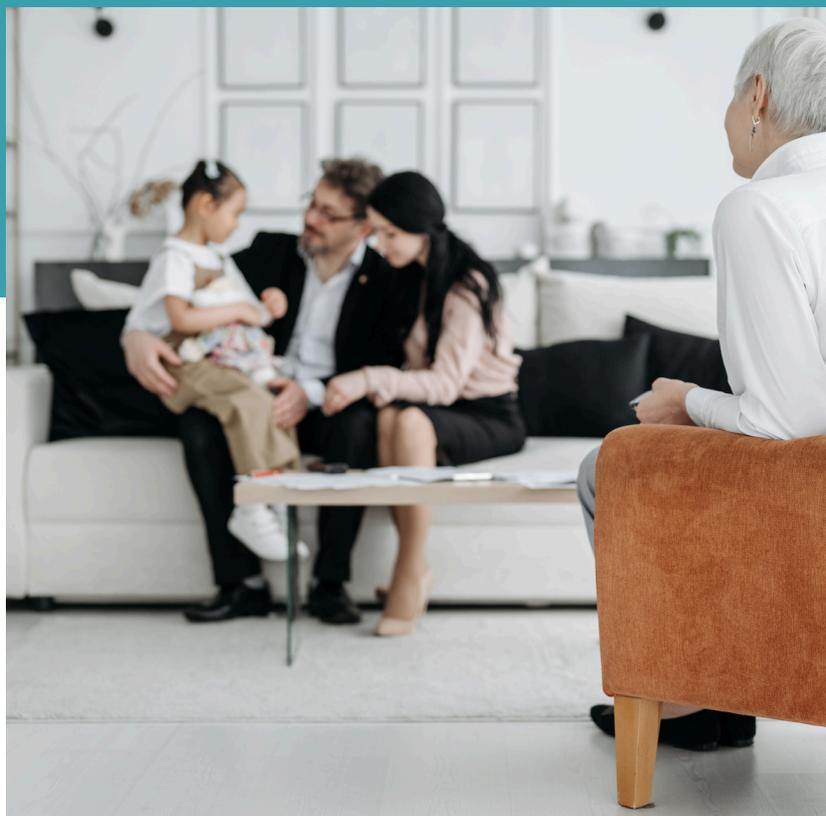


VALE, VALLEYS, & CARDIFF (VVC)

3-ADOPTION TEAMS

COMBINED: ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 2025

Prepared by:
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INTRODUCTION

The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

The Service supports parents throughout the adoption process. This includes Recruitment and Assessment; Family Finding and Matching and; Post-Adoption support. Each process is delivered by its three functional team services led by their respective Team Managers.

The Recruitment and Assessment Service provides training for families preparing for adoption.

The Family Finding and Matching Service matches prospective adoptive parents with children awaiting adoption.

The Post-Adoption Service links in with adoptive families for their one and three years post Adoption Order.

This annual report presents key insights from consultations conducted across two of the three adoption teams between August 2024 and March 2025 and a summary of each engagement activity is provided below. Due to a single response by 31 March 2025, the Family Finding Team survey lacked sufficient data to support a formal report.

PURPOSE & SCOPE

The consultation and engagement pieces aimed to understand adoptive families' experiences before, during and after adoption; assess the quality of support and communication provided; identify good practice and areas for improvement; and ensure services align with the NAS Good Practice Guide and Regulation 39 requirements. It also sought to inform future service development and ensure families feel safe, supported and able to thrive.

The purpose of producing this annual report is to bring together the findings from consultation and engagement activities carried out by two of the three adoption teams, with the third team commencing their consultations within the upcoming reporting year.

By collating and analysing feedback across the service, this report provides a comprehensive overview of adoptive families' experiences and the quality of support provided at each stage of the adoption journey.

Reviewing the service as a whole enables us to identify common themes, share good practice, and address areas for development in a consistent and coordinated way. This collective insight not only supports continuous improvement in service delivery but also strengthens strategic planning, promotes staff learning and development, and ensures a more unified approach to meeting the needs of adoptive families across the region.

CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT

Four separate surveys were conducted across two of the three adoption teams between August 2024 and March 2025, and a summary of each engagement activity is provided below. The third adoption team is commencing their consultations within the upcoming reporting year.

Recruitment & Assessment Team:

- **Adopter Survey:**
12 out of 41 prospective adopters responded.
- **2nd-Time Adopter Survey:**
5 out of 16 prospective Adopters responded.
- **3-Day Training Survey:**
All 85 prospective adopters responded.

Post-Adoption Team:

- **Adopters' Check-In Survey:**
22 out of 64 prospective Adopters responded.

RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT TEAM

Adopter Survey:

Between August 2024 and March 2025, 41 surveys were distributed to adopters to gather feedback on their experience with initial engagement and preparation for adoption. A total of 12 responses were received, resulting in a 29% response rate. While response rates can vary, a typical and meaningful response rate for surveys in this context is usually around 30-40%. This indicates a good level of engagement while balancing the effort required from adopters to participate.

Summary of Findings:

The feedback from adopters reflects a generally positive experience with the adoption process, including adopters experiences during the initial stages of their engagement with the adoption service through to the two-stage process, homework assignments, the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR), and the panel process. A significant number of respondents appreciated the clarity of communication and the support provided by Social Workers (SWs) throughout the stages. While the process was described as demanding, particularly with the homework assignments, most adopters felt the overall experience was well-organised and facilitated by clear guidelines.

Key Insights & Trends:

Early Engagement and Communication

Strong early engagement, including clear information sessions and responsive communication, built adopter confidence. Communication was consistently rated highly, though minor information gaps (e.g., Welsh Early Permanence - WEP) highlight room for improvement.

Clarity and Managing Expectations

Clear guidance helped reduce uncertainty and support informed decisions. While timelines were generally accepted, unclear expectations around delays caused some anxiety, suggesting a need for better planning and transparency.

Relationships with Social Workers

Supportive, open relationships with social workers were central to positive experiences. These partnerships fostered trust and made the process feel collaborative and emotionally safe.

“We feel extremely lucky to have been paired with our Social Worker.”

Two-Stage Process

The two-stage process was well-structured and flexible. Weekly sessions and homework helped keep adopters engaged and prepared.

“Stage 2 was quick and well-organised due to weekly sessions and homework.”

Reflection and Practicality

Adopters valued the mix of practical tasks and reflective learning, which supported emotional readiness. Though balancing homework with full-time work was tough, many found it essential to their growth.

“It was difficult with work, but integral to understanding adoption.”

Opportunities for Improvement

While most felt supported, some flagged issues with emotional support and delays. Clearer communication and efficient, end-to-end planning are critical as adopters move toward matching.



Areas for Improvement:

Many respondents expressed high satisfaction, with comments like “No improvements come to mind” and “Just keep doing what you’re doing.” However, several constructive suggestions were offered to enhance the experience further, including:

Clarity of Information

Some found the WEP (Wales Early Permanence) process unclear and requested clearer explanations and more time to review key documents like the PAR.

Timelines and Organisation

While necessary checks were understood, the process was sometimes felt to be slow or disorganised, particularly around Approval Panel delays. Suggestions included better coordination between approval and fostering panels and clearer expectations about timelines.

Homework and Documentation

4 respondents found aspects of homework tasks challenging, especially the personal profile. Respondents requested clearer guidance, sample documents, and consistent formatting templates – particularly helpful for those less confident with technology.

“A short sample of a hypothetical profile would have helped us.”

“Documents were difficult to manage for those not computer-savvy.”

PAR Content and Tone

2 respondents shared concerns about the PAR (Prospective Adopter Report), noting a focus on negative life experiences and a need for more balanced, positive framing. Some also pointed out factual inaccuracies or phrasing that could be improved.

“It focused more on the bad life experiences than the positive ones.”

Panel Process and Technology

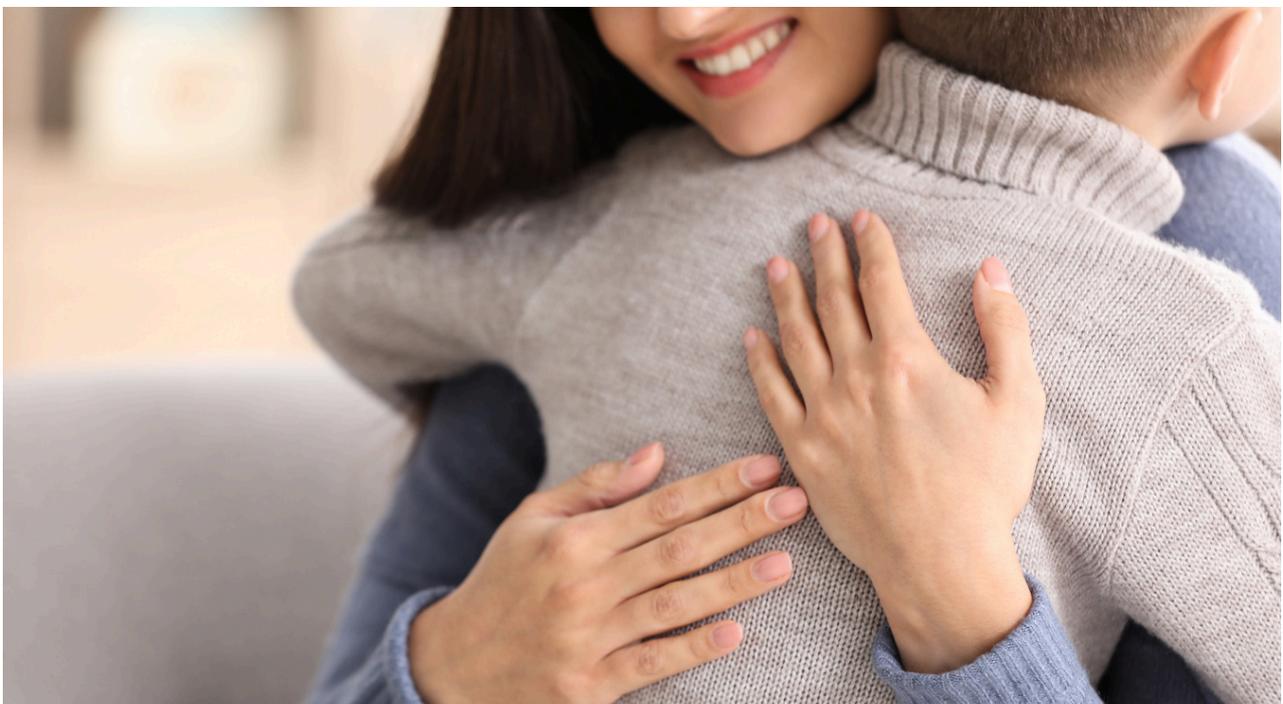
While the panel experience was mostly positive, some reported technical issues with the online format, feeling disconnected during virtual meetings. A face-to-face option was preferred by some for such a significant stage.

“The panel process was a bit ‘bitty’ with multiple links and waiting times.”

“It would have been better to have a face-to-face option.”

Emotional Challenges

Parts of the process were emotionally difficult for some. More support around sensitive discussions and emotionally intense steps was suggested.



RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT TEAM

2nd-Time Adopter Survey:

Between 18 October 2024 and 31 March 2025, **16 surveys were distributed** to second-time adopters to gather feedback on their second-time adoption preparation experiences. A total of **5 responses** were received, resulting in a **31% response rate**. This indicates a good level of engagement while balancing the effort required from adopters to participate.

Summary of Findings:

Feedback from second-time adopters course participants was overwhelmingly positive, with course topics, facilitation and, information provided meeting expectations. Greg's delivery was highly praised and, facilitators created an engaging and inspiring atmosphere. The life-story section stood out, emphasising the importance of drip-feeding adoption-related knowledge from an early age. Lee's openness about second-time adoption provided valuable insights, while some participants suggested refining legal discussions and adopter interactions for an even more enriching experience.

Key Insights & Trends:

- A recurring theme in the feedback is the deep appreciation for Lee's openness and honesty in sharing their second-time adoption experience. Their insights into adopting a second child offered a valuable perspective that resonated with attendees.
- Another notable trend is the strong emphasis on the life story section, which highlighted the importance of gradually introducing adoption-related information from a young age. This concept of drip-feeding knowledge was particularly impactful and reinforced the significance of early, ongoing conversations in the adoption journey.
- Overall, the feedback suggests that real-life experiences and authentic storytelling played a crucial role in making the session meaningful and engaging.



Areas for Improvement:

- Overall, feedback was highly positive, with 10 of the participants stating that everything was helpful. Many felt the course was well-structured and engaging, with no changes necessary.
- However, 6 provided constructive insights, noting that while the legal aspects were essential, they could be more concise. Some foster carers already had a strong understanding of court proceedings, making that section less relevant to them.
- Tina's emphasis on life-journey books inspired a more intentional approach to letter-box communication, reinforcing the importance of consistent reflection. Greg's realistic approach was valued, as it helped participants navigate the challenges of the adoption journey with greater confidence.
- Additionally, a suggestion was made to refine interactions between adopters to enhance engagement and shared learning.



RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT TEAM

3-Day Training Survey:

Between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 **85 surveys were distributed** to adopters to gather feedback on their 3-day adopters training course experience. **All 85 surveys were returned, giving a 100% response rate.**

Summary of Findings:

The 3-day adopters training received positive feedback for its clarity and engaging content, with all participants agreeing that the course goals were clearly explained. Sessions on trauma, therapeutic parenting, and PACE were particularly appreciated, and attendees valued the opportunity to share experiences with other adopters. The use of case studies, group work, and videos helped maintain engagement. Trainers were praised for being knowledgeable and approachable.

While most felt the course was comprehensive, some suggested improvements, such as reducing lengthy recaps, cutting down on PowerPoint use, and refining familiar content. Recommendations included enhancing the schedule, improving comfort and accessibility, adding more interactive elements, and providing emotional support.

Key Insights & Trends:

- The training received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 50 of the participants believing no improvements were needed.
- Many described it as well-designed, informative, and exceeding expectations.
- The delivery was praised for its positivity, happiness, and engagement, fostering a supportive learning environment.
- Ratings further reflected this strong reception, with 57 rating the course as excellent, 9 as very good, and 14 as good, while only 5 rated it as average.
- These insights highlight the course's effectiveness in providing a meaningful and well-structured experience.



Areas for Improvement:

- A key recommendation was to avoid consecutive-day scheduling for better engagement.
- Comfort was highlighted, with calls for improved seating, clearer presentation materials and, better accessibility.
- Structured timing and shorter breaks were encouraged to maintain focus.
- Some attendees proposed a separate refresher course for second-time adopters and foster carers transitioning to adoption.
- Keeping discussions on track while minimising lengthy recaps was advised, alongside more interactive methods such as group activities and movement-based tasks.
- There was strong interest in hearing first-hand adoption experiences and ensuring the environment felt welcoming and supportive.
- Emotional expression and sensitivity to trauma were emphasised as essential, and greater clarity in task instructions was requested.
- Additional topics such as contact processes, WEP, and matching adopters in similar situations were suggested.
- Practical improvements like sharing slides for reflection, wider course promotion and, small considerations such as providing water and adjusting meal breaks were also noted.
- Incorporating varied delivery techniques, including quizzes and video content, could further enhance engagement.

POST-ADOPTION TEAM

Adopters' Check-In Survey:

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, the Post-Adoption and QA Teams sent a total of 129 surveys to adopters and received 62 responses.

- From 1st April to 31st August 2024, 65 surveys were sent by the Post-Adoption Team, with 40 responses received.
- From 1st September 2024 to 31st March 2025, 64 surveys were sent by the QA Team, with 22 responses received.

These response numbers indicate a meaningful level of engagement, reflecting adopters' willingness to provide feedback while balancing the effort required to participate.



Summary of Findings:

Many adopters face challenges with emotional regulation and behavioral difficulties, highlighting the need for greater access to specialised support like therapy and peer groups. While training is generally seen as helpful, there is a clear need for more comprehensive adoption-related education to address gaps in guidance. Contact arrangements primarily rely on 'Letterbox' communication, with limited direct contact, suggesting the need for clearer guidance on fostering meaningful connections.

There is also a need for improved outreach and accessibility of ongoing support, as some adopters are unsure about being on mailing lists for updates or wish to be added. Additionally, there is strong interest in further post-adoption assistance. Strengthening emotional and training support, refining contact arrangements, and ensuring accessible long-term resources will better meet adopters' evolving needs.



Key Insights, Trends & Areas for Improvement:

Emotional & Wellbeing Support Needs:

- A number of adopters (14) face challenges with emotional regulation and behavioral that challenges, highlighting the need for expanded access to specialised support. Therapy, peer networks, and tailored interventions could provide essential assistance in navigating post-adoption complexities.

Training & Resource Development:

- While most adopters (45) found training beneficial, a proportion (9) felt additional guidance was necessary, and 3 found it insufficient. Strengthening training depth, particularly around complex adoption scenarios, and ensuring complete, accessible support materials would enhance adopters' preparedness.

Guidance on Contact Arrangements:

- With 'Letterbox' contact being the primary means of communication (86%), direct contact remains uncommon. Improved guidance on navigating contact arrangements, along with support in fostering meaningful connections, could boost adopters' confidence in managing birth family relationships.

Enhanced Outreach & Continued Support:

- While 31 of adopters are on the mailing list for updates, 53 were unsure, and 9 wished to be added. Additionally, 48 provided their details for further support, underscoring the importance of ensuring accessible and proactive post-adoption resources for long-term assistance.
- By prioritising emotional support, refining training, improving contact navigation, and expanding outreach, post-adoption resources can be strengthened to better serve adopters and their families.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Introduction:

This section of the report presents a comparative analysis of adopters' feedback gathered from four separate surveys, focusing on key insights and trends, as well as areas for improvement in the adoption process. The analysis highlights the experiences of adopters, with a particular focus on early engagement, communication, emotional support, training, and post-adoption services. It also evaluates how these findings align with the NAS Good Practice Guide and the requirements set out in Regulation 39, which aims to ensure high-quality adoption services. By addressing areas such as clarity of information, relationship building with Social Workers, and the need for improved emotional and practical support, this report offers actionable insights for enhancing adoption practices in the Vale of Glamorgan and beyond.



Comparative Analysis:

Early Engagement and Communication

Clear and consistent early communication was highly valued, helping build trust and confidence among adopters. Information sessions were described as responsive, though minor gaps, such as confusion surrounding the Wales Early Permanence (WEP), suggested areas for improvement.

Area for Improvement:

There were calls for clearer explanations of processes like the WEP and the Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). Respondents suggested offering more time to review key documents and clearer instructions.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This aligns with the NAS Good Practice Guide, which stresses the importance of early, transparent communication. Regulation 39 also mandates clear, accessible information for adopters.

Reinforcing Research:

A 2022 Adoption UK Cymru report emphasises that clear communication, especially in smaller authorities like the Vale of Glamorgan, is a key factor in fostering long-term placement stability.

Clarity and Managing Expectations

Adopters valued clear guidance to reduce uncertainty, although unclear explanations of delays caused unnecessary anxiety. There is a need for better planning and transparent communication regarding timelines.

Area for Improvement:

Improved coordination between the approval and fostering panels, along with clearer expectations about delays and timelines, was commonly requested.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This aligns with NAS's principle of 'no surprises', ensuring families are kept informed of potential changes. Regulation 39 requires clear records and communication of planning decisions.

Reinforcing Research:

Research by the Wales Centre for Public Policy (2021) indicates that clear expectation-setting directly correlates with adopter satisfaction, especially in authorities with complex caseloads, like the Vale of Glamorgan.



Relationships with Social Workers

Strong, open, and emotionally supportive relationships with Social Workers were consistently highlighted as a key factor in positive adopter experiences. These relationships fostered trust and collaboration.

Area for Improvement:

Although positive overall, there is still room to ensure that Social Worker interactions remain consistently supportive, especially during more emotionally challenging stages of the process.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

These experiences align with NAS's emphasis on relational practice, which promotes trust and emotional security. Regulation 39 requires a full understanding of the adopter's journey, which is greatly facilitated by strong professional relationships.

Reinforcing Research:

Cardiff University research (2020) found that positive relationships with Social Workers contribute to better placement outcomes and emotional resilience, particularly during transition periods.



Two-Stage Process

The two-stage process was generally well-received. Weekly sessions, tasks, and clear expectations helped adopters stay engaged and prepared for the adoption journey.

Area for Improvement:

Though largely positive, some adopters suggested refining the structure to ensure it is flexible enough to accommodate diverse needs, such as those of second-time adopters or foster carers transitioning to adoption.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This supports NAS's recommendations for structured, flexible processes that ensure adopters are emotionally and practically prepared. Regulation 39 requires continuous and comprehensive assessments.

Reflection and Practicality

The combination of practical tasks and reflective learning helped adopters feel emotionally ready. While balancing homework and full-time work was challenging, many found this essential for their growth.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters requested clearer guidance on tasks and a better balance between practical tasks and emotional preparation, particularly for those with demanding work schedules.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This fits with NAS guidance, which advocates for holistic preparation. Regulation 39 supports the need to assess and prepare adopters' emotional capacity.

Real-Life Experiences and Storytelling

Hearing from experienced adopters added depth and authenticity to training, particularly when adopters shared insights into second-time adoption.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters expressed a desire for more opportunities to hear from peers who have gone through the adoption process, particularly those adopting multiple children.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This aligns with NAS's encouragement to incorporate lived experiences into training and engagement, as well as Regulation 39, which stresses meaningful, experience-based engagement throughout the process.

Life Story Work

The emphasis on life story work had a strong impact, with many adopters valuing the gradual introduction of adoption-related information for children.

Area for Improvement:

Some adopters requested more support on how to implement life story work effectively, particularly around difficult conversations regarding the child's history.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

Both NAS and Regulation 39 support 'drip-feeding' adoption-related information to help children form coherent life narratives.

Reinforcing Research:

CASCADE research from Cardiff University emphasises the importance of life story work for promoting emotional well-being in adopted children, advocating for early and ongoing narrative-building.

Emotional & Wellbeing Support Needs

22.5% of adopters reported emotional and behavioral challenges, highlighting the need for expanded emotional and therapeutic support post-placement.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters requested more accessible mental health services, peer support groups, and specialised interventions to help with post-adoption emotional regulation and behavioral challenges.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This aligns with the NAS Good Practice Guide, which stresses the need for post-placement emotional support. Regulation 39 requires accessible and comprehensive post-adoption services.



Training & Resource Development

Training was generally praised but some adopters felt there was a need for more in-depth scenario-specific guidance, particularly for complex adoption situations.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters requested more training tailored to the complexities of adoption, including handling sibling groups and trauma.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

This aligns with NAS's advocacy for training that covers a broad range of adoption scenarios. Regulation 39 requires that adopters are well-prepared for the challenges of adoption, including complex family dynamics.



Guidance on Contact Arrangements

Most adopters relied on Letterbox contact but expressed a need for more guidance on managing birth family relationships and facilitating meaningful contact.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters suggested better preparation and support for managing complex contact arrangements, especially with birth families.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

The NAS Good Practice Guide advises supporting adopters in managing contact with birth families. Regulation 39 requires that contact arrangements are child-focused and well-managed.

Enhanced Outreach & Continued Support

Adopters expressed a desire for ongoing support post-adoption, with many requesting to be added to mailing lists or receive updates about available resources.

Area for Improvement:

Adopters recommended better outreach and continued connection with support networks, as well as more proactive post-adoption resources.

Alignment with NAS and Regulation 39:

Both NAS and Regulation 39 highlight that adoption support should extend well beyond placement, ensuring that adopters are informed, included, and supported throughout the adoption journey.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the four surveys present a clear and consistent message: adopters value clarity, emotional support, real-life insights, and well-structured engagement throughout the adoption process. While overall feedback was positive and aligns closely with the NAS Good Practice Guide and Regulation 39, adopters also offered thoughtful, constructive suggestions for improvement.

Key areas for development include enhancing post-placement support, strengthening emotional wellbeing resources, improving clarity around key processes and documents, and addressing digital literacy challenges. These themes are particularly relevant in the Vale of Glamorgan, where the smaller scale and established adopter networks present opportunities for tailored, community-focused improvements.

In addition to the insights gained from this year's core surveys, it is important to reflect on both the strengths and limitations of our consultation and engagement approach. While the four surveys provided meaningful and actionable feedback, other newly developed engagement methods introduced this year received little or no response, limiting our ability to report comprehensively on those areas. This highlights the need to critically assess and evolve our engagement strategy exploring alternative, creative, and more accessible ways to reach a broader range of adopters.

Moving forward, it will be essential not only to build on what has worked well but also to develop more inclusive and effective methods of consultation that encourage participation across diverse adopter groups and experiences. By doing so, we can ensure that all voices are heard and considered in the continued improvement of adoption services.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Regulatory Framework & Guidance

- Regulation 39 (Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005): Sets out the legal duties for assessing and supporting prospective adopters, including communication, planning, and emotional support.
- NAS Good Practice Guide (National Adoption Service for Wales): A framework for high-quality adoption services, focusing on clarity, emotional safety, lived experience, and lifelong support.

Appendix B – Supporting Research

- Adoption UK Cymru – Adoption Barometer Wales (2023): Highlights key trends in adopter experiences in Wales, including post-placement emotional needs and training gaps.
<https://www.adoptionuk.org>
- Cardiff University – CASCADE Research (2020–2023): Focus on life story work, social worker relationships, and long-term adoption outcomes.
<https://cascadewales.org>
- Wales Centre for Public Policy – Family Support in Wales (2021): Research into the importance of early support and communication within Welsh local authorities.
<https://www.wcpp.org.uk>