

# Education Secretary urges overhaul to adoption system

An overly bureaucratic system that places too high a burden on parents who want to adopt is making it harder for people who want to give a child a stable home, the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has today warned.

In a speech to coincide with National Adoption Week, the Education Secretary said “too many lifestyle judgements” are made on potential adopters, with the consequence that there are not enough adoptive parents to go around. The shortfall is resulting in children being “bounced around the system” as they wait for a family, he added.

Figures published today show that there are currently around 2,400 children waiting for adoption but just over 1,800 approved adopters who are ready to give them a home.

The government has previously made it clear that any families considering adoption will be supported and has today confirmed that £6.5 million was provided to local authorities and regional adoption agencies to help adoptive families facing greater stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is alongside the government’s Adoption Support Fund which has provided nearly 61,000 adoptive and special guardianship order families across the country with therapeutic support since its launch in 2015, backed by nearly £175 million.

The Education Secretary also announced a further £2.8 million in funding for Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The money will allow them to continue to deliver their adoption activities during the pandemic, including recruiting adopters to be matched with children waiting.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

When it comes to adoption, what we have seen over a number of years is something I can only call narrow mindedness or even snobbery.

For example, some local authorities make it harder to adopt if you rent your home rather than own it, or if you’re not a perfect ethnic match. These outdated messages are putting off people who would otherwise come forward when the only qualification you need is the ability to love and care for a child.

I am urging local authorities to help us break down these barriers so that we can unite more children with the families they deserve so much.

While safeguards must not be relaxed and checks must remain in place, the Education Secretary announced his intention to change the process that leads

to lifestyle-judging that is making adoption a daunting experience for many.

Given Black and Minority Ethnic children often wait the longest to be adopted, he also warned that we must end an “obsession with finding the perfect ethnic match for children”, stating that there is no acceptable reason why adopters should be blocked from registering simply because there are no children of the same ethnicity waiting to be adopted.

At the same time a national campaign will launch next month to reach out to churches, mosques and other community groups starting with a pilot service in London and Birmingham, to reinforce these points and encourage more potential Black and other minority ethnic adopters to come forward.

Maggie Jones, Chief Executive of Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, said:

Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) across England are hugely grateful for the additional funding provided by Government in this difficult time. It has enabled us to continue our vital work supporting hundreds of adoptive families at a time of great stress and preparing new adoptive parents to provide forever, loving homes for many children who need them.

VAAs provide a quarter of all adoptive placements and the choice they offer is particularly important for the Black and minority ethnic communities with whom we work. We really appreciate the confidence the Government has shown in VAAs and we will continue working with partners across the social care system to create positive futures for our most vulnerable children.

Dr Krish Kandiah, Founding Director of Home for Good, said:

We have been delighted to play our part in addressing the persistent racial disparity in adoption and are so encouraged to see a continued commitment to this critically important issue from the Secretary of State today. It has been our privilege at Home for Good to assist with training hundreds of social workers across the country in faith and cultural literacy and to pilot a new project helping to find adopters of Black children waiting for adoption.

We are grateful for the funding that the Government has made available for this work. We recognise that lasting change is a marathon and not a sprint, so greatly look forward to working together to find a loving, safe and permanent family for every child who needs one.

Helping deliver on a manifesto commitment, more Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) are going live each month, with the current number now being 25 covering 119 local authorities (79%). Data published today highlights RAAs

have shown early promise in speeding up the time it takes to match children waiting for adoptive families. The speech comes after the Education Secretary asked councils in January to put adoption at the top of their agendas, and to make sure that people are not being turned away because they were too old, or had a low income, or because of their faith or sexual orientation.

Earlier this year the Department for Education provided £6.5 million to local authorities and regional adoption agencies to help adoptive families facing “greater stress” during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is funding activities such as virtual peer to peer support, access to helplines, couples therapy and online counselling, given the social distancing measures that have been brought in by the Government to protect the NHS and save lives.

It comes as the Department for Education confirms it has spent almost £175 million on the Adoption Support Fund since it was launched in 2015, helping nearly 61,000 adoptive and special guardianship order families across the country.

The Department for Education today published research that found RAAs are taking a more strategic approach to marketing, incorporating targeted marketing activities, and developing inclusive websites to boost efforts to increase adopter diversity, which has been important for adopter engagement.

The Government has also confirmed that it is making £4.3 billion available for local authorities to manage the impact of COVID-19, including on children’s services. Additional funding has also been provided to support the extension of the role of Virtual School Heads to promote the education of children who have left care through adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order. This is the third year of this funding, which supports the new duties which came into force in September 2018.

---

## **Cutting-edge treatments to be fast-tracked to patients through international collaborations**

- International regulators will work together to authorise promising treatments after the EU transition period
- Medicines will include cancer treatments

NHS patients could have quicker access to the next generation of cutting-edge treatments thanks to the UK teaming up with other countries to fast-track the approval process.

Now we have left the EU, the UK has complete autonomy to streamline the approval process for medicines, while maintaining the highest safety

standards.

The UK will be joining 2 initiatives bringing together some of the world's leading regulators to allow pharmaceutical companies to submit medicines to be reviewed by several countries at the same time, pooling resources and allowing patients to benefit from earlier access.

The 2 schemes are:

## **Project Orbis**

A programme coordinated by the US Food and Drug Administration involving Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Singapore and Brazil to review and approve promising cancer treatments. The scheme has already given the green light to many life-saving treatments for patients suffering from conditions such as breast cancer, lung cancer, liver cancer, endometrial cancer, and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

## **Access consortium**

A programme involving Australia, Canada, Switzerland and Singapore to help secure improved patient access to high-quality, safe and effective medicines. The consortium has previously approved 9 innovative prescription medicines, including 5 new cancer treatments.

The UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will participate as an observer of both groups before the end of 2020 and will be a full participant as of 1 January 2021 after the EU transition period.

MHRA will have the authority to make the final decision to authorise medicines onto the UK market and will have complete autonomy to streamline the approval processes even further if needed outside of both schemes.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I will stop at nothing to make sure NHS patients can access life-saving treatments as quickly as possible and now we have left the EU, we have an opportunity to speed up the time it takes to get new medicines from bench to bedside.

With the ground-breaking work on dexamethasone and other COVID-19 treatments, it is clear the UK continues to lead the way with research into the most transformative treatments.

I'm delighted the UK will be teaming up with some of the world's best regulators to put patients first by fast-tracking cutting-edge medicines after the transition period.

The aim of both groups will be to ensure that patient safety and scientific integrity is upheld to the highest possible standards, while removing red

tape and working together to get medicines onto the market quicker.

Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive, said:

We are committed to working together to ensure that UK patients are among the first to benefit from promising life-saving treatments. Through our commitment to international cooperation and innovation in regulation, the MHRA continues to be at the forefront of new developments as a global hub for life sciences.

Richard Pazdur, MD, Director, FDA Oncology Center of Excellence, said:

Project Orbis stemmed from a monthly teleconference FDA held with other regulators for about 15 years, which indicated that the US often receives applications first – sometimes months or even years before other countries.

We decided to address this by partnering with other countries and asking the pharmaceutical companies to submit applications to several regulators at about the same time, to provide early entry of these applications into their regulatory systems. To date, our partners include Australia, Canada, Singapore, Switzerland, and Brazil. We are pleased to welcome the UK's MHRA to this collaborative program.

## **Background information**

Some of the key benefits to sharing the evaluation of medicines across the group are:

- there is reduced duplication of effort leading to more efficient and effective regulatory review
- work-sharing is promoting distribution of work to facilitate regulatory decisions
- agencies are learning from each other, adopting a flexible approach to application management and using the best parts of each evaluation pathway
- sharing the evaluation of new drug applications is cost-effective for the regulators
- each agency is able to benefit from the other partners' knowledge and expertise and continually improve its regulatory practices, and there is a sharing of global regulatory intelligence
- post-market activities are helping to identify emerging safety concerns
- there is greater access to additional regulatory experts, opportunities for technical discussions and more informed decision-making
- partner agencies have gained a greater understanding of areas where their regulatory frameworks diverge, which has increased the potential for better harmonisation in the future

- there are clear efficiencies in the development of best practice, the sharing of guidance and procedural documents, and international alignment

## **MHRA**

The independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. Their work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgement to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.

The MHRA also includes the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) and the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD). MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.

---

## **Captain Sir Tom Moore presented with first Veterans Railcard**

- Captain Sir Tom Moore presented with the very first Veterans Railcard as design is unveiled
- former servicemen and women to receive up to a third off fares from Armistice Day, unlocking opportunities to re-enter work and connecting with loved ones
- Rail Minister hails selflessness and spirit of all veterans as he visits former service personnel retraining to enter construction industry

Military veterans of every generation will soon benefit from cut-price rail travel, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today (14 October 2020), as he presented Captain Sir Tom Moore with the very first Veterans Railcard.

Aimed at supporting veterans post-service, the newly unveiled railcard will provide up to a third off all peak and off-peak fares, as well as discounted travel for adult companions and children. It forms part of the government's commitment to make this country the best place to be a veteran, helping repay the debt we all owe to those who have served.

At his home in Bedfordshire Captain Tom Moore, who served in World War II and won the nation's hearts with his incredible fundraising efforts, was presented with the very first card.

The card pays tribute to the Royal Navy, RAF and Army, using the colours featured on the veterans' flag. An estimated 830,000 veterans, who are not eligible for existing railcards, will now be able to get up to a third off rail travel from 5 November 2020.

The new card will be on sale at an introductory price of £21 until 31 March 2021.

Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary, said:

We have an eternal debt of honour to those who have served our country and this railcard is part of marking our gratitude. For veterans looking to re-enter the world of work and connect with friends and family, it will cut the cost of travel to open up new opportunities. Delivering this Manifesto promise will improve lives for veterans and their families across the United Kingdom.

I am also delighted to present Sir Captain Tom Moore with the very first railcard. Through his service and his inspirational fundraising, he has shown the selflessness and indomitable spirit of all those who have served.

Captain Sir Tom Moore, Captain Tom Foundation, said:

This is a wonderful occasion to accept the first Veterans Railcard.

It is a rare opportunity to show thanks and gratitude to veterans and this railcard is a necessary recognition and investment in veterans, giving them the ability to re-connect and combat loneliness, something that we promote and support at the Captain Tom Foundation.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris also visited the [Building Heroes](#) centre in Wandsworth, to meet with veterans undergoing a 6-week training course in building and construction.

Targeted at teaching veterans new skills and tackling unemployment by delivering a seamless transition into a career in the construction industry, Chris Heaton Harris discussed how the railcard would support re-entering civilian life after service.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

Providing discounted rail travel is a fantastic way to underline the debt of gratitude we owe to those who have served.

For younger veterans, it will also help boost employment prospects, allowing more flexibility in their travel to work or job interviews.

Charles Byrne, Director General of The Royal British Legion said:

Every day our armed forces community provide an incredible service in so many ways and it's right their unique contribution is recognised.

We welcome the introduction of measures such as the new Veterans Railcard that will allow veterans and their families to enjoy discounted rail fares.

At a time when many veterans are facing significant financial hardship, we hope as many as possible will be able to enjoy the benefits this card will bring when travelling by train.

Help for Heroes CEO, Melanie Waters said:

We are pleased that the government will make good on its promise to introduce a railcard for veterans and extend discounted train travel to former service personnel in England.

The pandemic is having a lasting impact on veterans and their families both financially and socially, and its introduction will come at a welcome time.

---

## [UK donation helps Zacapa regional hospital to fight COVID-19](#)

World news story

The UK government donated 432 quick COVID-19 tests to help Guatemala's regional hospital in Zacapa.



The Guatemalan Ministry of Health approved the donation and was processed into the country's aid system by CONRED. This support is estimated to worth



more than 250,000 quetzals.

As soon as the pandemic exploded, the UK invested in several projects in Guatemala aimed at tackling the impact of the COVID-19. Special assistance has been provided to:

1. Helping indigenous communities in Sololá to cover some of their basic food needs,
2. Training women leaders on health issues in Quiche, Huehuetenango and Alta Verapaz, and
3. Working with Agexport to encourage municipalities to develop and implement COVID-19 protocols and economic reactivation.

Currently, the UK government is working with Guatemala to secure the country's access to a potential vaccine for COVID-19. We are encouraging governments around the world to support mechanisms such as COVAX and GAVI, to have access to the vaccines they need.

Published 13 October 2020

---

## [UK elected to UN Human Rights Council for the term 2021-23](#)

Press release

The UK has today been successful in its bid for election to the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2021-23



This follows a year-long campaign, resulting in a high number of votes from countries around the world.

Following the announcement of the election results in New York today, UK Human Rights Minister Lord Ahmad said:

As a founding member of the UN Human Rights Council, the UK has been a strong advocate of its vital work since its inception, and we are honoured to be elected for a fifth term.

We will keep using our voice to help strengthen the Council, and to support countries working to improve their human rights record. We will continue to hold to account all those responsible for the worst violations and abuses.

The UK strives to be a force for for good in the world, working to protect the most vulnerable from some of the most pressing global human rights issues. This includes making sure girls' have access to a quality education, working to end violence against women and girls, standing up for democratic values and media freedom, and protecting freedom of religion or belief.

I thank those who supported our candidacy and look forward to working closely with the members of the Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and civil society to deliver our election pledges.

Published 13 October 2020