

THE WALES ADOPTION COHORT STUDY

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Adoption law across England and Wales is found in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, but policy has increasingly diverged in recent years and there are now some legislative differences between the two countries. Challenges and opportunities in practice remain similar, especially recruitment of adopters and planning ongoing support. This article will highlight findings from the Wales Adoption Cohort Study that may be helpful to adoption practitioners undertaking assessments across England and Wales.

Structure of services

Children's services and adoption were devolved to Wales in 2007, but most of the 2002 Act remains in place. A number of amendments contained in the Children and Families Act 2014, following the Narey recommendations, took effect in England only. For example, the duty to strive for fostering for adoption placements under section 22C (9A)–(9C) Children Act 1989, amended by the 2014 Act, applies in England only. The fervour with which adoption policy was pursued by the David Cameron government and Michael Gove in the Department for Education from 2010 was not replicated in Wales. However, Welsh Government does recognise the importance of adoption as the best option for some children who cannot live with their birth families and has recently increased its funding of adoption support services.

Notably, a National Adoption Service for Wales was established in 2015, which comprises all the local authority adoption agencies in three regional collaborative groups, alongside the voluntary adoption agencies. Other influential organisations are AFA Cymru, which succeeded BAAF Cymru when BAAF closed in 2015, and a Welsh branch of Adoption UK. These organisations all work together in developing and sharing best practice. This co-operation and specialism is practical in terms of the relatively small numbers of adoptions in Wales; 270 adoption orders were made in 2019–20, compared with 3,440 in England.

Background to the research

The work on adoption disruption undertaken by Julie Selwyn's team in both England and Wales (Selwyn *et al.*, 2015) and an inquiry by the National Assembly for Wales (Ottaway *et al.*, 2014) into the delivery of adoption services in 2012 made it clear that the early stages of the adoption placement were vital in setting the foundation for the child's long-term security and the permanence that is the aim of adoption.

The team has produced

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