



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN  
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

*Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann*  
Adoption Authority of Ireland

*Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2019*  
*Annual Report 2019*

*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.*

Blank reverse of cover

Blank

Report of  
Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann  
Adoption Authority of Ireland  
for 2019

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

## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	7
Overview .....	9
Statement of Mission, Vision and Values .....	9
Mission Statement .....	9
Vision Statement.....	9
Principles and Values .....	9
Child-Centeredness:.....	10
Quality Services:.....	10
Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency:.....	10
Respect:.....	10
Organisation & Management Structure .....	11
Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team 2019.....	11
Board of the Adoption Authority .....	12
Membership of the Board 2019.....	12
Committees of the Board.....	12
Governance.....	13
Board Responsibilities.....	13
Events and Travel 2019 .....	14
Meetings of the Board of the Authority .....	15
Meetings of Committees of the Board .....	17
Board Stipend.....	17
Roles and responsibilities .....	18
Chairperson.....	18
Chief Executive Officer.....	18
Corporate Governance .....	20
General.....	20
Financial Control .....	20
Internal financial control.....	20
Budget management .....	20
Risk and Audit Committee .....	21
Internal Audit Function .....	22
Risk management.....	22
Procurement .....	23
Annual Report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 .....	23
The Authority's 2019-2021 Corporate Plan and 2019 Business Plan .....	25
Progress Report 2019.....	26
Domestic Adoption .....	31
Activity Analysis .....	31
Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability .....	31
Adoption Orders .....	31
Applications to the High Court.....	31
Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 .....	32

Information and Tracing .....	34
Activity Analysis .....	34
Requests for the release of Birth Certificates.....	34
National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR).....	34
Preparation for Information and Tracing Legislation .....	36
Intercountry Adoption .....	38
Activity Analysis .....	38
Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability .....	38
Register of Intercountry Adoptions .....	38
Matching of Children .....	38
Country Specific Issues.....	38
Register of gender recognition of Intercountry Adoptions .....	40
ICAN November .....	40
Social Work Team .....	41
Staffing .....	41
Overview of Social Work Role.....	41
Social Work Phone Service.....	41
Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) .....	41
Social Work and Domestic Adoption .....	42
Social Work and Intercountry Adoption .....	42
Social Work and Information/Search and Reunion .....	43
Social Work Fora .....	43
Social Work and Accreditation and Inspection.....	44
Children First Act, 2015 and the Authority's role as a Relevant Organisation .....	44
Research.....	45
Strategy .....	45
Outputs .....	45
Research Supports .....	46
Communications/Website .....	46
The Library .....	46
Journal Access .....	47
Research Participant Database .....	47
Internship Programme.....	47
Corporate Services and Accreditation .....	48
Website and Information Technology .....	48
Document Management at the Adoption Authority of Ireland .....	48
Parliamentary Questions (PQs).....	48
Freedom of Information Requests (FOI).....	48
Press/Media .....	49
Energy Management.....	49
Overview of Energy Usage in 2019 .....	49
Accreditation.....	49
Activity Analysis .....	49
Accreditation Procedures .....	50
Cessation of Accredited Bodies .....	51
Data Protection.....	52
Data Protection Requests .....	53

Human Resources .....	54
Recruitment .....	54
Pension/Retirements .....	54
Training .....	54
Employee Assistance Service .....	55
Statistics .....	56
Other Information.....	64
Appendix A.....	65

## Table of Figures and Tables

<b>Figure 1</b> Number of NACPR Applications 2005-2019 .....	35
<b>Figure 2</b> Number of NACPR Matches 2005-2019 .....	36

<b>Table 1</b> Adoptee/Relative Breakdown.....	34
<b>Table 2</b> Breakdown of NACPR Application by Year 2017-2019 .....	35
<b>Table 3</b> Statistics Table for NACPR Matches 2017–2019 .....	36
<b>Table 4</b> Accredited bodies 2019 .....	50
<b>Table 5</b> Requests for Personal Data 2013-2019 .....	53
<b>Table 6</b> Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953-2019.....	56
<b>Table 7</b> Domestic Adoptions by type 2015-2019 .....	58
<b>Table 8</b> Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2015-2019 .....	58
<b>Table 9</b> High Court Orders Granted Pursuant to Domestic Adoption Applications 2015-2019 .....	58
<b>Table 10</b> 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, 2010-2019 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). .....	59
<b>Table 11</b> Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2019 only. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption) .....	60
<b>Table 12</b> Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2019, 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).....	61
<b>Table 13</b> Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2019*, 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).....	62
<b>Table 14</b> Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2019 (All Sections) .....	63

## Foreword

In 2019, the Authority continued to prepare for the implementation of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill, 2016. The Authority developed further its measures in anticipation of the transfer of all adoption and related records into its custody to be appropriately safeguarded.

Dr Judy Lovett joined the Authority as Research Officer in August 2019 and, together with the Research Advisory Committee and Board, agreed an ambitious 3-year research strategy for the AAI.

The Social Work team hosted a professional development forum at the AAI in November, at which the keynote speaker, the Director of the National Immunisation Office, spoke about intercountry adoption and vaccines.

The Corporate Services unit facilitated the launch of the revamped AAI website. Corporate Services also managed the reconfiguration of the electronic document management system, which is a critical building block for the Authority's preparation for the Information and Tracing legislation.

The Authority's commitment to promoting effective communication was rewarded with a Champions of Plain English award from the National Adult Literacy Agency.

The operations of Cúnamh Adoption Agency (formerly the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland, established in 1913) ceased in December, and all Cúnamh's 13,000 adoption files and records were subsequently transferred to the Adoption Authority.

A total of 79 domestic adoption orders were granted in 2019, and 48 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to applicants seeking to adopt abroad. The Authority received 560 applications to the voluntary National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) during the year. In 115 cases, a potential match was identified between the new applicants and family members who had previously joined the Register.

The [statistics section](#) displays figures for operational matters in 2019 and previous years for all the units. The data indicates how numbers of domestic adoption orders, intercountry adoptions, requests for birth certificate releases, applications to the NACPR and matches between adopted persons and birth relatives in 2019 compare with other years, and how many Parliamentary Questions and Data Protection requests the Authority processed.

In May, CEO Patricia Carey took part in the International Seminar on the Search for Origins in Montreal, Canada. In October, Chairman Dr Geoffrey Shannon, leading a delegation to Vietnam, delivered the opening presentation at a training workshop in Ho Chi Minh City for local staff involved in the processing of intercountry adoptions.

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 (DCYA).

---

Dr Geoffrey Shannon  
Chairman

---

Ms Patricia Carey  
CEO



## Overview

The Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI), established on 1 November 2010 under the Adoption Act 2010, is an independent quasi-judicial body under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The Authority is also, in line with The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the central authority for intercountry adoption in Ireland. The purpose of the Adoption Act 2010 is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption.

Legal adoption was first introduced in Ireland under the 1952 Adoption Act. The 1952 Act was enacted on 1 January 1953 and the Adoption Board was established under this Act. The Adoption Board had the sole right to grant or refuse to grant Adoption Orders. This right is now vested in the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the current 2010 legislation.

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.

## Statement of Mission, Vision and Values

### 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."

### 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."

### 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***

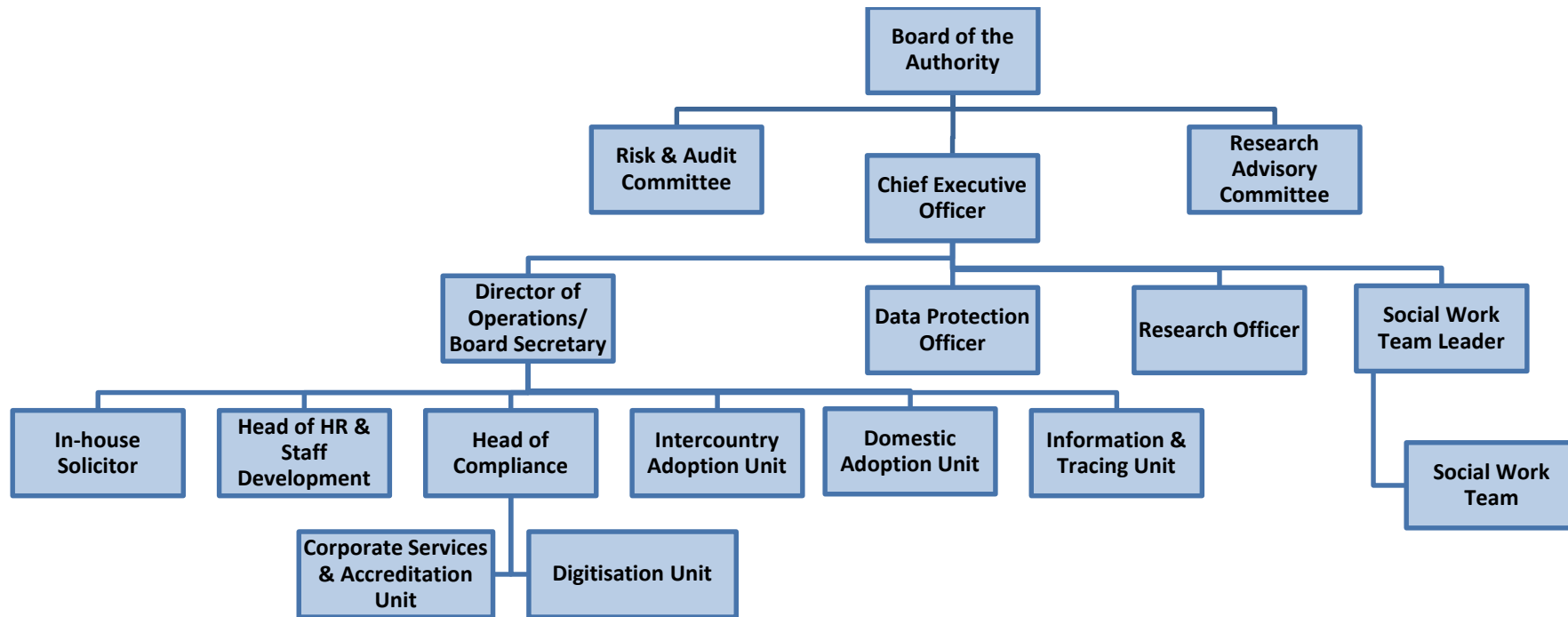
- We are guided by honesty, propriety, accountability and ethical adoption practice in all of our actions and decisions.
- We operate in a manner which is open to scrutiny and which will be characterised by impartiality and equity.
- We are committed to delivering our services in the most efficient and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

This Annual Report is a summary of the main pieces of work undertaken by the Adoption Authority of Ireland in 2019. You can read and download information about our accounts and publications on [www.aai.ie](http://www.aai.ie).

## Organisation & Management Structure



### Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team 2019

Chief Executive Officer

Patricia Carey

Director of Operations/Board Secretary

Tara Downes

Head of Human Resources and Staff Development

Fiona Monaghan (Head of Compliance and Resources until October 2019)

Head of Compliance

Kate O'Hara (Appointed October 2019)

## Board of the Adoption Authority

### Membership of the Board 2019

Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairperson  
Ms Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chairperson  
Professor Helen Buckley  
Mr Paul Harrison  
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.)  
Ms Anne O'Flaherty  
Dr Margo Anglim

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board shall consist of seven members, being the chairperson, the deputy chairperson and five 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 two consecutive terms. The current Board was established on 1 November 2015.

The attendance of the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson and two 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

#### 1. Risk and Audit Committee

Ms Claire Byrne (Chair)  
Ms Tara McDermott  
Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairman of the Authority  
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.), Member of the Authority

#### 2. Research Advisory Committee

Dr Helen Buckley (Chair)  
Dr Geoffrey Shannon  
Professor Sheila Greene (TCD)  
Professor Gordon Harold (University of Sussex)  
Ms Patricia Carey (CEO)  
Dr Judy Lovett (Secretary)  
Ms Claire McGettrick (UCD) (Appointed November 2019)  
Ms Anne O'Flaherty (Board member)  
Ms Orlaith Traynor (Board member)

Ms Nicole Scannell (Social Work Team Leader) (Appointed November 2019)  
Mr Mark Kirwan (Manager Intercountry Unit) (Appointed November 2019)  
Mr Des Tracey (Manager Domestic Unit) (Appointed November 2019)  
Ms Joan Groves (Manager Tracing Unit) (Appointed November 2019)

## **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. The Board conducted an internal assessment of its effectiveness in 2019.

## **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.

## **Events and Travel 2019**

### *The Hague – May 2019*

Director of Operations Tara Downes took part in the Working Group on Preventing/Addressing Illicit Practices in Intercountry Adoption at The Hague Permanent Bureau, Netherlands. Attendees discussed models that the Central Authorities of the states of origin and receiving states may use to stop illicit practices occurring.

### *Montreal – May 2019*

CEO Patricia Carey was invited to participate in the International Seminar on the Search for Origins in Montreal, Canada. Patricia engaged in workshops on research into family origins and delivered a presentation about the impact of an irregular adoption file for an adopted person researching his or her family origins.

### *Arc Adoption USA – August 2019*

In August, founder of the New Jersey agency Adoption ARC, travelled to Ireland to attend the Adoption ARC/Helping Hands 25th Anniversary celebration in Cork. On route she met executive members at AAI along with senior diplomat, Consular Chief at the US Embassy Ireland, and reviewed US/Ireland adoption agency work.

### *Philippines – September 2019*

CEO Patricia Carey travelled to the 15th Philippine Global Consultation on Child Welfare Services in Manila, Philippines. Ahead of the conference, together with CEO of Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency (HHAMA), Patricia met Executive Director of the Philippines Central Authority (the Intercountry Adoption Board – ICAB) and other members of the ICAB Board and executive. AAI and HHAMA are planning to sign off on accreditation that will enable HHAMA to work with applicants

for the Philippines, and to this end an inspection visit by the Board of ICAB to HHAMA in Cork was agreed for 2020.

#### *USA – October 2019*

In October, Adoption Authority Chairman Dr Geoffrey Shannon and Director of Operations Tara Downes visited the USA to conduct the regular review of the USA-Ireland intercountry adoption programme with senior officials in the US State Department in Washington DC. They also met the Ambassador Dan Mulhall and staff at the Embassy of Ireland in Washington, and discussed child protection with representatives from UNICEF in New York.

#### *Vietnam – October 2019*

The Central Authority in Vietnam, the Department of Adoption/Ministry of Justice (DOA/MOJ) invited a delegation from Ireland to participate in a training workshop in October for local staff involved in the processing of intercountry adoptions. Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairman; Orlaith Traynor, Vice Chair; and CEO Patricia Carey held meetings with representatives from the Embassy of Ireland in Hanoi, officials from the DOA/MOJ, and the Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF. In Ho Chi Minh City, accompanied by HHAMA CEO, the AAI delegates attended the training workshop, where the Chairman delivered the opening speech. The delegates also visited a child nurturing centre in the city.

#### *ICAN – November 2019*

In November, the AAI and CEO Patricia Carey hosted the annual network meeting for European and US Central Authorities in Dublin. Senior executives from the US, Spain, Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway exchanged information on country programmes, tracing origins, illicit practices and data protection, among other topics.

#### *The Hague – November 2019*

The AAI Chair and CEO travelled to The Hague, Netherlands, to discuss and clarify elements of The Hague Convention standards and safeguards with the Principal Legal Officer of The Hague Permanent Bureau.

### **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 18 meetings during 2019, including one meeting outside of Dublin which was held in Limerick in November.

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 in [Appendix A](#).

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.

The Board passed a resolution to have a minimum of one meeting each year for Governance matters only. Two Governance meetings were held, on 24 September and 26 November 2019.

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 Limerick, as well as conducting the normal business of the Board and granting adoption orders, the Board took the opportunity to meet with 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 2019. On 24 September (Governance Day) the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive and again on 26 November (Governance) the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive. 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 in 2020.

### ***Meetings of Committees of the Board***

#### **1. Risk and Audit Committee**

The Committee meets at least four times a year, with authority to convene additional meetings as circumstances require. The attendance of two non-executive committee members shall constitute a quorum. In 2019 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 Crowleys DFK.

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 2019 Annual Report of the Risk and Audit Committee was formally presented to the Board at their meeting on 7 April 2020. Further details of the work of the Risk and Audit Committee are detailed [here](#).

#### **2. Research Committee**

The Research Committee met on one occasion in 2019.

The frequency of meetings of the Board and its committees and the attendance of each Board member at Board meetings is reported in [Appendix A](#) in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

### **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 the DCYA;
- 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 DCYA;
- 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 DCYA. In 2019, the financial allocation of the Adoption authority was €4.462 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 DCYA.

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 2019 accounts commenced in May 2019. Once approved by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General the 2019 Statements will be published on the Authority's website.

Crowleys DFK Chartered Accountants provided accountancy services to the Authority during 2019.

### *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 with support from the Authority's finance consultants Crowleys DFK. Budgets are monitored closely with monthly reports furnished to the DCYA 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 attend all meetings of the committee. The Committee sat four times during 2019 and met with representatives from the Comptroller and Auditor General and internal auditors. In their Annual Report 2019 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 Committee's agenda in 2019 included

- Review draft Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2018;

- Discussion and approval of 2019 Internal Audit Plan;
- Draft Governance Statement and Board Members' Report;
- Draft Statement of Internal Control 2018;
- C&AG Audit on 2017 and 2018 Financial Statements;
- 2019 Master Budget;
- IA Tender and Appointment of Internal Auditors;
- Review of the effectiveness of the system of internal financial controls;
- Checklist of Internal Controls;
- Results of the self-assessment review of effectiveness;
- Review year to date budget vs actual variance analysis;
- Discussion and approval of Risk Management Policy and Risk Register;
- Draft RAC Annual Report to the Board.

## **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 a review of internal controls in 2019. The audits resulted in 'satisfactory' ratings. Recommendations made were accepted. The AAI procured for Internal Audit services in 2019 through the Office of Government Procurement using their established framework for accountancy and auditing services.

## **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. The Risk 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 in 2019.

## **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. In 2019, a number of contracts were successfully procured in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement in line with the Authority's 2019 Procurement Plan.

## **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 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019.



# The Authority's 2019–2021 Corporate Plan and 2019 Business Plan

## Overview

The Authority is required under section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010, to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan. The Adoption Authority's Corporate Plan 2019–2021 was laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas on 3 April 2019. When devising the 2019–2021 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 4 principles identified were

- *Child-Centeredness*
- *Quality Services*
- *Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency*
- *Respect*

## Goals

A number of strategic goals and as well as specific objectives were identified and are incorporated into the Authority's Annual Business Plans. These goals were identified as being the primary drivers of the Authority for the 3-year duration of this Corporate 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 were submitted to the DCYA on a quarterly basis in 2019 in compliance with the AAI's Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department.

## Progress Report 2019

This section of the Annual Report gives details of the progress to the end of 2019 on the 3-year Corporate 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.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
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.	All applications that proceed to adoption order have a report of child consultation.	In 2019 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.
1.2) The Authority will facilitate all requests from a child to be heard by the Board during the adoption process.	All requests acknowledged promptly and notified to Board at next scheduled meeting. All requests for a hearing before the Board are facilitated.	Every Adoption Order before the Board is reviewed to ensure the views of the child have been heard.  At all Board meetings with children held during 2019 the voice of the child was heard.
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.	All relevant information is provided to children and families directly as part of their adoption application.	In 2019, the AAI launched their new website with a re-vamped young person's section. This section includes leaflets and videos, as well as clear FAO section <a href="https://aai.gov.ie/en/information-for-young-people.html">https://aai.gov.ie/en/information-for-young-people.html</a>
1.4) Liaise with other relevant public bodies in ensuring consistency in practice when hearing the voice of the child.	Consistent high standards are maintained in hearing the voice of the child	During 2019, there was ongoing interaction with the DCYA, Tusla and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the voice of the child was considered in all applications.
1.5) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister in ensuring the voice of the child is given sufficient consideration in all adoption proceedings.	Full compliance with Section 19 of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017.	

**Goal 2** - To ensure all relevant parties to the adoption process are heard and their respective rights are balanced appropriately.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
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.	All parties are aware of their right to be heard before the Board.	Review of Domestic Adoption Guidelines was progressed substantially in 2019 and will be introduced in 2020.

2.2) Facilitate requests to be heard from any of the above relevant parties.	All requests for a hearing before the Board are facilitated and scheduled.	During 2019, hearings were scheduled on a monthly basis to facilitate all requests.
2.3) The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of all relevant parties.	All relevant parties views are considered and recorded.	Internally during 2019 the Authority's Operations Manual was updated as required.
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.	Receive feedback from relevant parties as to whether they felt they were adequately informed to enable them to make decisions.	On an ongoing basis, each adoption application is reviewed by the Board to ensure all decisions are free and informed. This continued during 2019.

**Goal 3** - To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
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"> <li>• Accuracy of documentation and reports received against standards</li> <li>• Accuracy, comprehensiveness and timeliness of submissions to Court.</li> <li>• Reduced Delays.</li> </ul>	In 2019, services were reviewed on a biannual basis both internally and externally. In Q2 the Board completed an internal review of the quality and adequacy of services.
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"> <li>• Adherence to planned schedule of meetings/consultations.</li> <li>• Timely response to unscheduled meeting requests.</li> </ul>	During 2019, regular meetings with accredited bodies, support and advocacy groups as well as other service providers and state bodies were convened.
3.3) Maintain active oversight of all accredited agencies, including reaccreditation and registration against approved regulations.	Statutory Reports filed on time.	During 2019, all statutory reports were filled on time.

**Goal 4** - To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
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;	<p>A) Turnaround time of 6 weeks.</p> <p>B) Before age 18.</p>	During 2019, all applications were reviewed by the Executive as soon as all documentation was complete and referred to the Board for a decision. During 2019, all declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt were granted within 6 weeks. All adoption

C) The recognition of intercountry adoption orders; D) Article 17 referrals.	C) Two weeks for routine and 8 weeks for non-routine. D) One week.	orders were made before a child turned 18. All routine RICAs processed within 2 weeks. All Article 17 referrals made within one week.
4.2) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister on all adoption related matters.	Full and constructive engagement with Department and Minister on all relevant matters.	In 2019, 6 meetings were held with the Adoption Policy Unit.
4.3) Maintain all statutory and non-statutory Registers in line with agreed requirements.	Registers are up-to-date and accurate.	All up to date and complete in 2019.
4.4) Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.	Routine Applications 1–2 weeks.	During 2019, requests were reviewed by the Board on a monthly basis.  All routine applications were decided within 1–2 weeks.
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.		In 2019, there was quarterly engagement with Central Authorities. There was a budget allocation of €62,000 for international travel and subsistence and hosting of delegates visiting Ireland where required. In 2019, visits were made to The Hague, Philippines, Vietnam and the USA.

**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.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
5.1) Engage proactively and communicate effectively with all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular engagements with stakeholders.</li> <li>Timely response to stakeholder issues.</li> <li>Continuing Intelligence gathering and reporting.</li> </ul>	<p>During 2019, continued progress was made with all stakeholders.</p> <p>All meeting requests were relied to promptly.</p>
5.2) Website to be the prime source of information for all stakeholders and the public at large.	Website redesign	In 2019, the AAI website was redesigned and launched. Post Adoption Services Directory published and updated as required.
5.3) Undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity.	Recruit in-house researcher.	In 2019, the researcher recruitment was completed and the successful candidate took up post in August 2019. Development of the Authority's research strategy commenced.
5.4) Support Government Departments in the development of adoption related policy and legislation.	Timely response to all requests.	All requests for information were dealt with promptly in 2019.
5.5) Promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues.	Hold a number of briefings, seminars and forums.	In 2019, one forum was organised; this was held on 19 November.

**Goal 6** - To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
6.1) To plan and implement the changes required in organisation (including transfer of functions) and operational procedures in line with the Information and Tracing Bill 2016	Effective implementation of project plan.	Implementation Plan in place for commencement of legislation. Budget set aside for implementation of plans subject to progress of legislation. At the end of 2019, the Authority were awaiting commencement of legislation.
6.2) Be prepared to adapt to a) donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) and Surrogacy legislation b) any other relevant legislation	Effective roll-out of implementation plan.	Awaiting the commencement of parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationship Act 2015. Implementation plan in place for commencement of legislation.

**Goal 7** - To be proactive and responsive to change and maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2019
7.1) Ensure full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Ensuring full compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Internal Audit plan includes annual compliance checks against the Code. In respect of financial accountability, variance analysis reports are provided to DCYA monthly. The AAI's 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 was formally presented to the Board. The Board and the Risk and Audit Committee both conducted self-assessment reviews. An external evaluation will be completed in 2020.
7.2) Collaborate with OPW in obtaining fit-for-purpose accommodation for the Adoption Authority.	Identification of a fit for purpose premises.	Throughout 2019, the Authority collaborated extensively with the OPW on securing new office accommodation. This will continue in 2020.
7.3) Maintain robust Risk Management Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold minimum of four RAC meetings each year.</li> <li>• No open recommendations from Internal Audit Reports.</li> </ul>	In December 2019, a full review of the corporate risk register and risk management policy was completed.
7.4) Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity and compliance with GDPR.	Strict compliance with all Data protection policies.	During 2019 The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to develop policies, systems and procedures, placing considerable emphasis on staff awareness and training, aimed at

		ensuring our compliance with the requirements of data protection legislation.
7.5) Authority to maintain a learning environment where competencies and training requirements are fully met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competency and skill gaps are met.</li> <li>• Adherence to training policy.</li> </ul>	During 2019, staff attended a number of training courses, workshops and networking events. Several general training course have been conducted and attended by staff – Fire Safety, First Aid and Manual Handling. Since October 2019 the Authority have a dedicated HR and Staff Development resource.
7.6) Maintain Board and Executive Succession Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No gaps between staff leaving and new appointments.</li> <li>• Ensure there are no competency gaps.</li> </ul>	In 2019, an external recruitment agency was engaged to assist with recruitment competitions. All vacancies in the Executive were filled in a timely manner with one exception. The AAI advertised three times but had no applications from suitable candidates. Performance review and goal setting continued for all staff during 2019.
7.7) Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with DPER guidelines.</li> <li>• Adherence to procurement and financial policies.</li> <li>• Operating within budget</li> </ul>	In 2019 the Authority’s financial procedures manual was reviewed and updated. The Authority now had a dedicated resource with responsibility for Finance and Audit.
7.8) Full implementation of Corporate Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Plan implemented in full, in line with agreed objectives.</li> <li>• Annual Business Plan fully aligned to Corporate Plan.</li> </ul>	All units complete quarterly task planner review and updates were submitted to the Department.

## 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. Overall, 104 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted in 2019, an increase of 25 over 2018 figures, with a similar pattern showing for extensions to Declarations, which increased to 14 in 2019 from the previous year's figure of 4. In most cases Declarations were granted within 3–4 weeks of receipt of the application.

Standards and guidelines produced by the Authority 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, the Adoption Amendment Act 2017, statutory regulations; Hague Convention standards in adoption; and international research such as that of the International Social Services.

#### *Adoption Orders*

Altogether, 79 Adoption orders were granted in 2019. The majority (51) were made in stepfamily adoptions. The number of adoption orders made in respect of children who had been in long-term foster care in 2019 was 21. The balance (7) was made up of a combination of adoptions of infants placed for adoption in Ireland (6), and 1 case where the child was in the care of extended family members.

Adoption Orders cannot be granted once a child turns 18 years of age and is legally considered an adult. Of the 79 Adoption orders granted in 2019, in 35 cases the child was 17 years of age; in 24 cases they were aged between 12 and 16 years, in 13 cases they were aged between 7 and 11 years, in 4 cases they were aged between 2 and 6 years, and in 3 cases the child was 1 year old.

#### *Applications to the High Court*

Under the Adoption Act 2010, the Authority is obliged to obtain a High Court order before certain adoptions can proceed.

The Authority 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 the 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 2019, 8 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. All 8 applications were granted.

Of these applications, 1 order was made by the High Court in circumstances where it was deemed inappropriate to notify and consult with the birth father. The remaining 7 orders were made in circumstances where the identity of the birth father was unknown.

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 under Section 54 in the following instances:

- Where parental consents are not forthcoming,
- Where there is an issue with regard to the circumstances of 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 2019, 5 applications were made to the High Court under Sections 54 of the Act. These 5 applications were granted in 2019. Each of these cases was taken as the birth mothers' consents had not been obtained.

### ***Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017***

The Adoption (Amendment) Bill was passed into law on 19 July 2017, and came into force as the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 on 19 October 2017. The amendment has brought about a number of key changes to domestic adoptions, including

- It recognised 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 allowed for couples living together in a civil partnership or co-habiting to adopt.
- It established separate provisions for step parent adoptions, allowing for a step parent to adopt their partner's child without requiring that partner (who is already the parent of the child) to also apply to adopt the child.
- It defined the role of the 'relevant non-guardian' in adoption cases, and extends to them the rights of birth fathers in such cases.
- It expanded on the criteria for a case before the High Court under Section 54.



As the amendment only came into force in October 2017, it did not have a substantive effect on the adoption orders granted in 2017. However, in 2019, all of the step parent adoption orders granted (50) were made in accordance with the amendment.

This also accounts for the noticeable drop in the numbers of step parent adoptions finalised in 2017 and 2018, since existing applicants wishing to proceed under these provisions needed to be reassessed in order to comply with its requirements, resulting in an increase in the number of step-parent adoptions completed in 2019 to 50.

The new provisions essentially meant that the birth parent in these 50 applications did not have to adopt their birth child with their partner, and was simply able to retain parental rights in tandem with the adopter.

Please see [statistics](#) section for further information.

## Information and Tracing

### Activity Analysis

#### *Requests for the release of Birth Certificates*

In 2019, the Authority received 71 requests from adopted persons for the release of their birth certificate and these are being actively considered.

During the year, 37 birth certificates were released (43 in 2018) and 9 requests were refused (6 in 2018). Of the 37 birth certificates released some were in respect of requests made prior to 2019; 6 of the requests refused were in respect of requests received before 2019.

#### *National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)*

The Adoption Authority has operated and maintained the NACPR, which is voluntary register, since 2005. The NACPR remains a critical tool in enabling agreed contact between adopted persons and birth relatives. At the end of 2019, there were approximately 14,600 entries on the NACPR with over 1,200 matches. Half of NACPR applications received are submitted by email, an increase from approximately one third of applications in the past number of years.

The number of adoptees registered on the NACPR since 2005 is approximately 10,100 (69%) and the number of relatives is approximately 4,500 (31%). This is reflective of the trend globally with a breakdown of 70% adoptees and 30% relatives joining an adoption contact register (see Table 1).

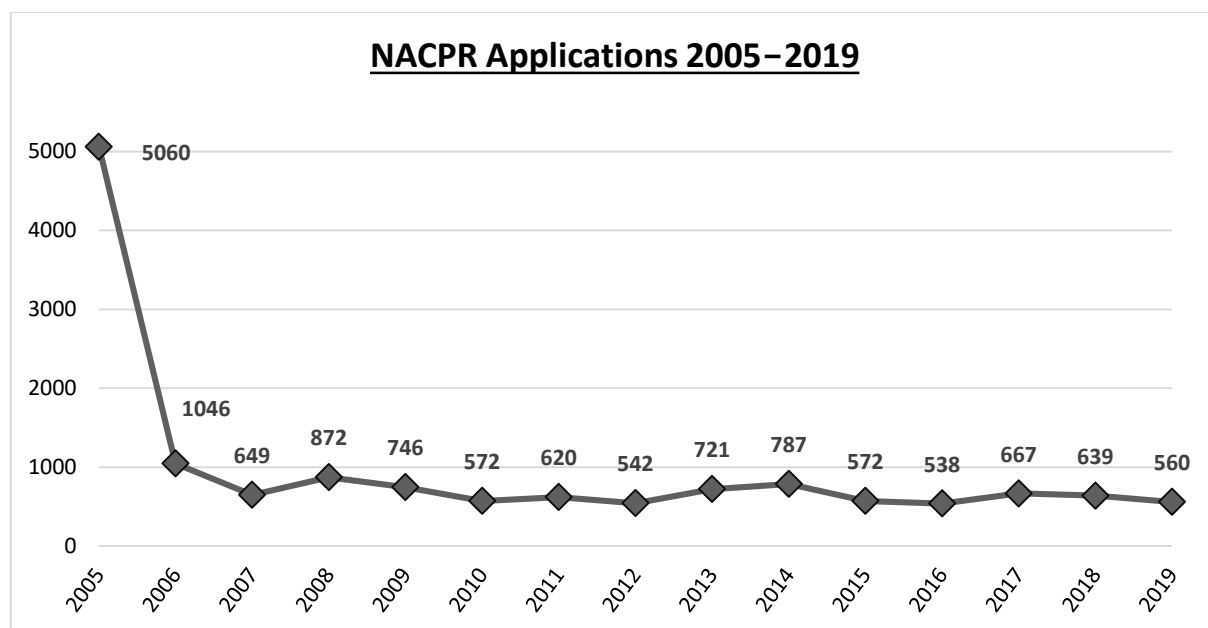
**Table 1** Adoptee/Relative Breakdown

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Adoptees	75%	68%	72%	71%
Relatives	25%	32%	28%	29%

In 2019, there were 560 applications to the National Adoption Contact Preference Register compared to 639 applications received in 2018. See Figure 1 and Table 2 below for further details of NACPR Applications 2005–2019.

In 115 cases, a potential match was identified between the new applicants and family members who had previously joined the Register. In 2018, this figure was 105. In total, there have been over 1,200 potential matches at the end of 2019 (see Figure 2 and Table 3 below for further information).

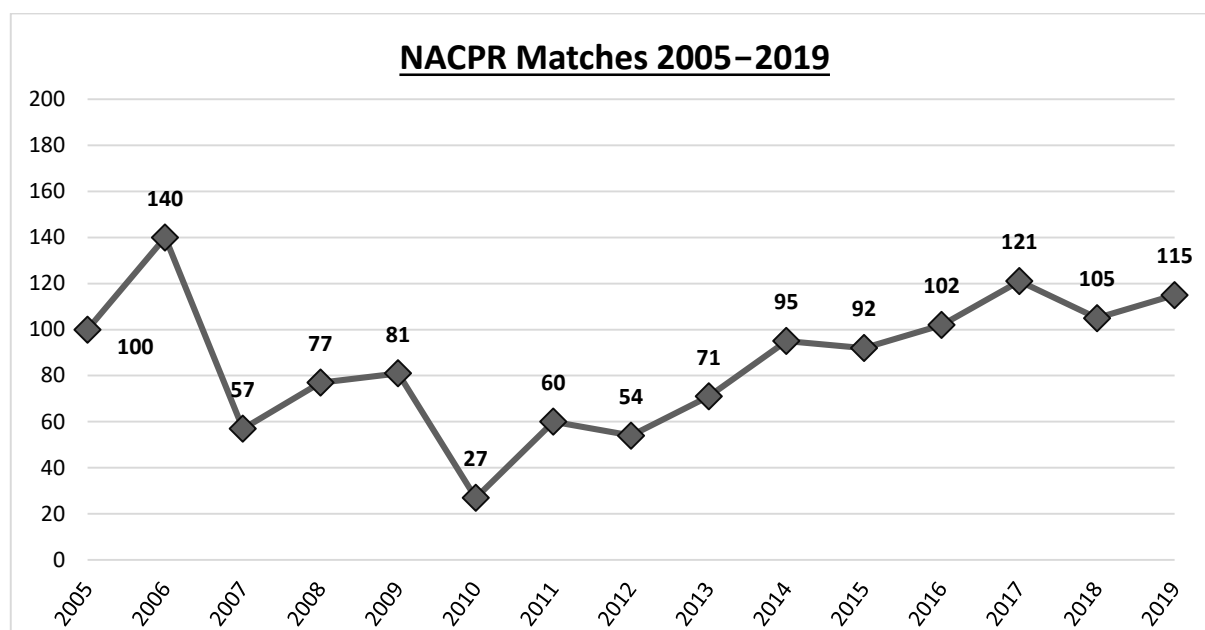
**Figure 1** Number of NACPR Applications 2005–2019



**Table 2** Breakdown of NACPR Application by Year 2017–2019

	2017	2018	2019
Adoptee	455	462	398
Aunt	14	10	13
Birth Father	17	10	14
Birth Mother	90	77	54
Cousin	12	16	8
Grandfather	1	1	0
Grandmother	3	2	0
Niece/Nephew	3	2	4
Sibling	68	55	61
Uncle	3	2	8
Unknown	1	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>560</b>

**Figure 2** Number of NACPR Matches 2005–2019



**Table 3** Statistics Table for NACPR Matches 2017–2019

Matches Recorded on NACPR	2017	2018	2019
Birth Mother	46	38	32
Birth Father	5	1	6
Cousin	2	4	0
Cousin (Both Adopted)	0	3	1
Grandparent	1	2	4
Sibling	20	8	14
Sibling (Both Adopted)	37	40	49
Uncle	0	1	2
Aunt	10	6	7
Other	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>115</b>

**Preparation for Information and Tracing Legislation**

Discussions in relation to the progressing of the Adoption (Information & Tracing) Bill, 2016 are continuing. While it has not proved possible to reach consensus on the issue of release of birth information at this time, it is intended to proceed with the option of safeguarding of records, with all adoption and related records to be transferred to the Adoption Authority to be appropriately safeguarded. To compliment this, the option of placing the current NACPR on a statutory footing is also being considered.

Preparation and planning for the implementation of the impending information and tracing legislation continues to involve the Adoption Authority working closely and meeting regularly with the DCYA, Tusla, Child and Family Agency and accredited agencies.

## Intercountry Adoption

### Activity Analysis

#### *Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability*

The Authority granted 48 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2019 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad and extended 27 existing Declarations by 1 year.

#### *Register of Intercountry Adoptions*

A total of 386 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of all relevant sections of the Adoption Act 2010. Of these, 33 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 adoptive parents. In 2019, 20 children were referred into Ireland from other countries. All referrals of children for adoption are reviewed by the Authority's multi-disciplinary team which comprises the Principal Social Worker, the Medical Advisor and the Manager of the Intercountry Adoption Unit.

#### *Country Specific Issues*

**Bulgaria:** In 2019, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Bulgaria; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 1 Adoption completed in Bulgaria was entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in 2019. There were 3 'live' applications in Bulgaria at the end of the year.

**China:** In 2019, 1 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in China; 3 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 3 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. There was 1 'live' application in China at the end of the year.

**Haiti:** In 2019, 5 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Haiti; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 1 Adoption completed in Haiti was entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in 2019. There were 3 'live' applications in Haiti at the end of the year.

Towards the end of 2019, significant civil unrest in Haiti necessitated the temporary suspension of Haiti programme. AAI is continuing to closely monitor the situation there and is hopeful that the programme can resume in 2020.

**India:** In 2019, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in India. No adoptions were effected in India by Irish residents in 2019. There were 3 'live' applications in India at the end of the year.

**Philippines:** Under current arrangements, Filipino children may be placed with prospective adoptive parents under Filipino guardianship provisions for the purposes of them being adopted subsequently in Ireland. In 2019, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the Philippines; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention).

HHAMA has been approved by the AAI to mediate adoptions from the Philippines and expects to receive accreditation from the Filipino Government shortly. The CEOs of the AAI and HHAMA travelled to the Philippines this the year to review the current programme and to facility the accreditation.

**Poland:** In 2019, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Poland; no Agreements to Place were 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. Adoptions from Poland are generally by Polish nationals living in Ireland. There was 1 'live' application in Poland at the end of the year.

**Thailand:** HHAMA was accredited by the AAI and the Thai Central Authority to mediate adoptions from Thailand, and assumed control of the programme in 2019. 13 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Thailand in 2019; 4 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. There were 14 'live' applications in Thailand at the end of the year.

**United States of America:** In 2019, 5 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the USA; 3 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 10 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. There were 14 'live' applications in the USA at the end of the year.

Representatives of **Adoption ARC** (an accredited agency based in the USA) visited the AAI and HHAMA in August 2019, and in October the Chairman of the Board of the AAI and the Director of Operations visited the USA to review the programme with the US State Department.

**Vietnam:** In 2019, 20 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Vietnam; 9 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 18 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. There were 27 'live' applications in Vietnam at the end of the year.

### ***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 Authority for an entry in the Register of Gender Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions.

Applications should be made in writing to the Authority and should be accompanied by:

- 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).

One entry was made in the Register in 2019.

### **ICAN November**

In November, the AAI and CEO Patricia Carey hosted the annual network meeting for European and US Central Authorities in Dublin. Senior executives from the US, Spain, Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway exchanged information on country programmes, tracing origins, illicit practices and data protection, among other topics.



## Social Work Team

### Staffing

February 2019 saw the departure of the Authority's Principal Social Worker. The year saw some changes on the team with the creation of a new post of Social Work Team Leader. In total, there are a team of 5 social workers. Supervision is provided by the Team Leader and an external supervisor. Each member of the Social Work team is individually registered with CORU.

### Overview of Social Work Role

All adoption services are regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. As part of that regulation, the social work team reviews and monitors social work practice at all stages of the lifelong adoption process, including

- Provide mediation and counselling in search and reunion;
- Crisis pregnancy support through to decisions about adoption;
- Review of assessment of prospective adoptive parents;
- Deal with requests for the release of an original birth certificate;
- Deal with requests for the release of non-identifying information.
- Review of matching children with suitable prospective adoptive parents;
- Advice on talking with children about adoption;
- Providing post adoption support;
- Organise fora for adoption social workers and other professionals;
- Collaborate on the research sub-committee;
- Accreditation and inspection of adoption services; and
- Act as Children First Child Protection Officer.

### Social Work Phone Service

The social work team manage a rota for the social work phone line and email address.

Callers and emailers sought information on their adoption history and/or searching for their relatives. Other callers requested information on adopting a child. A number of calls were also received from pregnant women thinking of adoption.

### Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)

Adoption Authority social workers, administration staff and the Adoption Authority Medical Advisor work together to review and monitor each application for adoption.

Reviews cover all aspects of adoption practice, including

- Counselling and consultation with birth parents;

- Consent to adoption;
- Assessment for a Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability to adopt;
- Selection and matching process leading to the placement of a child with a specific family for adoption;
- Post placement reports;
- Applications for adoption orders;
- Requests for the release of an original birth certificate;
- Requests for the release of identifying information.

## **Social Work and Domestic Adoption**

Domestic adoption refers to the situation where a child who is resident in Ireland is adopted by a couple also resident in Ireland. There are four different types of domestic adoption – step family, extended family/relative adoption, domestic infant adoption, long-term foster care to adoption.

Social workers review all domestic adoption files for eligibility and suitability under the Adoption Act 2010 and the Adoption Amendment Act of 2017.

Social workers are an integral part of the MDT in the matching of domestic infants through the national matching panel in Ireland.

Social workers review all domestic infant placements in Ireland until the adoption order is finalised.

Social workers liaise with Tusla and private agency social workers on all domestic adoption issues.

In 2019 the Team reviewed 104 domestic adoption files for a Declaration.

## **Social Work and Intercountry Adoption**

Intercountry adoption refers to the situation where a person resident in Ireland decides to adopt a child who is resident in a country other than Ireland.

Intercountry adoption was given a statutory basis in 1991 with the passing of the Adoption Act in that year and the most recent principal legislation in this area which is the Adoption Act 2010.

Social workers review all intercountry adoption files for eligibility and suitability under the Adoption Act 2010.

Social workers are an integral part in approving the matching of children during both the Proposal in Principle stage as well as the Article 17 stage.

Social workers liaise with the mediation agency in Ireland to ensure best practice is being carried out.

In 2019 the Team reviewed 48 intercountry adoption files for a Declaration.

## **Social Work and Information/Search and Reunion**

In 2019 the Team had 246 new referrals relating to information/search and reunion.

Referrals in this area were the following:

- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking information;
- Birth certificate requests;
- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking search and reunion service and
- Connections made between relatives on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register

The Adoption Authority Social Work Team provides mediation and counselling to people who have been involved in some third-party and family adoptions. The team also offers information, advice and support about adoption related issues. Queries are welcome from members of the public, as well as professionals.

## **Social Work Fora**

The social work team organises professional development fora each year. The purpose of SW fora 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.

In 2019, one forum was organised; this was held on 19 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. In 2019, The keynote speaker was the Director of the National Immunisation Office. They spoke on the topic of Intercountry Adoption and vaccines. Other speakers that day were the AAI's Medical Advisor and the Chief Executive of HHAMA. The medical advisor spoke about the health profiles of children being adopted internationally into Ireland. HHAMA's CEO spoke about country updates and handover of Thailand & Philippines programmes.

## Social Work and Accreditation and Inspection

Most national adoption services are delivered through local Tusla - Child and Family Agency offices and bodies accredited by the Adoption Authority. The Social Work team is involved in reviewing applications for accreditation of adoption agencies.

The services of Tusla are reviewed and monitored by the multi-disciplinary team on an ongoing basis through desk top reviews of all documents requiring Adoption Authority authorisation.

Services provided by accredited bodies are reviewed at six-month intervals by self-reporting. On-site inspections of the accredited bodies also take place in compliance with the Adoption Act 2010 and the Regulations.

## Children First Act, 2015 and the Authority's role as a Relevant Organisation

The Children First Act, 2015 was fully enacted in December 2017. The guidelines which accompany the Act are *The Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017*.

The Authority is a Relevant Organisation under the Act.

The Children First Act together with the Guidelines requires that each Relevant Organisation ensures that children are safe from harm while using their services. Each relevant organisation carries out a Risk Assessment to identify whether a child or young person could be harmed when using the services; and has a Child Safeguarding Statement outlining the policies and procedures that are in place to manage identified risks.

A delegated Relevant Person or designated liaison person is to be the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters of child protection. The Act and Guidelines also specifies Mandated Persons to formally report child welfare or protection concerns to Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. Tusla has an online portal for Mandated reporters: [www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-](http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-)

The nominated Relevant Person or Children First Child Protection Officer is Katie Harrigan, Senior Social Work Practitioner, tel 01 2309 318 or email [katie\\_harrigan@aai.gov.ie](mailto:katie_harrigan@aai.gov.ie). Katie is the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters of child protection.

## Research

A core aim of the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) is to develop a research function, as described in Goal 3 of the Corporate Plan 2016–2019:

*“To inform and influence adoption policy and service delivery through provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.”*

More specifically, objective e) of the Corporate Plan states that the Authority as an organisation will *continue to undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity*. In 2018, sanction was received for a research officer on a 3-year contract (see AAI Business Plan 2018). Recruitment commenced in Q4 of 2018. Following an interview process in April/May 2019, the research officer joined the Adoption Authority in August 2019.

One of the first goals outlined for the officer was to develop a clear 3-year research strategy. This was designed in consultation with the CEO and relevant members of the Executive in September and October 2019.

The research officer serves as secretary to the research advisory committee,<sup>1</sup> which is a sub-committee of the Board. Its purpose is to advise and make recommendations on issues relating to research conducted by the Authority. The Research Advisory Committee met at the Authority on 5 November 2019 to discuss the draft strategy and related planned outputs. These were approved, and Terms of Reference for the sub-committee were drafted and agreed upon by the Board in December 2019.

## Strategy

The Research Advisory Committee agreed upon a three-year research strategy which includes a number of short, medium and long-term research projects. The majority of these studies will be conducted in-house, although some may be put out to tender. The strategy was designed to ensure that any outputs produced would be of use to a number of stakeholders in both domestic and intercountry adoption, including adopted individuals and their families, birth relatives, practitioners and policymakers.

## Outputs

A short report on intercountry adoption was compiled in Q4 2019. It outlined the number of children adopted from other countries by parents who were habitually resident in Ireland from 1991–2019. It will be published in early 2020.

---

<sup>1</sup> For details of committee members, please visit <https://aai.gov.ie/en/what-we-do/research/research-sub-committee.html>

A brief report on recent adoption trends was compiled for the December Board meeting in 2019.

## Research Supports

In Q4 of 2019, a number of supports were put in place to facilitate the establishment of a strong research function in the Authority going forward. These included the following:

### Communications/Website

A mailing list of contacts in the Irish adoption/research fields was developed in consultation with the CEO and Executive, and each one was invited to join the AAI's research mailing list. Delegates attending an adoption conference held in UCD in December 2019 were invited to submit their contact details to be added to the list. The members of the mailing list will receive updates whenever a new AAI publication is released.

The research section of the website<sup>2</sup> was re-designed and developed in late Q4. It includes information about the membership of the research sub-committee, relevant publications by the AAI, and details of invitations to tender, alongside upcoming or ongoing Irish adoption research. A form was added to the website, facilitating the submission of contact details by interested parties for the mailing list.

## The Library

The AAI's library contains a number of books, legal documents, Acts & Bills, conference proceedings, annual reports and publications from the AAI and the Adoption Board, and relevant publications from other domestic and international sources. Some of the documents contained therein date back to the establishment of the Adoption Board in 1952.

The library was re-configured in Q4 of 2019. A survey of the AAI staff was conducted to assess current library use and needs or ideas for an improved library system. Once the results were collated, advice was sought from a librarian through a visit to a library in a similar sized organisation. A temporary student intern was recruited from UCD's Masters in Librarianship Programme to assist in the initial planning and set-up. A KOHA library management system was built for the Authority and hosted by Interleaf. In December 2019 the research officer and intern received detailed training from Interleaf in the KOHA management system and its processes which included cataloguing, barcoding, creating new user accounts, checking items in and out and so on.

All books in the library were re-classified using the Dewey Reference system, and an intuitive labelled shelving system was put in place. Members of the executive were

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://aai.gov.ie/en/what-we-do/research.html>

asked to contribute all books from individual units to the library so that they could be made available to all staff from one central location. These books were classified and catalogued accordingly. The new library will be used by members of the executive and Board and other related parties, by approval of the senior management team.

## **Journal Access**

As part of the library development project, and following consultation with the relevant members of the AAI executive, an EBSCO account was established to ensure that the AAI have access to the most up-to-date domestic and international research in adoption. The research officer received a detailed in-person briefing on EBSCO in December 2019. The Authority has access to two different EBSCO products: SocIndex and EBSCO Discovery, both of which will be made available to all members of the executive and Board in 2020.

## **Research Participant Database**

In collaboration with the Domestic and Intercountry Adoption Units, in Q4 the Authority began writing to adoptive parents who had engaged with it in the previous 14 months, introducing the Authority's research function and inviting them to consent to receiving more information about taking part in research in future. This has led to the establishment of a database of potential participants which will be a useful resource to the Authority as its research element progresses.

## **Internship Programme**

The Authority welcomed Caitlin Getchell for the month of June under the University of Tulsa College of Law summer internship program. The AAI is pleased to be able to support the program each year facilitated by the Department of Law, Maynooth University. Besides attending her own classes at UCD, Caitlin attended the AAI office and undertook research projects for the AAI, comparing state law on adoption in the US and laws relating to adoptees' and birth relatives' search for origins in various countries. She gained an overview of the processes in each unit in AAI and insights into adoption law in Ireland from the Authority's external legal advisor.

## **Corporate Services and Accreditation**

### **Website and Information Technology**

In 2019, the website was relaunched following a substantial update and redesign. A new research section was included and the customer information section was updated to detail a visible data protection subsection, in order to ensure compliance with data protection and GDPR legislation.

Reporting of website activity through the use of Google Analytics ensued in 2019. This information was collated and reported to the Board on a monthly basis. The insights gathered provided information such as website visitor traffic and most visited pages; therefore, enhancing improved customer service provision.

### **Document Management at the Adoption Authority of Ireland**

In 2019, the Authority carried out an extensive re-configuration of the existing electronic document management system (eDMS) and began the integration of all current databases into this system.

A digitisation project was tendered for and is due to commence early in 2020, where historic adoption records will be scanned and imported into the eDMS. Much of the re-configuration work in 2019 was completed in preparation for this digitisation project to facilitate the import of these documents.

In 2020 the Authority's plan is to complete the re-configuration of the eDMS, integration of all databases and finalise staff training, so that all sections will be fully operational within this system. The digitisation project is also due to be completed in 2020.

### **Parliamentary Questions (PQs)**

In total, 28 Parliamentary Questions were received and responded to in 2019.

### **Freedom of Information Requests (FOI)**

The AAI publish details of FOI requests received, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for Freedom of Information for Public Bodies.

In 2019 the Adoption Authority received 15 requests under the Freedom of Information Acts.



- 6 were granted/part granted;
- 1 statistic was unavailable;
- 8 were 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.”

## **Press/Media**

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

The AAI continued to monitor adoption-related news reports in the local, national and international media to keep updated with developments on adoption-related matters in 2019.

## **Energy Management**

### ***Overview of Energy Usage in 2019***

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.

The value of the contribution of improved public sector energy efficiency and its pivotal importance was further underpinned in June 2019 with the publication of the first *Climate Action Plan*. This governmental strategic plan sets a more ambitious target of 50% improved energy efficiency to be achieved by public sector bodies by the end of 2030.

In 2019, The Adoption Authority of Ireland reported on its 2018 energy use and had improved on the previous years’ performance with an energy saving of 32.7% since a baseline level in 2009. At this level of savings, we are on track to meet our 2020 target of 33% savings.

## **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 2019, there were 6 registered accredited bodies:

**Table 4** Accredited bodies 2019

<b>Accredited Body</b>	<b>Date of accreditation</b>
PACT 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 22 February 2019 10 March 2016
Cúnamh CPRSI House 30 South Anne Street Dublin 2	Reaccredited 8 March 2019
Barnardos Post Adoption Service 23/24 Buckingham Street Dublin 1	Reaccredited 1 June 2019
Arabella Counselling, t/a Here2Help 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 18 October 2019
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

Six-monthly self-assessment reports were submitted by all accredited bodies during 2019. Audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2018 were also submitted.

### ***Accreditation Procedures***

In line with statutory requirements, The Adoption Authority of Ireland actively engages with all accredited bodies throughout the year.

For each calendar year two 6-monthly activity reports are required to be submitted by each accredited body. These reports are summarised by the Executive and presented to the Board of the Authority. All activity reports were received for 2018

during 2019. In 2019 a revised template was provided to registered bodies for data optimisation purposes.

In addition, annual audited Financial Statements are to be submitted by each body to the Authority by 31 March the following year where appropriate. All Financial Statements were received for 2018.

Congruent with legislation the initial period of registration is for five years and renewals shall not exceed three years. Successful applications for renewals were made in 2019 to the Authority by PACT, Barnardos, Cúnamh and Arabella Counselling, t/a Here2Help for specified activities contained within the Adoption Act 2010.

A monthly report is submitted by the Executive to the Board of the Authority detailing all accredited body activity.

### ***Cessation of Accredited Bodies***

In December 2019 the operations of Cúnamh (formerly CPRSI) Adoption Agency came to cessation. All Cúnamh Adoption Agency adoption files were subsequently transferred to the Adoption Authority of Ireland in mid-December 2019.

Under Section 127 of the Adoption Act, 2010 and the associated Regulations S.I. 524 of 2010, the Cúnamh Adoption Agency will be formally deregistered from the register of accredited bodies in due course.

The International Adoption Association (Ireland) did not renew their accreditation which expired in January 2019. Notification of their subsequent removal from the register was published in Iris Oifigiúil on 6 September 2019.

## Data Protection

In 2019, The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to develop policies, systems and procedures, placing considerable emphasis on staff awareness and training, aimed at ensuring our compliance with the requirements of data protection legislation.

The role of the Data Protection Officer in the Adoption Authority is

- To assist in monitoring internal compliance;
- To inform and advise on data protection obligations;
- To provide advice regarding Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs);
- To act as a contact point between data subjects (who will request 'access' to personal data) and the Adoption Authority.

On the AAI website [www.aai.gov.ie](http://www.aai.gov.ie) under customer information, there is a dedicated section on data protection & GDPR. A dedicated email address ([dataprotection@aai.gov.ie](mailto:dataprotection@aai.gov.ie)) has been put in place to facilitate data protection queries.

Processing 'special category' data carries more risk than any other personal data, so vigilance is of prime importance in the Adoption Authority with data regarding children and health/medical information.

The advent of GDPR has impacted greatly on the area of Subject Access Requests in particular. A Subject Access Request (SAR) is the Right of Access allowing an individual to obtain records to their personal information, held by an organisation. GDPR, which became applicable in May 2018, provides individuals with the right of access to this information. The volume of requests for information and for data is four times greater than pre-GDPR.

Applicants may request data in two ways: Formal & Informal

<b>Option 1: Informal Request or request for information or</b>	<b>Option 2: Formal Request or SAR (Subject Access Request)</b>
This is very often the first approach and is a good starting point for applicants who cannot identify what information they require or if AAI have the information they are searching for	A formal request is a legal structured process which must be completed within 30 days or a valid extension requested. This is called a SAR (or subject access request). Applicants make this request under Article 15 GDPR
Applicants can make a simple informal request for personal details in one of the following three ways:	Applicants may make a formal request in one of three ways:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By email to <a href="http://www.aai.gov.ie">www.aai.gov.ie</a></li> <li>2. <u>By emailing the data protection officer at <a href="mailto:dataprotection@aai.gov.ie">dataprotection@aai.gov.ie</a></u></li> <li>3. <u>By telephoning 01 2309300 during office hours 9.30am-4.30pm</u></li> </ol> <p>Applicants will be directed to the person who can best help them with their request. In general, these types of requests are for assistance tracing a child, parent or sibling, joining the voluntary database (NACPR), they are sometimes looking for medical information only or may want pre-birth or early post birth information which the Adoption Authority will not hold. Many of these types of requests will be dealt with appropriately by either the Information &amp; Tracing Section or the Social Work Team.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete a Subject Access request form available on the AAI Website, print and post it to our offices;</li> <li>2. Email the form as an attachment to <a href="http://www.aai.gov.ie">www.aai.gov.ie</a> or <a href="mailto:dataprotection@aai.gov.ie">dataprotection@aai.gov.ie</a></li> <li>3. Alternatively, write to AAI, telephone or email and state, “I wish to make a Subject Access request.”</li> </ol> <p>These formal requests are usually for <b>ALL</b> personal information that the Adoption Authority hold on an individual.</p> <p>These requests will <u>always</u> be dealt with by the Data Protection Officer.</p>
--	--

## Data Protection Requests

In 2019 the AAI received 26 Data Protection requests and all were responded to.

**Table 5** Requests for Personal Data 2013–2019

	Number Received	Number Refused /Declined	Internal Appeals received	Appeals to Data Protection Commissioner	Decision of Data Protection Commissioner
2013	10	0	0	0	n/a
2014	7	0	0	0	n/a
2015	8	2	0	0	n/a
2016	8	2	0	0	n/a
2017	6	0	0	0	n/a
2018	3	1	0	0	n/a
2018*	12	5	0	0	n/a
2019	26	5	5	1	Awaiting decision

\* after GDPR was introduced 18 May 2018

## Human Resources

In October 2019, Human Resources and Staff Development was separated from the umbrella of Corporate Services (see updated [Organisation & Management Structure](#)). A dedicated Human Resource function will result in better succession planning, training and staff development to build on the skills and corporate knowledge in the Authority.

### Recruitment

There was a high volume of staff changes in 2019. Eight members of staff either resigned, left on career break or their contract finished at the Authority and there was one retirement. In an organisation as small as the Authority recruitment of staff takes up significant portion of the time available in a one person unit, despite this all vacancies but one were filled by the end of the year.

Following a recruitment competition in Q3 2019, a new Assistant Principal Officer was appointed in October 2019. This new role of head of compliance oversees the corporate function of the Authority with specific responsibility for Finance, Audit and Risk bringing a more focussed approach to those important governance matters. Further competitions took place during the year which the Authority conducted under its licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to recruit a Principal Social Worker to the Adoption Authority, a Team Leader Social Work position was successfully filled in Q4 2019.

### Pension/Retirements

In February, The Authority's Principal Social Worker who has been with the Authority since its establishment in 2010 retired.

Annual Benefit Statements were provided to all members of the Single Public Pension Service Scheme (SPSPS) as required under the legislation.

### Training

Training opportunities which staff availed of in 2019 included:

- First Aid and Fire Safety
- Manual handling
- Data retention
- People management skills for line managers
- Public Service grade specific training courses

Lunch and Learn sessions were conducted on each alternate month during the year.

### **Employee Assistance Service**

The Authority continued to provide a dedicated Employee Assistance Service which is available to all staff and their family members as required. Staff who have availed of the service during the year report very positive experiences with the service.

## Statistics

**Table 6** Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953–2019

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



Table 6. contd.

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
2018	61,016	23,061	37.8	72
2019	Not available at time of publication			79
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>44,682</b>

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

**Table 7** Domestic Adoptions by type 2015–2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Step Parent	66	65	37	35	51
Long Term Foster Care	13	19	31	25	21
Infant	7	5	7	7	6
Foreign to Domestic	6	4	2	3	0
Extended Family	1	0	3	2	1
Private Placement	1	2	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>79</b>

**Table 8** Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2015–2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
17 Years Old	30	25	27	30	35
12-16 Years Old	35	37	21	23	24
7-11 Years Old	13	15	14	7	13
2-6 Years Old	12	15	5	9	4
0-1 Years Old	4	3	5	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>79</b>

**Table 9** High Court Orders Granted Pursuant to Domestic Adoption Applications 2015–2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Section 18	6	7	5	1	0
Section 30	14	13	14	7	8
Section 54	13	17	19	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>

**Table 10** 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, 2010-2019 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*).

Country	No. of Entries*	Country	No. of Entries*
Russia	1,629	South Africa	2
Vietnam	903	El Salvador	2
Romania	808	Jersey	2
China	431	Kenya	2
Ethiopia	308	Lithuania	2
Kazakhstan	151	Peru	2
Belarus	145	Poland	2
Thailand	129	Rwanda	2
United States of America	113	Scotland	2
Mexico	108	Sri Lanka	2
Ukraine	100	Uzbekistan	2
Bulgaria	32	Bolivia	1
India	24	Bosnia Herzegovina	1
Taiwan	22	Haiti	1
Colombia	19	Hong Kong	1
England	18	Malawi	1
Brazil	17	Zimbabwe	1
Paraguay	7	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000</b>
Cambodia	4		
Philippines	4		

\*A review of the AAI's historical statistics and the implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

**Table 11** Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2019 only. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption)

<b>Country</b>	<b>No. Entered on the Register in 2019</b>
Bulgaria	1
China	3
Haiti	1
United States of America	10
Vietnam	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 12** Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2019, 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 where the adoption was effected	No. Entered on the Register in 2019	Country where the adoption was effected	No. Entered on the Register in 2019
Australia	1	Scotland	15
Canada	3	Singapore	1
Cayman Islands	1	South Africa	13
China	9	Spain	2
Costa Rica	1	Sri Lanka	3
England	180	Taiwan	1
Hong Kong	4	Tanzania	1
Isle of Man	1	Thailand	9
Kenya	1	The Bahamas	2
Malawi	2	Turkey	1
Mexico	1	Ukraine	1
New Zealand	4	United States of America	38
Northern Ireland	45	Wales	8
Romania	1	Zimbabwe	4
		<b>Total</b>	<b>353</b>

**Table 13** Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2019\*, 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	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bulgaria	4	8	4	8	1	1
Cambodia	0	1	0	0	0	0
China	0	15	7	10	4	3
England	2	5	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	0	0	1	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	1
India	3	0	0	1	0	0
Lithuania	0	1	1	0	0	0
Mexico	5	11	0	1	0	0
Peru	0	1	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	1	0	0	0
Russia	4	2	2	0	1	0
Thailand	6	1	4	2	8	0
USA	4	6	12	9	7	10
Vietnam	4	32	23	22	20	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>

\*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

**Table 14** Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2019 (All Sections)

Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*
1991	58	2006	409
1992	305	2007	439
1993	59	2008	488
1994	64	2009	395
1995	93	2010	290
1996	117	2011	342
1997	149	2012	242
1998	260	2013	141
1999	284	2014	106
2000	324	2015	160
2001	284	2016	214
2002	439	2017	324
2003	460	2018	313
2004	482	2019	386
2005	442	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,069</b>

\*A review of the AAI's historical statistics and the implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

## Other Information

**Website:** The website of the Adoption Authority can be accessed at [www.aai.gov.ie](http://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

(Internal Audit)

ASM  
20 Rosemary Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1QD



## Appendix A

Dates of Meetings 2019		Board of the Authority Attendees
15 January		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim
22 January		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison
12 February		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, Judge P McMahon, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty
19 February		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon
12 March		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, H Buckley, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon, A O'Flaherty
29 March		Dr G Shannon, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon
9 April	Full	All members
7 May		Dr G Shannon, H Buckley, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon, A O'Flaherty
27 May		Dr G Shannon, H Buckley, Dr M Anglim
11 June		Dr G Shannon, A O'Flaherty, H Buckley, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon, Dr M Anglim
9 July	Full	All members
30 July		Dr G Shannon, H Buckley, Dr M Anglim
10 September		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim, Judge P McMahon, P Harrison
24 September	Full	Corporate Governance all members
8 October	Full	All members
12 November	Full	All members
26 November (Limerick)	Full	Corporate Governance all members
10 December	Full	All members

Dates of Meetings 2019	Risk and Audit Committee
20 March	Full Attendance
29 July	Full Attendance
29 October	Apologies Judge Patrick McMahon
3 December	Full Attendance

Dates of Meetings 2019	Research Sub Committee
5 November	Apologies Anne O'Flaherty, Dr Geoffrey Shannon,