

Adoption Authority of Ireland

Corporate Plan

2012 – 2015

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Foreword

This is the Authority's first Corporate Plan. It will set the direction of the organisation for the next three years and is an important milestone in the transition from its predecessor, the Adoption Board, to the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The Adoption Authority's remit is very broad. Its functions are set out in the Adoption Act 2010 and include quasi-judicial functions of an operational nature in relation to the adoption process, registration, supervision and reporting functions and policy advice and reporting functions.

The four key principles outlined in the Corporate Plan will guide the work of the Authority for the period 2012-2015. The Authority faces many challenges in the implementation of the new legislation which governs it, the changing international dimension of adoption and the current economic situation. The principles outlined in the Corporate Plan seek to address these challenges and provide a framework for the development of the Authority.

The Authority's main objective is to ensure the provision of world class adoption and adoption related services, with the best interests of the child as the first and paramount consideration. The activities section within the Corporate Plan sets out how the Authority will deliver on its Goals with a view to achieving its mission. The inclusion of targets in the Corporate Plan is important. Indeed, the Corporate Plan indicates how the Authority intends to deliver on these targets. Furthermore, measuring the realisation of the objectives in the Corporate Plan will be an annual process and will be detailed in our Annual Report.

The success of the Adoption Authority is dependant on the Authority working in collaboration with other key stakeholders, in particular the Health Service Executive. We hope to build on relationships with key stakeholders during the next three years.

The capacity of the Authority to deliver on its targets will need to be monitored in the context of the constrained resources available due to the challenging nature of the current economic climate.

We wish to express our deep personal gratitude to the Board Members, the Senior Management Team and all the staff of the Adoption Authority of Ireland for their very considerable efforts during a period of unprecedented change in the adoption area. We also wish to thank the Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald TD and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for their assistance and support.

Dr Geoffrey Shannon

Chairperson

Mr. Pat Bennett

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Summary

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is the Central Authority for Adoption in Ireland. It was set up under the Adoption Act 2010 and is an independent quasi-judicial statutory body appointed by Government for the purposes of regulating adoption in Ireland. The Adoption Act 2010 strengthened the regulatory framework governing the lifelong process that is adoption, and ensures that the best interests of children are protected throughout. The Adoption Act 2010 and the establishment of the Central Authority coincided with Ireland's formal ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption.

The environment in which adoption services operate has changed enormously since the enactment of the first adoption legislation – the Adoption Act, 1952. The ratification of the Hague Convention as part of the Adoption Act 2010 provides an internationally agreed set of standards. The clarity of expression of these standards, relating to both international and domestic adoption, gives a very mandate to the Authority in the decision-making processes for which it is responsible

The Authority supports the Government in providing a service for children who need an alternative family placement. The focus is on the child as the first and paramount consideration in its decision-making. In forming and realising its policies, the Authority is supported by key partners and service providers, in particular the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Health Services Executive and agencies accredited by the Authority. The Authority is cognisant, too, of the strongly held views of other stakeholders, both corporate and individual, on adoption law, policy and practice, both past and present. Relationships with all of its partners will be monitored and actively supported in order to provide responsive and supportive services. There are also policy, legislative and constitutional changes mooted, all of which could impact on the current role and functions of the Authority or on the demand for adoption and adoption-related services. The capacity of the Authority to respond to and manage any changes in demand needs careful monitoring in the context of constrained resources.

The Authority has a vital role in providing accurate, appropriate, timely information on all aspects of adoption to Government, service providers and all those in receipt of services (i.e. children and natural/birth and adoptive parents involved in the adoption process as well as adult adopted people and their natural/birth parents). In order to achieve this, it has identified key principles which will guide its mission, its goals, its objectives and its day-to-day work. These are:

- 1 - Child-centeredness
- 2 – Excellence
- 3 - Accountability through Ethical practice and Transparency
- 4 - Respect

The Adoption Authority seeks to be the central source of information on adoption issues and aims to promote balanced, informed debate on this highly sensitive and often emotive issue. The Authority aims to create a world-class organisation which provides a strong, independent and authoritative resource to Government, to its clients and to the adoption services it supports and regulates. The Authority works collaboratively with all of its stakeholders, and looks forward over the coming years to continued dialogue and the valuable contributions from interested parties that inform its work.

Adoption Authority – Organisation & Governance

Introduction

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

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

Functions and Governance arrangements

The functions of the Authority are set out in Section 96 of the Adoption Act 2010¹. These include functions of an operational, judicial and quasi-judicial nature in relation to the adoption process itself, as provided for under the Act and 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 Inter-country Adoption. In addition, the Authority has registration and regulatory functions. Finally, there are reporting, policy advice and research functions set out.

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

Corporate Plan – the Legal Framework

The Authority is required, under Section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010², to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan. A Corporate Plan is intended to³:

- highlight the strategic focus of the organisation
- provide a collective view to ensure ownership and delivery
- build staff engagement and commitment
- provide a challenging appraisal of existing activities and a prioritisation of strategic choices
- include a realistic assessment of available resources vis-à-vis desired objectives

¹ Appendix A.

² Appendix B.

³

- outline coherently core areas and associated functions of the organisation

[adapted: Boyle & Fleming, 2000: *'The Role of Strategy Statements'*, Dublin: IPA]

The high level goals and objectives identified in the Corporate Plan provide the framework for the year-on-year work programme for the Adoption Authority over the next three years. The plan is linked to the yearly business planning process and performance management system for the Authority. It also provides the basis for the annual reporting structure of the Authority. The Corporate Plan provides the opportunity to carefully identify the essential corporate governance and capacity building requirements for any public body alongside the judicial, quasi-judicial, regulatory and operational functions of the Authority which, under law, must be provided or adhered to by the Authority.

It is worth noting that while the Authority was formed as a new statutory organisation under the Adoption Act, 2010, a number of core functions build on the competencies of the former Adoption Board which had been in place from 1952 until November 2010. The Adoption Act 2010 provided for a single legal framework which more fully reflects changing trends and practices in adoption policy and practice over that lengthy period.

Organisational Structure – an Evolving Organisation

The Adoption Authority has examined how the staff and organisational structure is suited to its functions and the legislative environment. An early objective of the Corporate Plan is to implement decisions regarding organisational structure and capacity to ensure that the Authority can deliver on its functions efficiently and effectively. A Business Plan objective for completion by mid-2013 is to have the following structure in place in the Authority, with the public service resource issues and non-employment of new staff stated as a critical success factor in this regard

See Organisational Chart at APPENDIX 3

Context and Environment

Context

The environment in which adoption services operate has changed enormously since the enactment of the first adoption legislation – the Adoption Act, 1952. As part of the changing social, cultural, legal, religious and political standards and trends, the nature of adoption shifted from an almost entirely domestically focused service in which there were very high levels of adoption and the majority of adoptions were non-family adoptions, to a situation where less domestic adoptions take place each year and almost all of these are within families. Ireland now has a high level of intercountry adoptions and the Adoption Act 2010 has placed significant standards and regulations on all adoptions.

The legal framework provided in the Adoption Act 2010 gives a clear expression in law of the Authority's mandate and functions, reflecting the modern realities of adoption services in developed and developing countries. The ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Inter-country Adoption as part of the Adoption Act 2010 provides an internationally agreed set of standards. The clarity of expression of these standards, relating to both international and domestic adoption, gives very strong support to the Authority in the decision-making processes for which it is responsible.

The Authority and CEO are giving leadership to the organisational structure and are developing existing and new capacities to meet the broadened remit set out in legislation, in particular as regards regulation, policy, research and information. Establishing a strong governance structure to meet the levels of accountability, scrutiny and requirements for transparency are also important priorities.

The challenges faced by the Authority are set against the backdrop of constrained resources, budgetary and otherwise, in the public service context. The transition from the pre-existing legal and organisational arrangements of the former Adoption Board and managing the inevitable structural and cultural changes and legacy issues are also important elements which feature in the first – middle phases of the Business Plan.

Environment

There are other issues which arise from the wider consideration of the environment within which the Authority operates. The appointment of a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to the Cabinet; the related establishment of a Department of Children and Youth Affairs; changes in the organisation of child and family services within the Health Services Executive and the Authority's accreditation of adoption and mediation agencies are all significant events. Accreditation of a number of other agencies is under consideration and progress is expected in this area by the end of 2012. All these organisations are key partners to the Authority in the world of adoption. Changes need to be carefully monitored and changing relationships actively supported. There are also policy, legislative and constitutional changes mooted, which will impact on the current role and functions of the Authority and/or on the demand for adoption and adoption-related services. The capacity of the Authority to respond to and manage any changes in demand will need careful monitoring in the context of constrained resources.

The Authority is conscious of the strongly held views of individuals, organisations and support groups on adoption law, policy and practice, both past and present. The Authority supports the Government in providing a service for children who need an alternative family placement. The focus is on the child as the first and paramount consideration in its decision-making. These are essential and important voices in the adoption process – all of these voices will be listened to and heard in order to provide responsive and supportive services. The first step was the online public consultation carried out in 2011 to inform the development of this plan. The subsequent steps in 2012 include the Chief Executive Officer's schedule of meetings with stakeholders, which will be a regular feature of the Business Plan. The Authority has a vital role in providing accurate, appropriate, timely information on all aspects of adoption to Government, service providers and all those in receipt of services (i.e. children and natural/birth and adoptive parents involved in the adoption process as well as adult adopted people and their natural/birth parents). It seeks to be the authoritative source of information on adoption issues and aims to promote balanced, informed debate on this highly sensitive and often emotive issue. In particular, the Authority acknowledges the complexities of promoting access to records, having regard to the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and precedents set by Court rulings in specific cases, against the challenge of providing such information in the current legislative void. The Authority is informing the drafting of legislation on information and tracing and will make a formal submission in this regard in the Business Plan last quarter of 2012. We look forward to the publication of this important legislation in due course.

The establishment of the Adoption Authority as the Central Authority for adoptions in Ireland, the enactment of the Adoption Act 2010, and the ratification of the Hague Convention are major milestones in adoption in Ireland. They have provided the opportunity to create a world-class organisation which provides a strong, independent and authoritative resource to Government, to its clients and to the adoption services it supports and regulates.

Principles

The Authority has identified key principles which will guide our mission, our high level goals, our objectives and the work that we carry out. **By applying these principles, we will ensure that all of our decisions have the welfare of the child as their first and paramount consideration, in accordance with Section 19 of the Adoption Act 2010.**

Child - Centeredness

- We will focus on the best interests of children and ensure that their needs are considered as paramount when they require adoption services
- We are committed to the best and true interests of the individual child and will strive to ensure that children's needs are paramount throughout the adoption process

Excellence

- We will 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 will be guided by honesty, propriety, accountability and ethical adoption practice in all of our actions and decisions
- We will 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 will be a listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those who work in adoption services, and /or are affected by adoption
- We will 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

Mission and High Level Goals

Mission

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

Goals

We have identified four key goals for the Authority and a number of specific objectives to capture the focus of our efforts over the next 3 year period.

Goal 1: To undertake and promote objective decision-making in adoption services in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.

Objectives:

- To make decisions regarding the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt, the making of adoption orders and the recognition of intercountry adoption orders
- To maintain the register of intercountry adoptions and the register of accredited bodies and to assist the General Register Office in maintaining the register of adoptions in accordance with adoption law and related laws
- To make decisions regarding the release of information to adult adoptees and birth parents, to maintain and administer the national adoption contact preference register and to provide an adoption information and tracing service to adopted persons and natural family members where no adoption agency was involved in the placement or where the Authority now holds the files of a defunct adoption society
- To create and maintain comprehensive records in respect of all applications for Adoption Orders / requests for entry on the Register of Intercountry Adoption
- To foster and develop national and international relationships with all stakeholders aimed at promoting excellence in adoption and adoption related services

Goal 2: To build capacity for excellence in adoption services both internally and externally.

Objectives:

- To build a capable and effective organisation that is well governed and efficient, both at Board and executive level
- To achieve the best use of the financial and operational resources allocated to the Authority and to ensure value for money
- To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption and post adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners
- 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

Goal 3: To support, monitor, investigate and, where necessary, to secure quality standards in adoption services.

Objectives:

- To provide a national quality standards framework for all adoption services
- To accredit and register against approved standards all agencies providing adoption services
- To provide for regular monitoring and evaluation of registered services
- To take all necessary action to ensure compliance with standards and continuous improvement planning

Goal 4: To provide a comprehensive information, research and communications framework to support the development of adoption policy, service delivery and continuous quality improvement.

Objectives:

- To compile and report on statistical information and planning / development aspects of service provision
- To undertake and promote research both internally and by engaging with appropriate academic institutions and professional bodies in order to establish appropriate research opportunities and protocols
- To provide information on adoption services, and other information directly to the general public, service users, professionals, policy makers and Government in a user-friendly format and to support others in the provision of information about adoption and adoption-related services
- To promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues
- To support Government Departments in the development of adoption and adoption-related policy

Translating High Level Goals through Strategic Objectives

The achievement of our vision and objectives will be, by necessity, an evolutionary process. In the next three years, by implementing the following specific actions, we will take a major step towards achieving that vision.

<i>Goal 1: to undertake and promote objective decision-making in adoption services in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.</i>		
Objectives	Activities	Output
To make decisions regarding the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt; the making of adoption orders, and the recognition of intercountry adoption orders	<p>Development of streamlined application/case management processes for all cases requiring decision of the Board including risk assessment process for complex cases</p> <p>Ongoing decision-making processes in respect of the granting of declarations, the approval of international referrals, the making of adoption orders and the granting of entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.</p> <p>Ongoing assessment of key judicial / quasi-judicial interpretation and emerging jurisprudence to inform internal policy and decision-making.</p>	<p>Standardised processes and documentation in place for all case management for Authority decision</p> <p>Mechanism devised and put in place to take account of evolving interpretation of jurisprudence and incorporate into standardised processes</p> <p>All applications dealt with efficiently & in a timely manner</p> <p>Making of orders/ granting of order carried out in accordance with the law</p> <p>Successful management of all litigation to ensure minimal costs and promotion of requirements of the law</p>
To maintain the register of intercountry adoptions and the register of accredited bodies and to assist the GRO in maintaining the register of adoptions in accordance with adoption law and related laws.	<p>Clear, transparent and streamlined processes to support Authority's functions in respect of the establishment and maintenance of registers of intercountry adoption and register of accredited bodies</p> <p>Development and documentation of requisite protocols with the General Registers Office</p>	<p>Registers established or transitioned and maintained up to date in real time</p> <p>Streamlined provision of information set out under Schedule 3 of the Act to the GRO in accordance with the law and in a timely manner.</p>

Objectives	Activities	Output
<p>To make decisions regarding the release of information to adult adoptees and birth parents; to maintain the national adoption contact preference register and to provide adoption information and tracing services in respect of adoptions where no agency was involved in placement or where the Authority holds the files of a defunct Adoption Society</p> <p>To create and maintain comprehensive records in respect of all applications for Adoption Orders / requests for entry on the Register of Inter-country Adoption</p>	<p>Development of streamlined application/case management process for all cases requiring decision of the Board including risk assessment process for complex cases</p> <p>Ongoing decision-making processes in respect of the release of information.</p> <p>Ongoing assessment of key judicial / quasi-judicial interpretation and emerging jurisprudence to inform internal policy and decision-making.</p> <p>Maintenance of National Adoption Contact Preference Register</p> <p>Maintenance of secure and comprehensive database of historical and new records</p>	<p>Standardised processes and documentation in place for all cases for Authority decision</p> <p>All applications dealt efficiently in a timely manner</p> <p>Making of orders/ granting of recognition of orders carried out in accordance with the law</p> <p>Successful management of all litigation to ensure minimal costs and promotion of requirements of the law</p> <p>Register maintained</p> <p>Referral of matches from NACPR to relevant agencies or internal social work staff managed in a sensitive ,timely and efficient manner</p> <p>All papers scanned onto secure database in a timely fashion and indexed for ease of reference</p> <p>Security protocols regularly revised in respect of storage of paper files / back up of electronic files</p>
<p>To foster and develop national and international relationships aimed at promoting excellence in adoption and adoption related services.</p>	<p>Development and maintenance of key national stakeholders relationships</p> <p>Leading and participating in discussions here and abroad to promote and support the effective implementation of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption.</p>	<p>Regular contact with Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Health Services Executive,</p> <p>Regular contact with Department of Foreign Affairs and other Government Departments and Agencies.</p> <p>Regular contact with key provider organisations, accredited bodies, adoptee and parent representative groups</p> <p>Regular contact with international organisations including the Hague Conference on Private International Law, UNICEF and International Social Services regarding international</p>

	<p>Development, renewal and maintenance of international relationships with Hague Convention sending States</p>	<p>developments in intercountry adoption</p> <p>Ongoing contacts with Central Authorities of Hague Convention Members</p> <p>Programme of visits/meetings to support the development of existing and new relationships with Hague countries from which children are/might be adopted to Ireland</p> <p>Investigate the feasibility of entering into 2-3 Administrative arrangements annually as appropriate</p>
	<p>Development, renewal and maintenance of international relationships with non-Hague Convention sending States in accordance with the views and approval of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</p>	<p>Investigate the feasibility of three bilateral agreements annually, where appropriate, with non-Hague countries in conjunction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General's Office</p>

Goal 2: to build capacity for excellence in adoption services both internally and externally

Objective	Activities	Output
To build a capable and effective organisation that is well governed and efficient, both at Board and executive level	Establishment and development of best practice governance in accordance with Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	<p>Development & agreement of</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respective roles of Chairperson, members and committees of the Board 2. Division of responsibility of the chairperson and CEO having regard to the relevant statutory provisions 3. Code of Conduct for Board <p>Development of Board competence and ongoing review of Board training needs</p>
	Development of the organisation to respond and deliver on the role set out in the Adoption Act, 2010 and the Corporate Plan.	<p>Staffing levels and recruitment protocols agreed with parent Department</p> <p>Effective recruitment and deployment of existing and new staff</p>
	Development of Human Resource Management and Training & Development Strategies	<p>Organisational structure review completed and implemented</p> <p>Human Resource Management processes operational</p> <p>Training & development programme developed and commenced</p>
	Record and file management system established in accordance with FOI / Data Protection legislative requirements	<p>Effective operation of PMDS</p> <p>Staff feedback mechanism developed and introduced</p> <p>All files registered and managed in accordance with file management protocols</p>
	Assessment of need and procurement of specialist services required for the effective and efficient operation of the Authority in accordance with public sector procurement rules, national and EU law	<p>FOI/Data Protection Officer appointed</p> <p>internal guidelines circulated on service management & data protection</p> <p>Shared Services, Contractual or Service Level Agreement arrangements reached in respect of</p>

		<p>ICT services</p> <p>Legal Services</p> <p>Financial Management, Payroll & Accounting systems</p> <p>Design & Print</p> <p>And other specialist services as required</p>
<p>To achieve the best use of the financial and operational resources allocated to the Authority and to ensure value for money</p>	<p>Development of the appropriate financial management, risk management, internal control and internal audit systems & procedures in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies</p> <p>Active management of Risk</p>	<p>Budget agreed with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs</p> <p>Arrangements for the delivery of accounts function, including sourcing of appropriate software and associated training, developed and agreed</p> <p>Financial procedures & procurement manual developed</p> <p>Arrangements for annual audit and reporting developed and implemented</p> <p>Audit and Risk Committee established and charter developed</p> <p>Risk Register established and maintained</p>
<p>To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners;</p>	<p>Development of Policy Implementation and Practice Guidance for adoption service providers and practitioners</p> <p>Standardised Framework for Domestic Adoption</p>	<p>Policy and practice guidance circulars prepared and issued to adoption services providers to deal with issues arising</p> <p>Case management documentation revised and circulated as required, to HSE and accredited bodies</p> <p>Standards & Practice Guidance developed/reviewed on an ongoing basis including publication of key guidance documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice Guide for Counselling of Birth Mothers and Consultation with Birth Fathers 2. Practice Guide on Concurrent Planning, Assessment of Eligibility of Child and Placement of Child for Adoption 3. Standardised Framework for Assessment of Eligibility and Suitability 4. Standardised Framework for Information and Tracing 5. Practice Guide for

	Continuous review of national & international trends in adoption service provision	<p>Mediation Services</p> <p>Emerging research and trend data incorporated into policy and decision-making processes and promulgated to adoption services providers and representative groups</p>
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	<p>Communications Plan developed and implementation commenced</p> <p>Development of quality customer services and press function to support Authority's work</p>	<p>Appropriate system to manage consultation and feedback for clients, service providers and other stakeholder groups developed and put in place by end Q3 2012</p> <p>Clear channels for input, feedback & networking, including complaints procedures in place and well promulgated</p> <p>Website content expanded, revised and consistently updated</p> <p>Information leaflets for clients of Authority Services developed and well promulgated</p> <p>Customer Services plan developed and implementation commenced</p> <p>Press function and protocols in place</p>

Goal 3: To support, monitor, investigate and, where necessary, to secure quality standards in adoption services.

Objectives	Activities	Output
To provide a national quality standards framework	<p>Develop and promulgate quality standards in respect of adoption and adoption related services</p> <p>Provide appropriate practice and procedural guidance relating to adoption and adoption-related services and clarity regarding the criteria and initial inspection regime</p> <p>Provide policy advice to the Department in respect of primary or secondary legislative requirements to underpin guidance</p>	<p>Standardised frameworks for adoption assessment, Domestic Adoption, Information & Tracing utilised in assessment of Accredited Bodies / HSE Regional Adoption Services</p> <p>Schedule for the development of standardised guidance for accredited agencies (other than those carrying out assessments) agreed and implementation commenced</p> <p>Initial Audit Guidance for Accredited Agencies agreed and implemented</p> <p>Regular correspondence, as necessary, with parent Department / Dept. of Health regarding upcoming I & T legislation and regulations in respect of Adoption legislation, as necessary</p>
To accredit and register against approved standards all agencies providing adoption services	<p>Development of monitoring / regulatory function in respect of HSE and accredited bodies</p> <p>Develop accreditation criteria/guidance in line with primary and secondary legislation</p> <p>Accredit applicant agencies against regulation and standards</p> <p>Undertake regular monitoring and evaluation of registered services</p>	<p>Staff team put in place to support Quality, Standards and Inspection function</p> <p>Criteria and Guidance to support statutory provisions promulgated, compliance requirements and sanctions defined</p> <p>Applicants processed and decisions regarding registration made in a timely manner</p> <p>Accreditations notified to Iris Oifigiúil in a timely manner</p> <p>Inspection regime for accredited bodies developed and implemented, initially through agreed schedule of service reports</p> <p>Action to ensure compliance with standards and continuous improvement planning</p>

Goal 4: To provide a comprehensive information, research and communications framework to support the development of adoption policy, service delivery and continuous quality improvement

Objective	Activities	Performance indicators
To compile and report on statistical information and planning / development aspects of service provision	<p>Compile, collate, verify and present statistical information in respect of a) domestic and b) intercountry adoptions</p> <p>Examine statistical information from multi-annual perspective to identify trends in order to plan / develop appropriate services</p>	<p>Statistical information published on website by end Q3 2012 in respect of 2011 and by end of Q1 2013 of year following that to which the figures relate from 2012 onwards</p> <p>Annual Report submitted to Minister by end Q3 2012 in respect of 2009/2010/2011 and by end of Q2 2013 on which report is based from 2012 onwards</p> <p>Business plan drawn up by end Jan annually, taking requirements of Corporate Plan, statistical evidence and other relevant information identified under Goal 2 (above) into consideration</p>
To undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity	<p>Assessment of research needs and priorities undertaken</p> <p>Promotion of research development individually and collectively</p> <p>Collation of Irish research and development on adoption library resource</p>	<p>Research Programme developed</p> <p>Initial research undertaken and promulgated</p> <p>Establishment of an Research Advisory Committee for adoption law, policy and practice</p> <p>Active engagement with relevant Departmental and Academic research units and professional bodies, nationally & internationally</p> <p>Development of shared research & training opportunities and protocols in the area of adoption law, policy and practice with Departmental, Provider and Academic partners</p>
To provide information directly to the general public, service users, policy makers and Government in a user-friendly format and to support others in the provision of information about adoption and adoption-related services	<p>Develop appropriate channels for rapid & effective communication, with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders utilising spoken, print and internet media</p>	<p>Circulation group(s) established and operational</p> <p>Website updated in real time</p> <p>Quality Customer Service team established and in place</p>
To promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues	<p>Develop policy and procedures for communications and media</p>	<p>Policy on media monitoring and response drawn up and implemented</p>

		Protocols for engaging with live media (e.g. radio / TV) drawn up and implemented
To support Government departments in the development of adoption-related policy and legislation	Engage, as required, with Dept of Children and Youth Affairs, of Social Protection, Dept. of Foreign Affairs, Consular Services & Embassies and other Government Departments, and relevant statutory bodies such as HSE with regard to adoption and adoption-related issues, including post-adoption services	<p>Annual meetings focused on identifying policy issues and priorities for shared action</p> <p>Timely feedback to requests for comments and views on legislative and other proposals</p>

Measuring Performance

Ensuring Implementation

The Corporate Plan sets out the overall direction for the Authority over the next 3 years and sets out the key pillars of responsibility and activity. There is a strong emphasis in this Corporate Plan on building capacity. It is acknowledged that capacity has to be built both internally and externally, to enable the Authority to deliver on its objectives. That means placing an emphasis on setting performance standards for both financial and non-financial activities and monitoring progress against those standards. As a standard-setting organisation, it is crucial that the Authority models the behaviour it seeks to support and demand of the wider system.

Following publication, a business plan will be developed for each of the years, establishing the sequence and priorities of each of the objectives and actions contained within it. This year-on-year plan is linked to the performance management development system within the organisation, providing a clearly defined set of responsibilities for individual staff members.

The Authority is also mindful that there are legislative changes proposed in the area of adoption policy. The Authority is an adaptive organisation and is flexible to changes that might emerge in the coming years. Developing a strong, expert, competent and confident staff body is central to its success. Training and development opportunities will be available to all staff to align with the performance management system and support internal capacity for further change management.

There are a number of challenges to be considered in relation to resourcing the Corporate Plan

These challenges are:

- to ensure that the Authority has the resources necessary to fulfil its statutory functions as prescribed in the Adoption Act 2010.
- to ensure that those resources, in real terms, will not be reduced over the period of the Corporate Plan.
- to make arrangements which will allow the Authority to deploy sufficient and appropriately experienced people to carry through the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.
- to agree with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the additional resources necessary for the continued expansion of the Authority's services.

The provision of financial and human resources is critical to the full implementation of the Corporate Plan and the work of the Authority over the period.2012-2015.

Reporting

The Authority works closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Authority will continue to report to the Minister and the Department on an ongoing basis on matters of concern and progress made in the key areas of activity.

The Authority will provide an annual Business Plan to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Annual Accounts and Annual Reports as required by the Adoption Act, 2010.

Corporate governance systems to be developed as part of this plan will be focused on ensuring that the implementation of the Corporate Plan is directed and controlled to the achievement of the mission and objectives. In the demand-led area of the Authority's work, control mechanisms are important to ensuring that urgent demand does not deflect the Authority from the full range of its statutory obligations. Robust systems for the identification and management of risk will be developed to assist in managing and assessing work priority and distribution. A corporate code of conduct will be developed underpinning the standards of accountability and integrity that our stakeholders expect from the organisation.

As a public body, the Authority is also subject to a range of statutory external control mechanisms including, inter alia, Comptroller and Auditor General⁴, Public Accounts Committee⁵, Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children, Information Commissioner and Data Protection Commissioner.

Conclusion

This Corporate Plan covers the period from 2012-2015. However, as many of our stakeholders will know, the work is already underway. The Authority continues to carry out the many functions associated with the adoption process, mindful of the very personal and urgent nature of the services it provides.

It is vital that the Authority meets the full range of its statutory obligations and ensures adherence to the law in all of the processes it oversees. It is important to ensure that processes put in place are robust and that the decisions made are not only in line with the legal requirements but will stand the test of time. The remainder of 2012 and much of the coming years will be focused on (i) internal reorganisation of its own resources; (ii) the streamlining of processes for all applications before the Authority; (iii) the development of standards (training and documentation) for managers and practitioners in the field; and (iv) improvements in communications across all of our stakeholders (v) the development of accreditation, regulation and monitoring systems (vi) development of research into adoption matters.

The Authority looks forward to continue working with all of its stakeholders, both now and over the coming years and would like to express our thanks for the contributions that have informed its future work.

⁴ The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) conduct annual audits of our receipts and expenditures, our systems, procedures and practices, together with period value for money reviews.

⁵ The Chief Executive Officer, as Accounting Officer, will appear before the Committee to deal with issues raised by the C& AG in his Annual Report and any other matter relating to our activities that the Committee might wish to examine.

Appendix 1

Section 96 of the Adoption Act, 2010

96.—(1) Without prejudice to the functions assigned to the Authority under this Act or any other enactment, the functions of the Authority include the following:

- (a) on and after the establishment day, performing the functions in relation to adoptions that before that day were performed by An Bord Uchtála;
 - (b) as specified in section 66, performing in the State the role of a Central Authority under the Hague Convention;
 - (c) at the request of the Minister, providing general advice to him or her about adoption matters;
 - (d) undertaking or assisting in research projects and activities relating to adoption services;
 - (e) compiling statistical information and other records as to the proper planning, development and provision of those adoption services;
 - (f) maintaining the register of accredited bodies; and
 - (g) maintaining the register of intercountry adoptions.
- (2) The Authority has all the powers as are necessary or expedient for the performance by it of its functions.
- (3) The Authority may make such enquiries as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions.
- (4) The Authority shall endeavour to ensure that its adoption enquiries under this Act and adoption hearings before the Authority are conducted in a non-adversarial manner.

Appendix 2

Section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010

108.—(1) The Authority shall prepare, adopt and at the times specified in subsection (2), submit to the Minister for approval a Corporate Plan for the 3 years immediately following the date of its submission.

(2) A Corporate Plan shall be submitted at the following times:

(a) within 6 months of the establishment day;

(b) within 6 months of the appointment of a new Minister for Health and Children if he or she requests that a new Corporate Plan be submitted;

(c) at the end of the 3 year period since the last Corporate Plan was submitted.

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

(a) the key objectives of the Authority for the 3 year period concerned and the strategies for achieving those objectives, and

(b) the uses to which the Authority proposes to apply its resources.

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

(5) Within 3 months of receiving a Corporate Plan, the Minister shall—

(a) approve the plan, or

(b) refuse to approve the plan if the plan is not amended in accordance with any directions that may be given by the Minister to the Authority.

(6) An approved Corporate Plan may be amended by the Minister at any time or may be amended by the Authority, but in the latter case only after—

(a) the Authority submits the proposed amendment to the Minister for approval, and

(b) the amendment is approved by the Minister.

(7) Subsections (3) to (6) apply with the necessary modifications in respect of an amendment by the Authority to an approved Corporate Plan.

(8) Nothing in a Corporate Plan is to be taken to prevent the Authority from, or to limit the Authority in, performing its functions.

(9) The Minister shall ensure that a copy of an approved Corporate Plan is laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas—

(a) within 21 days of the plan being approved by the Minister, and

(b) if the plan is amended under subsection (6) after being approved by the Minister, within 21 days of—

(i) in the case of an amendment made by the Minister, the making of the amendment, or

(ii) in the case of an amendment made by the Authority, the approval of the amendment by the Minister.

(10) The Authority shall ensure that, as soon as practicable after copies of an approved plan are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, the plan is published—

(a) on the Internet, and

(b) in accordance with such other arrangements as the Minister may specify.

(11) The Authority shall provide the Minister with a progress report on the implementation of an approved Corporate Plan for the Authority in the Authority's annual report and, at the request of the Minister, at other times that the Minister may specify.