



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Adoption Authority of Ireland Corporate Plan 2019-2021

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.

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1 Foreword

Established under the Adoption Act, 2010 the Adoption Authority of Ireland (the Authority) is an independent quasi-judicial statutory body appointed by Government for the purposes of regulating adoption in Ireland. The provisions of the Adoption Act 2010 give a very clear mandate to the Authority in the decision-making processes for which it is responsible. Adoption practice in Ireland is also governed by the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Inter-country adoption. Under the Hague Convention the Authority is also the designated Central Authority for Adoption in Ireland.

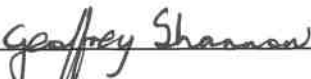
The Authority sets out to ensure provision of the highest possible standards of adoption and related services, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount consideration. This is a key defining principle for all of our work and activities.


While largely successful in meeting the ambitions we set in our Corporate Plan for 2016-18, we are conscious that our operating environment continues to change and develop. The legal and policy framework surrounding adoption, the needs of adoptees and the expectations of applicants, parents and other parties to the adoption process all continue to evolve. We will continue to adapt and develop our services accordingly. Our collective aim is to do the best we can in delivering on our legal obligations and policy objectives, within the limits of the resources allocated to us for this purpose.

We anticipate significant change for the Authority, flowing from a number of legislative developments currently in train, such as the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016. We will be pro-active in planning for these changes as the legislative process moves to a conclusion.

The Authority values the constructive relationships it enjoys with multiple external partners and looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with them in the best interests of children and the continuous improvement of adoption services.

We appreciate the strong support we receive from the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and her Department and look forward to a continuation of our close working relationships in the period ahead.


Dr. Geoffrey Shannon
Chairperson


Patricia Carey
Chief Executive Officer

2 Executive Summary

Preparation of this Corporate Plan has been undertaken by the Board and Executive through a series of workshops, preceded by a progress review of the Plan for the period 2016-18. That review confirmed the value of the planning process undertaken, the continuing validity of the template adopted for management planning and board oversight purposes and provided reassurance that all key objectives for the outgoing period had been largely achieved. Where key objectives were not completed due to factors outside the control of the Authority, measures have been put in place to ensure those objectives are realised during the term of the new Corporate Plan.

Planning for the coming three-year period requires continuity in many aspects of the Authority's work but also anticipates change in line with pending legislative developments.

Elements of the preparatory phase have included consideration of the factors that currently impact and are likely to impact the future workings and focus of the Authority (including the legislative proposals set out in the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016, relocation of the Authority by 2021 and the change in social working within the Authority), while SWOT, PESTLE and Risk analyses were also carried out. This extensive analysis has informed the approach taken in planning for the coming period.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 of this Plan outline the governance and legal framework within which the Authority operates and some of its key organisation and financial features. In Paragraph 5, we set out the mission, vision and values, leading into our statement of Strategic Goals in Paragraph 6. Goals are broken out into Strategic Objectives in Paragraph 7, with indicators, target outcomes, and projected timelines identified in each case.

This document provides the frame for a more detailed Task Planner (attached) which in turn will form the basis for organisational and individual performance planning over the period of the Plan. Implementation will be supported by annual business planning and regular review at Executive and Board levels.

This Plan was adopted in final form by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2018.

3 Organisation and Governance

3.1 Introduction

The Adoption Act 2010 commenced on 1st November 2010. The Adoption Authority was also established on that day and operates as the Central Authority for Adoptions in Ireland. Since that date, adoption in Ireland is regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland which is an independent quasi-judicial statutory body appointed by Government.

The commencement and establishment days coincided with Ireland's formal ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. The purpose of the Adoption Act 2010, is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption. The legislative framework governing adoption has been strengthened so as to ensure that the best interests of children are protected throughout the adoption process.

3.2 Functions and Governance Arrangements

The functions of the Authority are set out in Section 96 of the Adoption Act 2010. These include functions of an operational, judicial and quasi-judicial nature in relation to the adoption process itself, as provided for under the Act but also relating to the Authority's designation as the Central Authority for the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. In addition, the Authority has registration and regulatory functions. Finally, there are reporting, advice and research functions set out. These statutory functions form the legal backdrop to each of the strategic goals, objectives and planned activities for the period of this plan.

The functions of the Authority (as defined in Section 96 on the 2010 Act) include the following:

- (a) on and after the establishment day, performing the functions in relation to adoptions that before that day were performed by An Bord Uchtála;
- (b) as specified in section 66 of the Act, performing in the State the role of a Central Authority under the Hague Convention;
- (c) at the request of the Minister, providing general advice to him or her about adoption matters;
- (d) undertaking or assisting in research projects and activities relating to adoption services;
- (e) compiling statistical information and other records as to the proper planning, development and provision of those adoption services;
- (f) maintaining the register of accredited bodies; and
- (g) maintaining the register of intercountry adoptions.
- (h) maintaining the register of gender recognition of intercountry adoptions and the Index referred to in section 91A(3) of the 2010 Act.

Section 96 of the Act also provides that:

- The Authority has all the powers as are necessary or expedient for the performance by it of its functions;
- The Authority may make such enquiries as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions;
- The Authority shall endeavour to ensure that its adoption enquiries under this Act and adoption hearings before the Authority are conducted in a non-adversarial manner.

Part 12 (sections 94-121 inclusive) provides, inter alia, for the establishment of the Authority and the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. The Authority members are the governing body of the organisation and are collectively responsible for promoting the success of the Authority by leading and directing the Authority's activities. The provisions of the Act put in place a statutory framework which ensures that we are accountable to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and to the Government. Our performance will continue to be

evaluated against the provisions contained in the Act and the commitments made in this plan.

3.3 Organisation Structure

The current organisation structure for the Authority is set out at **Appendix A**.

3.4 Financial History

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is established under the Adoption Act 2010 and as a publicly funded body is subject to oversight by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The table below sets out a 3-Year history of the financial performance of the Adoption Authority.

	2016	2017	2018*
	€'000	€'000	€'000
Total Income	3,411	3,398	3,929
Total Expenditure	3,208	3,369	4,037
Total Assets	96	263	216

Figure 1.0 – Financial History

*as per draft unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2018

4 Corporate Plan – the Legal Framework

The Authority is required under section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010, to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan. Section 108(3) &(4) of the Act states that

(3) The corporate plan shall be prepared in a form and manner in accordance with any direction given by the Minister and shall specify—

(a) the key objectives of the Authority for the 3 year period concerned and the strategies for achieving those objectives, and (b) the uses to which the Authority proposes to apply its resources.

(4) In preparing the corporate plan, the Authority shall have regard to the policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government to the extent that those policies may affect or relate to the functions of the Authority”

In line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 the Authority has prepared a three year Corporate Plan and annual Business Plan, with reporting and review in the form of the Authority’s Annual Report and by updates at the Authority’s regular meetings with the Department’s Adoption Policy Unit (APU).

5 Statement of Mission, Vision and Values

5.1 Mission Statement

“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.”

5.2 Vision Statement

“To be recognised as the centre of excellence and the principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services.”

5.3 Principles and Values

The Authority has adopted a set of principles and values which underpin its approach to its mission, vision, goals, objectives and daily operations. These are concerned with:

Child – Centeredness:

- We focus on the best interests of children and ensure that their lifelong needs are considered as paramount when they engage in adoption services.
- We are committed to the best interests of the individual child and will strive to ensure that children’s needs are paramount and the voice of the child is heard and responded to in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process.

Quality Services:

- We seek to provide the highest quality service in all areas of our work, in line with law and best practice in adoption.
- We are committed to developing and retaining a highly skilled and knowledgeable staff through leadership, training, development and commitment to continuous improvement in the delivery of our services.

Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency:

- We are guided by honesty, propriety, accountability and ethical adoption practice in all of our actions and decisions.
- We operate in a manner which is open to scrutiny and which will be characterised by impartiality and equity.
- We are committed to delivering our services in the most efficient and effective way possible so as to achieve value for money.

Respect:

- We are committed to treating all with whom we deal with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- We are a listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those who work in adoption services, or are affected by adoption.
- We listen to the ideas and concerns of our own staff and use their knowledge and experience to make the Authority a good place to work.

6 Strategic Goals

The following goals have been identified by the Authority as being the primary drivers of the Authority for the 3-Year duration of this Strategic Plan:

Goal 1

"To ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount and the voice of the child is heard and responded to in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process."

Goal 2

"To ensure all relevant parties to the adoption process are heard and their respective rights are balanced appropriately."

Goal 3

"To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland."

Goal 4

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

Goal 5

"To inform adoption policy and service delivery by reason of a practical understanding of the operations of the legislation through the provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework."

Goal 6

"To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes."

Goal 7

"To be proactive and responsive to change and maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation."

7 Strategic Objectives

Goal 1

“To ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount and the voice of the child is heard and responded to in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process.”

Goal 1 Objectives	Indicator	Target outcome	Timeline
1.1) The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of the child giving due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written report on consultation with the child. 	All applications that proceed to adoption order have a report of child consultation.	Monthly, before each matter comes before the Board and is then reviewed by the Board.
1.2) The Authority will facilitate all requests from a child to be heard by the Board during the adoption process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All requests acknowledged promptly and notified to Board at next scheduled meeting. 	A Hearing is scheduled in order to facilitate the Child being heard by the Board.	Monthly.
1.3) To ensure the Authority provides sufficient and appropriate information to enable the child to make a free and informed decision regarding the adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from families. 	All relevant information is provided to children and families directly as part of their adoption application.	Ongoing.
1.4) Liaise with Tusla and other relevant public bodies in ensuring consistency in practice when hearing the voice of the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive engagement with relevant public bodies. 	Consistent high standard in hearing the voice of the child.	Biannual Review.
1.5) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister in ensuring the voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development of any regulations made 	Full compliance with Section 19 of the Adoption	Ongoing.

<p>of the child is given sufficient consideration in all adoption proceedings.</p>	<p>under Section 19 of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017.</p>	<p>(Amendment) Act 2017.</p>	
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Goal 2

“Ensuring all relevant parties to the adoption process are heard and their respective rights are balanced appropriately.”

Goal 2 Objectives	Indicators	Target outcome	Timeline
2.1) Ensure that all relevant parties (the child; applicants; mother of the child; father of the child; relevant non-guardians; guardians; person having charge or control over the child) are fully informed of their right to be heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respective documentation and reports received from Tusla confirming relevant parties have been offered a hearing. 	All relevant information is provided to relevant parties in a timely manner.	Monthly, before each matter comes before the Board and is then reviewed by the Board.
2.2) Facilitate requests to be heard from any of the above relevant parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All requests acknowledged promptly and notified to Board at next scheduled meeting. 	Hearings scheduled.	Ongoing.
2.3) The Authority’s procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of all relevant parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respective documentation on file reflecting the views of relevant parties. 	In all cases having written confirmation on file of attempts to engage.	Each case is reviewed before it comes before the Board.
2.4) Ensure the Authority provides sufficient and clear information to enable all relevant parties to make a free and informed decision to engage in the adoption process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive Feedback from relevant parties as to whether they felt they were adequately informed to enable them to make decisions. 	All relevant information is provided to all relevant parties directly as part of their hearing application.	Monthly.

Goal 3

“To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.”

Goal 3 Objectives	Indicators	Target outcome	Timeline
3.1) To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy of documentation and reports received against standards • Accuracy, comprehensiveness and timeliness of submissions to Court. 	Reduced Delays.	Biannual review.
3.2) To engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely scheduling of Meetings • Speedy response time to meeting requests 	Adherence to planned schedule of meetings / consultations. Timely response to unscheduled meeting requests.	Ongoing.
3.3) Maintain active oversight of all accredited agencies, including reaccreditation and registration against approved regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of inspections carried out. • Regular Reporting to the Board. • Regular scheduled engagements with various accredited agencies. 	Statutory reports filed on time.	Review and oversight of accredited Agencies is undertaken by the Board on a monthly basis.

Goal 4

“To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.”

Goal 4 Objectives	Indicators	Desired outcome	Timeline
4.1) Make informed and timely decisions regarding: A) the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt ; B) the making of adoption orders; C) the recognition of intercountry adoption orders ; D) Article 17 referrals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A) Speedy turnaround times from application to decision. • B) All adoption applications processed fully before age 18. • C) Routine and non-routine processing of applications. • D) Timely Processing of referrals. 	A) Turnaround time of 6 weeks. B) Before age 18. C) Two weeks for routine and 8 weeks for non-routine. D) One week.	Monthly.
4.2) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister on all adoption related matters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of engagement • Timely response to Departmental requests. 	Full and constructive engagement with Dept. and Minister on all relevant matters	Ongoing
4.3) Maintain all statutory and non-statutory Registers in line with agreed requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely updating of all registers. • Timely response to updates and corrections to records. 	Registers are up-to-date and accurate.	Ongoing.
4.4) Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of personal sensitive information to adult adoptees and birth parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnaround time on routine applications. • Release of identifying information. • Time to bring non-routine applications to Board. 	Non-routine Applications to next appropriate board meeting. Routine Applications 1-2 weeks.	Reviewed monthly by the Board.
4.5) Maintain constructive relationships with all partners and develop national and international relationships that promote the highest possible standards in adoption and adoption related services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule of engagements. • Response time to requests. • Visit programme and travel plan. • Hosting of delegates from sending countries and other Central Authorities. 	Quarterly teleconference with English speaking Central Authorities. Adherence to visits schedule.	Ongoing.

Goal 5

“To inform adoption policy and service delivery by reason of a practical understanding of the operations of the legislation through the provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.”

Goal 5 Objectives	Indicators	Desired outcome	Timeline
5.1) Engage proactively and communicate effectively with all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular scheduling of meetings with stakeholders. Continuing Intelligence gathering and reporting. 	<p>Regular engagements with stakeholders.</p> <p>Timely response to stakeholder issues.</p>	Ongoing.
5.2) Website to be the prime source of information for all stakeholders and the public at large.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularity of website review. Number of website visits. Activity Reports. Number of queries through website. 	Quarterly reviews of website.	Quarterly and as required.
5.3) Undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of Research strategy. 	<p>Research Officer in place.</p> <p>Research strategy identified and operational.</p>	From Qtr. 2 2019 and ongoing thereafter.
5.4) Support Government Departments in the development of adoption related policy and legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speedy turnaround time to Department requests. 	Timely response to all requests.	Ongoing.
5.5) Promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of briefings. Number of seminars and forums. Response time to media requests. 	3 Seminars and 4 fora per annum.	Ongoing.

Goal 6

“To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes.”

Goal 6 Objectives	Indicators	Desired outcome	Timeline
6.1) To plan and implement the changes required in organisation (including transfer of functions) and operational procedures in line with the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of project plan. 	Effective implementation of project plan.	Planning is ongoing. Implementation subject to enactment.
6.2) Be prepared to adapt to a) DAHR and Surrogacy legislation b) any other relevant legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation Plan. 	Effective roll-out of implementation plan.	Implementation subject to enactment and content of legislation.

Goal 7

"To be proactive and responsive to change and maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation."

Goal 7 Objectives	Indicators	Desired outcome	Timeline
7.1) Ensure full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Statements. Annual Report. Compliance Check. External evaluation. 	Full compliance with all requirements.	Annual deadlines as set out in the Code of Governance and Business Plan. 3-year independent assessment.
7.2) Collaborate with OPW in obtaining fit-for-purpose accommodation for the Adoption Authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relocation Plan. 	Relocation with minimal disruption to services. Compliance with Plan.	Relocation by Feb 2021.
7.3) Maintain robust Risk Management Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk Register Review. Risk and Audit Committee ToR. RAC number of meetings. Risk Heat Map. Internal Audit Reports. External Risk Evaluation. 	4 meetings per annum for RAC. External evaluation once every 3 years. No open recommendations from Internal Audit Reports.	Monthly Review by the Board. Periodic independent review.
7.4) Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity and compliance with GDPR.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Protection Policy. Breach Reporting Policy. 	Full adherence to each policy.	Ongoing.
7.5) Authority to maintain a learning environment where competencies and training requirements are fully met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training needs reports. PMDS. 	Competency and skill gaps are met. Adherence to training policy.	Ongoing.

Goal 7 Objectives	Indicators	Desired Outcome	Timeline
7.6) Maintain Board and Executive Succession Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR staff strategy plan for succession and expansion (as required). • Anticipate Board vacancies and provide competency requirements to Dept. 	<p>No gaps between staff leaving and new appointments.</p> <p>No competency gaps.</p>	Annual.
7.7) Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audits. • Procurement and relevant financial and HR policies. • Budget Plan and report to Board. 	<p>Compliance with DPER guidelines.</p> <p>Adherence to procurement and financial policies.</p> <p>Operating within budget.</p>	Ongoing.
7.8) Full implementation of Corporate Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to Department on Corporate Plan and annual Business Plan. • Report to Board on quarterly basis. • Oversight Agreement. • Task Planner and % level of achievement against each objective. 	<p>Corporate Plan implemented in full, in line with agreed objectives.</p> <p>Business Plan fully aligned to Corporate Plan.</p>	Quarterly Review.

8 Risk / Risk Mitigation

The following risks have been identified as potential obstacles to successful implementation of the 3-year plan. Mitigating actions have been identified where feasible.

#	Risk	Mitigating Action
1	Relocation risks. No place of business has yet been identified, risk is that there will be a delay in doing causing disruption to services.	Having comprehensive relocation plan. Close collaboration with OPW.
2	Reduction in social worker staff. Due to retirements and staff taking up posts in other other State Boadies there has been a continued reduction in the social work complement together with a difficulty in recruiting new social workers, this will impact on service delivery.	Being creative for options in retention of key staff.
3	Consequences of not fulfilling strategic objectives. There is a risk of a failing to meet statutory obligations, which may result in legal challenges and the ancillary reputational damage and increase in legal spend.	Regular monitoring of objectives set and targets to be achieved.
4	Transfer of Adoption Records pursuant to the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill. Records will need to be scanned and safely and appropriately archived in a Place of Deposit, systems may not be in place to achieve this.	Planning and close collaboration with Tusla and OPW to achieve a safe transfer of records and identify an appropriate Place of Deposit.
5	Change of Board and loss of existing expertise.	Maintain schedule of competency and skills requirements and provide to Department. Appropriate induction programme for new Board members.
6	Loss of key personnel and knowledge base. As staff retirement and take up posts in other State Bodies this will result in a loss knowledge and expertise thereby impacting on service delivery.	Knowledge spread across staff through training programmes.

7 Funding risks in relation to Accredited Agencies	Contingency plan in place if the one agency accredited to provide intercountry mediation services closes. Provide informed advice to the Department to assist in their current review of the role of accredited agency.
8 Legal challenges. Legal actions that arise may cause an increase in legal spend, impact on current processes and procedures and cause possible reputational damage.	Continue to meet all statutory obligations and the Board continue to review case work.

Figure 2.0 – Risks and Risk Mitigating Actions

9 Appendix A - Organisation Structure

