	63,525	1,403	2.21	1,049
1966	62,215	1,436	2.31	1,178
1967	61,307	1,540	2.51	1,493
1968	61,004	1,558	2.55	1,343
1969	62,912	1,642	2.61	1,225
1970	64,382	1,709	2.65	1,414
1971	67,551	1,842	2.73	1,305
1972	68,527	2,005	2.93	1,291
1973	68,713	2,167	3.15	1,402
1974	68,907	2,309	3.35	1,415
1975	67,178	2,515	3.74	1,443
1976	67,718	2,545	3.76	1,104
1977	68,892	2,877	4.18	1,127
1978	70,299	3,003	4.27	1,223
1979	72,539	3,337	4.60	988
1980	74,064	3,723	5.03	1,115
1981	72,158	3,914	5.42	1,191
1982	70,843	4,358	6.15	1,191
1983	67,117	4,552	6.78	1,184
1984	64,062	5,116	7.99	1,195
1985	62,388	5,282	8.47	882
1986	61,620	5,946	9.65	800
1987	58,433	6,347	10.86	715

Year	Total Births	Non-Marital Births	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1988	54,600	6,483	11.87	649
1989	52,018	6,671	12.82	615
1990	53,044	7,767	14.64	648
1991	52,718	8,912	16.91	590
1992	51,089	9,211	18.03	523
1993	49,304	9,826	19.93	500
1994	47,928	9,904	20.66	424
1995	48,530	10,788	22.23	490
1996	50,390	12,484	24.77	405
1997	52,311	13,892	26.56	422
1998	53,551	15,133	28.26	400
1999	53,354	16,461	30.85	317
2000	54,239	17,235	31.78	303
2001	57,882	18,049	31.18	293
2002	60,521	18,815	31.09	266
2003	61,517	19,313	31.39	263
2004	61,684	19,935	32.32	273
2005	61,042	19,528	32.00	253
2006	64,237	21,295	33.15	222
2007	70,620	23,170	32.81	187
2008	75,065	24,844	33.09	200
2009	74,728	24,532	32.82	190
2010	73,724	24,860	33.72	189
2011	74,650	25,157	33.70	39
2012	72,225	25,344	35.10	49
2013	68,930	24,393	35.40	116
2014	67,462	24,514	36.30	112
2015	65,909	23,990	36.40	94
2016	63,897	23,348	36.50	95
2017	62,053	23,340	37.60	72
TOTAL				**44,531**

Sources: Statistical Abstracts, (various years) C.S.O.

Table 2. Domestic Adoption Order granted / Accredited Bodies concerned

Domestic Adoption Orders granted 2017 / Accredited Bodies concerned	
Health Service Executive / Child & Family Agency / Tusla	All

Table 3.
Entries in the Register of Foreign Adoptions, 1991-2010, entered pursuant to Section 5 of the Adoption Act 1991 **and** in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, 2010-2017 pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption).

No	Country	No of Children
1	Russia	1607
2	Vietnam	860
3	Romania	786
4	China	421
5	Ethiopia	302
6	Guatemala	176
7	Kazakhstan	149
8	Belarus	145
9	Thailand	119
10	Ukraine	99
11	Mexico	108
12	United States of America	96
13	India	52
14	Colombia	19
15	Taiwan	19
16	Brazil	17
17	Paraguay	16
18	Philippines	11
19	Bulgaria	31
20	Peru	7
21	Cambodia	4

Table 3. contd.
Entries in the Register of Foreign Adoptions, 1991-2010, entered pursuant to Section 5 of the Adoption Act 1991 **and** in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, 2010-2017 pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption).

22	Uganda	2
23	Uzbekistan	2
24	United Kingdom	7
25	El Salvador	2
26	Chile	1
27	Israel	1
28	Japan	1
29	Lebanon	1
30	Bolivia	1
31	Sri Lanka	1
32	Venezuela	1
33	Zambia	1
34	Kenya	1
35	Zimbabwe	1
36	Morocco	1
37	Bosnia Herzegovina	1
38	Malawi	1
39	Libya	1
40	South Africa	1
41	Lithuania	2
	Total	**5074**

Table 4
Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2017 only. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption)

Country	**2017**
Bulgaria	8
China	10
India	1
Mexico	1
Thailand	2
United States of America	9
Vietnam	22
Total	**53**

Table 5
Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2017, where the adoptions were effected by adopters who were habitually resident abroad. (Sections 57(2)(a) & 57(2)(b)(i) of the Adoption Act 2010 refer).

Country of residence at time of adoption	2017
Australia	1
Bulgaria	2
Cambodia	2
Canada	1
Cayman Islands	1
China	19
Colombia	1
Ecuador	1
England	126
Ethiopia	1
Hong Kong	9
India	1
Jersey	1
Malawi	1
Northern Ireland	40
Romania	1
Russia	2
Scotland	10
South Africa	8
Spain	2
Taiwan	2

Table 5 cont'd
Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2017, where the adoptions were effected by adopters who were habitually resident abroad. (Sections 57(2)(a) & 57(2)(b)(i) of the Adoption Act 2010 refer).

Tanzania	1
Thailand	6
United States of America	28
Vietnam	2
Wales	1
Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia)	1
Total	**271**

Table 6
Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2012 and 2017, where the adopters were habitually resident in Ireland and held a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the adoption). (Section 5, Adoption Act 1991 and Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010 refers).

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Bulgaria	0	1	4	8	4	8
Cambodia	0	0	0	1	0	0
Colombia	0	1	0	0	0	0
China	1	3	1	15	7	10
El Salvador	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	32	26	0	0	1	0
India	10	10	3	0	0	1
Lithuania	0	0	0	1	1	0
Mexico	1	0	5	11	0	1
Peru	0	0	0	1	0	0
Russia	49	17	4	2	2	0
Taiwan	3	1	0	0	0	0
Thailand	2	5	6	1	4	2
United States of America	19	7	5	6	14	9
United Kingdom	0	0	2	5	0	0
Vietnam	0	0	4	31	21	22
Total	**117**	**72**	**34**	**82**	**54**	**53**

Table 7
Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2017 (All Sections)

Year	Number
1991	58
1992	305
1993	59
1994	67
1995	90
1996	117
1997	148
1998	260
1999	284
2000	323
2001	285
2002	440
2003	487
2004	486
2005	439
2006	406
2007	436
2008	490
2009	394
2010	288
2011	342

Table 7 contd. Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2017 (All Sections)	
2012	244
2013	145
2014	104
2015	160
2016	215
2017	**324**
Total	**7396**

Table 8
Number of Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability granted and refused by the Adoption Board under the Adoption Act, 1991 in respect of intercountry adoptions.

Year	Number of Declarations Granted	Number of Declarations Refused
1991	4	1
1992	40	1
1993	54	6
1994	63	3
1995	109	4
1996	117	5
1997	176	1
1998	206	3
1999	242	1
2000	282	1
2001	391	1
2002	399	1
2003	468	0
2004	461	0
2005	403	3
2006	400	3
2007	452	5
2008	494	1
2009	391	1
2010	423	1
Total	**5,575**	**40**

Table 9
Number of Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability (Intercountry) granted and refused by the Adoption Authority of Ireland from 2010-2017 under the Adoption Act 2010 in respect of intercountry adoptions.

Year	Granted	Refused
2010	20	0
2011	205	0
2012	164	2
2013	266	1
2014	106	4
2015	86	1
2016	72	0
2017	68	0
Total	**987**	**8**

OTHER INFORMATION

Energy Management
Overview of Energy Usage in 2017

Ireland's third National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP 3), published in 2014, reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to delivering a 20% reduction in energy demand across the whole of the economy by 2020, along with a 33% reduction in public sector energy use.

This public sector target is the equivalent of 3,240GKwh in primary energy savings. The figures for the collective energy savings for the public sector for 2016 were not available at the time of publication of this report.

In 2017, The Adoption Authority of Ireland reported on its 2016 energy use and had improved on the previous years' performance with an energy saving of 27.9% since a baseline level in 2009. At this level of savings, we are on track to meet our 2020 target of 33% savings.

Website: The website of the Adoption Authority can be accessed at www.aai.gov.ie

Solicitors
Matheson
Sir John Rogerson's Quay
Dublin 2

Auditors
The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General
Treasury Block
Lower Yard
Dublin Castle
Dublin 2

ASM
20 Rosemary Street
Belfast
BT1 1QD
(internal audit)