



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Customer Action Plan 2018 - 2020

Adoption Authority of Ireland

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

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Foreword by Chief Executive Officer

The Authority is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all those who communicate with us.

This Customer Charter is the Authority's public statement on the service customers can expect when dealing with the Authority.

The Authority is committed to communicating in plain English and to providing child- and family-friendly processes for communication and face-to-face meetings.

The Authority seeks to be individually and collectively accountable, open to change, customer focused and respectful in our dealings with the public and work colleagues. The Customer Charter and Action Plan set out how the Authority will ensure that it meets the standards set out in the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service.

Patricia Carey
Chief Executive Officer

The Authority and its Customers

The purpose of this Customer Action Plan, and the Customer Charter that accompanies it, is to set out in clear and unambiguous terms how we intend to ensure that we can continue to provide all our customers with the highest possible level of service over the period 2018 - 2020. It outlines our commitment to the provision and delivery of customer service and how our performance in this respect will be measured and evaluated.

The Role of the Authority

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is a Public Service agency under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. All staff at the Adoption Authority of Ireland are Public Servants.

Our Mission

"We will work to achieve excellence in adoption and adoption related services, with the best interests of children as our primary consideration."

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is an independent body established on 1 November 2010 under the Adoption Act 2010. The purpose of the Adoption Act, 2010, is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption. The regulatory framework governing adoption has been strengthened in an attempt to ensure that the best interests of children are protected at every step throughout the adoption process.

Customers of the Authority

Any persons who have an interest or are engaged with our organisation, for example:

External Customers

The Authority has a wide range of external customers and is committed to providing a quality service to meet their individual needs.

- Members of the public particularly those who have been adopted, are interested in adopting a child, who are seeking to trace family members or family information.
- Other Government Departments/Offices in particular the Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Tusla – Child and Family Agency, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the Office of the Ombudsman.
- Public representatives and members of the Oireachtas.

- A wide range of stakeholders from outside the public service including accredited bodies, adoption support organisations, trade unions and other representative bodies, community and voluntary groups.
- Central Authorities in other countries.

Internal Customers

The Board of the Authority and staff of the Authority are customers of each other and it is important that the internal customer is acknowledged (See Principle 12 in the following section).

Quality Customer Service

The Authority is wholly committed to providing the highest level of service to all our customers in accordance with the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service.

12 Principles of Quality Customer Service

Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service which the customer can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

Equality/Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

Provide contact details in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

Complaints

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

Appeals

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

Consultation and Evaluation

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

Official Languages Equality

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

Better Co-ordination

Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

Internal Customer

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

The way in which the Authority will honour these principles is set out in our Customer Charter (Appendix A). To ensure that our Customer Charter commitments are met, the Authority has developed a number of standards and performance indicators against which we will measure our performance. These are set out in the 'Measuring and Evaluating Performance' section below.

Measuring and Evaluating Performance

The Authority employs a range of mechanisms to measure and evaluate our performance against the standards set out in our Customer Charter, to ensure that we continue to deliver the highest levels of service to our customers.

In monitoring our performance we will:

- Benchmark our performance against previous results.
- Seek feedback and suggestions from our customers on ways in which we can enhance our service provision and delivery.
- Consult our customers through a variety of methods, including direct interviews, discussion fora and focus groups.
- Use internal management information systems to inform our customer service policies.
- Ensure full compliance with all applicable Health and Safety standards and regulations.

Service Standards and Performance Indicators

Our Customer Charter outlines in broad terms the level of service all customers of the Adoption Authority of Ireland are entitled to expect. To ensure that we can meet the commitments in our Charter, it is important that customers are made aware of the procedures and processes we use. These are defined as our Service Standards and are set out below. To further underpin our commitment to deliver the highest quality of service, the Authority will use these Standards as Performance Indicators in measuring and evaluating our performance

Quality Service

- ✓ Ensure that all customers are kept fully informed of the standards of service they can expect to receive from us, through the display of our Customer Charter in our office and on our website.
- ✓ Ensure that copies of the Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan are made available in our offices and to all customers who wish to have a copy.

Equality/Diversity

- ✓ Ensure that a focus on equality/diversity issues is maintained throughout the Authority.
- ✓ Ensure that all customers are treated equally and in accordance with relevant legislation.
- ✓ Ensure that the needs of staff and visitors with disabilities are identified and fully catered for.

Physical Access

- ✓ Ensure that access to our building is maintained for people with disabilities and any other customers with specific needs.
- ✓ Ensure that all areas of our building are clean, comfortable and comply with occupational and safety standards.

Information

- ✓ Ensure that all information provided by the Authority is clear, timely, accurate and fully accessible for any customers with specific needs.
- ✓ Ensure that material on the Authority's website follows all web publication guidelines in terms of accessibility and official languages equality.
- ✓ Ensure that our information distribution channels are kept as up-to-date as possible and that these channels maintain pace with the most recent technological developments and innovations in media and communications.
- ✓ Make every effort to ensure that information is made available in as many different formats as practicable.

Timeliness and Courtesy

- ✓ Ensure that all customers are treated with courtesy and that all enquiries are dealt with promptly and efficiently.
- ✓ Ensure that all staff provide their names and sections when answering telephone calls.
- ✓ Ensure that voicemail messages are updated regularly and that all voicemail messages are responded to within 2 working day of receipt.

- ✓ Ensure that full contact details are provided on all written or e-mail communication from the Authority.

Complaints

- ✓ Ensure that all complaints are treated promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence.
- ✓ Ensure that all complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
- ✓ Ensure that all complaints are investigated fully and that a reply to a complaint is issued within 30 working days. Where this is not possible, an interim reply will be given, explaining the reason for the delay and advising when a substantive response will issue.
- ✓ To ensure that the details of a complaint remain entirely private, the Authority undertakes to keep records of complaints separate from other records.
- ✓ The Authority's website has full details of our Customer Complaints Procedure. Details are also attached at Appendix B.

Appeals

The Authority maintains a formalised system of appeal for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services. Customers who are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation by the Customer Service Officer have the option of appeal to a senior officer.

If the matter is still not resolved, the customer has the right to appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman. Nothing in this appeals procedure affects your statutory rights under Freedom of Information, Data Protection or any other relevant legislation.

Consultation and Evaluation

- ✓ The Authority is committed to ensuring that the views of all of our customers are considered in framing our service delivery. You can forward any comments or suggestions you may have by emailing us through the contact us section on our website www.aai.gov.ie.
- ✓ The Authority is committed to ensuring meaningful consultation with customer representative groups and other interested parties and reflecting their opinions regarding the development, provision and delivery of our services.
- ✓ Ensure that the levels of service provision and delivery by the Authority are properly evaluated on a regular basis.

Choice

Ensure the availability of multiple contact options for the Authority, including telephone, Freephone telephone number, e-mail and website address.

Ensure that the Authority makes full use of new and emerging technologies to broaden the choice of services available to customers.

Official Languages Equality

- ✓ Ensure that staff are available to cater for callers who may wish to be dealt with through Irish.
- ✓ Ensure that the Statement of Strategy and other information publications and key policy documents produced by or on behalf of the Authority will be made available in Irish.
- ✓ Encourage a focus on Irish language training courses in staff development programmes.
- ✓ Ensure that customers who wish to deal with the Authority by e-mail through Irish are catered for.

Better Co-ordination

Ensure ongoing co-operation with other Departments and Government Agencies to improve co-ordination on service provision and delivery.

Internal Customer

- ✓ Ensure that a module on internal customer service is included as a key part of all Customer Service training and induction courses.
- ✓ Ensure that the training and development needs of each staff member are provided for through the implementation of the Performance Review and Development System.
- ✓ Ensure the development of more effective internal channels of communication to allow staff to gain a fuller understanding of all aspects of the role of the Authority.

Training

We recognise that in order for staff to provide a quality service they must be familiar with the policies and practices outlined in the Customer Action Plan and with the commitments

given in our Customer Charter. We are fully committed to investing in training for all staff and to regular refresher training where necessary, as all members of staff are in regular contact with members of the general public.

Statutory Obligations

In addition to undertakings given in our Customer Action Plan and Customer Charter, we believe it is important that all Authority staff are aware of their statutory obligations. The Authority is fully committed to fulfilling all relevant statutory obligations in relation to Data Protection, Equality, Freedom of Information, Prompt Payment of Accounts and Safety, Health & Welfare at Work.

Consultation

In order to monitor our performance against our customer service commitments, the Authority will conduct regular surveys with our main stakeholders and other interested groups.

These surveys will be designed to assess the requirements of our stakeholders and measure the extent to which the Authority meets these needs. They will also measure the stakeholders' levels of satisfaction with the services they have received. The results of the surveys should give us a clear picture of our current performance in relation to service provision and delivery, showing how effective we have been in meeting the commitments in our Customer Action Plan and Charter. They will also highlight any areas where improvements or enhancements might be required

We welcome and value the views of our customers and have provided a facility in the Contact Us section of our website which allows all members of the public to email us with their queries and comments. By monitoring the queries raised and responding to the comments received, we can focus appropriate resources on particular aspects of our services, ultimately serving all our customers better.

How to Contact Us

The public hours of the Authority are Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4.30pm.

Adoption Authority of Ireland
Shelbourne House
Shelbourne Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin D04 R6F6

Telephone + 353 1 2309300 (Automated Switchboard)
Duty Social Work number + 353 1 2309 306
Website address www.aai.gov.ie

The Adoption Authority of Ireland Customer Charter 2018-2020

Our Vision

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.

Our Commitment to our Customers

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all our customers, providing and delivering the highest quality of service in accordance with the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service. We will treat all our customers equally and make every effort to ensure that the services we provide reflect your needs and expectations.

This Customer Charter is the Authority's public statement on the levels of service customers can expect when dealing with the Authority. It does not seek to cover all the functions and services provided by the Authority, but outline our commitment to you, the customer, and describes:-

- The levels of service you are entitled to expect when you contact the Authority;
- How your input can contribute to the improvement of our services;
- How to obtain further information or make a complaint;
- How to contact the Authority.

Levels of Service to expect when contacting or visiting the Authority

Telephone Contact

Our phones are answered from 9:30 to 4:30 Monday to Friday. Our main number is +353 1 2309 300 when you call you will be directed by an automated system to the various units in the Authority. We provide a duty social worker line on +353 1 2309 306.

When we answer the phone we will identify ourselves and our area of work. We will be polite and helpful and do our best to provide our customers with clear and correct information. Due to the legal and regulatory nature of the work of the Authority it is necessary in some instances to request a caller to send in their query in writing, either by post or by email.

All staff have voicemail facilities set up at their extensions which identifies the section and the staff member your call has gone through to. We will do our best to respond to voicemail messages within one working day.

Subject to the nature of an enquiry It may also be necessary to request official identification (passport, driver's licence etc.) before any response can be provided.

Written Contact

All incoming post is recorded and distributed to the relevant section each morning. Correspondence will be acknowledged within 2 working days. Where it has not been possible to provide a final response with the acknowledgement, a reply will be provided within 10 working days.

If it is not possible to provide a full response in 10 working days we will explain this in an interim reply. The name, section and contact details of the staff member dealing with the correspondence will be included on the reply.

In so far as it is possible, replies to correspondence will not include any technical or complicated language.

Subject to the nature of an enquiry It may also be necessary to request official identification (passport, driver's licence etc.) before any response can be provided.

Email Contact

Each section has an email address which will issue an automatic acknowledgement of your incoming email. You can also contact the sections by email through links on our website.

Each Inbox is monitored on a daily basis and emails will be acknowledged within 2 working days. Where it has not been possible to provide a final response with the acknowledgement, a reply will be provided within 10 working days.

If it is not possible to provide a full response in 10 working days we will explain this in an interim reply. The name, section and contact details of the staff member dealing with the correspondence will be included on the reply.

In so far as it is possible, replies to correspondence will not include any technical or complicated language.

Subject to the nature of an enquiry It may also be necessary to request official identification (passport, driver's licence etc.) before any response can be provided.

Website

The AAI has a comprehensive website at www.aai.gov.ie. This website provides information about all our activities and adoption-related matters. It is intended that the website is an active communication to all our customers. It also includes an email contact service. The

website is constantly reviewed and updated where necessary. A number of publications and statistical information is also available on our website.

Visiting the AAI

The Authority does not have a public office. To ensure that your query can be dealt with efficiently it is recommended that you telephone or email in advance and make an appointment to meet with a member of staff who has the expertise in relation to your query. If you call in person without an appointment we will endeavour to assist you, but the appropriate person may not be in a position to meet you at the time you call.

Subject to the nature of an enquiry it may also be necessary to request official identification (passport, driver's licence etc.) before any response can be provided.

We will provide suitable facilities for our Adoption Hearings and meetings and will ensure that our offices are clean and safe. We will provide a welcoming reception area, child-friendly meetings rooms and changing facilities. We will make sure that our offices are accessible for people with disabilities.

Disabilities

Where the Authority has invited members of the public to the offices of the Authority we will identify any needs of people with disabilities and ensure they are fully catered for.

Irish & Other Languages

The Authority will ensure that customers who wish to deal with us through Irish can do so. In addition, we will make every effort to communicate effectively in languages other than English and Irish as arises, including the use of translation services and sign language interpreters.

Séirbhís Trí Ghaeilge

Tabharfar freagra as Gaeilge ar chomhfreagras a gheofar i nGaeilge. Déanfar gach iarracht freastal ar fhiarfraithe teileafóin i nGaeilge agus freastal ar dhaoine a thagann i láthair ar mian leo a ngnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge

Equality/Diversity

The Authority is committed to increasing levels of knowledge in the organisation regarding equality and diversity through training, information and communications.

Social Media

Due to the confidential and legislative nature of the services provided by the Authority we do not participate on social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.). Our website is our only internet presence.

Suppliers

- We will operate clear, impartial and transparent tendering and purchasing procedures in accordance with Public Procurement Guidelines.
- We will ensure that payments to suppliers are made in accordance with applicable Prompt Payment legislation and regulations.

How your input can contribute to the improvement of our services

We welcome and value your comments and suggestions on all aspects of our services. This allows us to improve our services to fully meet your needs and serve you better. You can make a contribution to this process.

Inform us of your views, comments or suggestions using the form in the Contact Us section of our website or you can write to us at Corporate Services, Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4 D04 H6F6. Tell us about the level of service you feel you have received, particularly if you feel that it failed to reach the standard you expected.

You can help us to help you by participating in any customer survey material we send you and sharing your views and comments

Statutory obligations

The Authority is fully committed to fulfilling all relevant statutory obligations in relation to Data Protection, Equality, Freedom of Information, Prompt Payment of Accounts and Safety, Health & Welfare at Work.

How to contact us

Postal Address	The Adoption Authority of Ireland Shelbourne House Ballsbridge Dublin 4 D04 H6F6
Website	www.aai.gov.ie
Email address for various sections	Domestic@aai.gov.ie Intercountry@aai.gov.ie Tracing@aai.gov.ie SW@aai.gov.ie = social work team corporate@aai.gov.ie

	aaiaccounts@aai.gov.ie
FOI	corporate@aai.gov.ie Ms Justine Barrett Corporate Services The Adoption Authority of Ireland Shelbourne House Ballsbridge Dublin 4 D04 H6F6
Data Protection	Ms Heather Connolly Data Protection Officer The Adoption Authority of Ireland Shelbourne House Ballsbridge Dublin 4 D04 H6F6
Telephone	+ 353 1 2309 300
Duty Social Worker	+ 353 1 2309 306
National Adoption Contact Preference Register – Freephone	+ 353 1800 309 300
Public Hours	Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm

Customer Complaints procedure

Complaints Procedure

This complaints procedure allows anyone receiving adoption services to make a complaint about the actions or failures of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The complaints system also covers registered Accredited Bodies who provide various adoption related services.

What can you make a complaint about?

You may make a complaint about any action of the Authority or an Accredited Body that:

- In your view, doesn't seem to be fair or reliable **administrative practice**; and
- Adversely affects you, or someone on whose behalf you are making a complaint.

What is fair or reliable administrative practice?

Administrative practice refers to the way decisions are made and how services operate. Under the complaints system, administrative practice isn't considered to be fair or reliable if it is:

- Taken without proper authority;
- Taken on irrelevant grounds;
- The result of negligence or carelessness;
- Based on erroneous or incomplete information;
- Improperly discriminatory;
- Based on undesirable administrative practice; or
- In any other respect, against fair or sound administration.

Who can make a complaint?

It is open to any individual affected to make a complaint. If you are unable to make a complaint on your own behalf due to your age, illness or disability, you can nominate someone else to make the complaint on your behalf, for example

- A close relative;
- Anyone appointed by law or the courts to take care of your affairs;
- A legal representative; or
- Anyone else with your consent.

Which complaints are not covered?

You cannot complain about:

- A matter that is, or has been the subject of legal proceedings before a court or tribunal;
- A matter relating solely to the decision of the Authority in performing its statutory functions (for example an application for an adoption order or an application for an entry in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions);
- A matter relating to the recruitment, appointment or terms and conditions of an employee of the Authority recruited through the Public Appointments Service;
- A matter that could prejudice an investigation being undertaken by An Garda Síochana;
- A matter that has been brought before any other statutory complaints procedure.

How to make a complaint

The Adoption Authority

If you wish to make a complaint about the Authority you should first of all try to resolve the problem locally. That means, bringing the complaint to the attention of the person in charge of the service, for example the manager of the relevant unit at the Authority or to the Principal Social Worker (if the complaint refers to an Authority social worker). The Authority has four administrative units, namely

Domestic Adoption Unit – Mark Kirwan - Domestic@aai.gov.ie
 Information and Tracing Unit – Joan Groves - Tracing@aai.gov.ie
 Intercountry Adoption Unit – Des Tracey - Intercountry@aai.gov.ie
 Corporate Services Unit – Justine Barrett - Corporate@aai.gov.ie
 Social Work – Celia Loftus - SW@aai.gov.ie

You will help to speed up the investigation of your complaint by providing the following details:

- Your name, address and e-mail address;
- Exactly what you were dissatisfied with;
- The name of the official or section you dealt with;
- A daytime telephone number.

You will need to make your complaint in writing, giving as much detail as you can. Written complaints will be acknowledged within five working days and the complaint will be investigated within 30 days by a complaints officer. If the investigation takes longer than 30 days, the complaints officer will keep you up updated about progress on your complaint every 20 working days.

Following the investigation, you will receive a written response to your complaint and will be advised of your right to have an internal review of the recommendation of the complaints officer. You will also be told of your right to complain to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children.

- All complaints will be treated promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence;
- We will keep records of complaints separate from other records;
- We will ensure that no complaint you have made in good faith will be used to your disadvantage in the future;
- We will endeavour to learn from mistakes to ensure that errors are not repeated.

Are Complaints Officers required to fully investigate all complaints?

No. Complaints officers may not initiate or may stop investigating a complaint for various reasons. For example, if the complaint is trivial or vexatious.

What recommendations can a complaints officer not make?

A Complaints Officer may not recommend overturning a decision of the Authority which it has made in performing its statutory functions.

Where to send complaints

Complaints should be addressed to the Unit Manager, *Name of the Relevant Unit*, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4 or you can email the managers at the addresses below.

If the complaint is about a Unit Manager it should be addressed to the Head of Compliance & Resources, Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4.

Can you appeal?

If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation of a complaint, the matter may be appealed to the Appeals Officer. The deadlines for responding to appeals will be the same as those for formal complaints (outlined above).

Appeals should be addressed to Complaints Appeals Officer, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4.

Complaint in relation to an Accredited Body

If you wish to make a complaint about an accredited body, you should initially contact the complaints officer for the [accredited body](#). If you have exhausted the complaints process in the accredited body and are not satisfied with the outcome you may then complain to the Adoption Authority. Your complaint should be made in writing to the Accreditation Unit, Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4.

If you have exhausted the Authority's complaints process and are not satisfied with the outcome you may complain to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children.

Office of the Ombudsman, 18 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2, Tel (01) 678 5222, Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.ie . Website: <https://www.ombudsman.ie/en/>

Ombudsman for Children's Office, Millennium House, 52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1, D01 F5P8, Ireland. Email oco@oco.ie. Website: <https://www.oco.ie/>

The OCO is a quasi-judicial body with a mandate to accept and investigate complaints about how the State is providing services or making decisions about children

Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Teach Shíol Bhriain
Bothar Shíol Bhrian
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