



Guidance for managers supporting colleagues who are adopting

This document provides guidance only and should be read in conjunction with the adoption/surrogacy leave policy.

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1. Why this guide

The adopting process is a long journey that consists of a range of stages. These span registration (with an adoption agency), initial meetings, checks and assessments, intense training, panel decisions, the matching and placement processes, and further meetings with social workers. Royal Holloway is committed to supporting parents wanting to adopt, and College policy covers the practical aspects of adoption, including process and pay, and is relevant those who are newly matched with a child for adoption.

The purpose of this guide is to help managers understand the adoption process as a 'lived experience', and covers all stages including the assessment/pre-matching period and the period following return to work after adoption leave. It highlights the complexity of the process and the challenges prospective adopters face when trying to navigate through all stages of this complex and emotionally draining process, whilst at the same time trying to maintain a successful career.

2. The adoption process

Once individuals who want to adopt register their interest, an initial meeting with social workers takes place and the process of checks and references starts. While this stage lasts normally for approximately two months, there can be an enforced break between this and the next stage of adoption, if the adoption agency requires that the adopter(s) need to implement a change (such as purchase larger accommodation) or if the agency needs to explore any health concerns of adopters.

The second stage, which lasts approximately 4 months, consists of assessments, intensive training and regular meetings with a social worker.

In parallel to these stages, adopters also need to be able to demonstrate experience of childcare experience such as volunteering with children. While this is not an official requirement, it is expected. This experience has to extend beyond babysitting for family and/or friends.

Following these stages, a panel convenes to assess whether they consider the prospective parents suitable for adoption. Once permission has been granted, adopting agencies work with local authorities to commence the matching process/appointments commence. This stage can take a long time as arrangements can fall through. In addition, adopters need to ensure they are engaging consistently with the adoption database in order to express interest in a particular child/children in a timely manner.

It is important to bear in mind that the adoption process doesn't end with the placement of the child/children with the prospective adopters. Once placement takes place, regular meetings with social workers occur, with some, not all, appointments requiring both parents to be present if there are two. These meetings take place at least once a month and continue until legal adoption is complete.

Legal adoption can happen within months of placement but can also take up to a year or even two if there are complications in the process.

Requirements for social worker meetings, including the reality of not knowing whether the adoption process will complete successfully, have implications for the adopters after they return from adoption leave, regardless of whether they are the main or supporting adopter.

"The adoption assessment period is extremely stressful, as you have no control over it. Each stage has to be completed within a designated time period and you have no choice in the matter in terms of time etc. It is an exceptionally time-consuming and emotionally draining process. We underwent ten full-time sessions of multi-hour interviews at the second stage plus 6 days of training. There was a period of time we didn't know whether we were going to get through this stage to get to the next one." Staff member, Royal Holloway

3. How line managers can support staff

- Read the College adoption policy so that you are familiar with the process and pay.
- Talk to the staff member about informing HR so that they can meet with the employee to discuss the policy and process.
- Discuss with the employee how they want the process of disclosure to the rest of the team to be managed. It may be the case that the employee does not want to tell others about the process as at any point (including during the assessment, panel, matching and placement periods) the process can be cut short.
- The College policy states that the main adopter is entitled time off for up to five occasions to attend adoption appointments (meetings with social workers or meetings with the child/ren), with the secondary adopter entitled to take paid time off for up to two appointments. In the context of this, it is important to support staff in terms of flexible working at this time so they can attend all required appointments.
- The College policy states that Staff should provide line managers with as much notice as possible for appointments. Prospective adopters should be made aware of this requirement. However, it is important to bear in mind that staff have minimal or no control over timings of appointments which can be made with very little notice (e.g. a week's notice). With prospective

adopters expected to show one hundred percent commitment to the adoption process, this can prove to be very challenging. The process doesn't consider one's work commitments.

- Bear in mind that newly matched children live with the adopting parent(s) for a period of time before the adopting parent(s) can apply to court for official adoption. This is a time where bonding takes place. Support for flexible working is also crucial at this point.