

## PRACTICE NOTE 36

# UPDATE ON ADOPTION REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE (ENGLAND & WALES)

*Written by Deborah Cullen, Secretary to BAAF Legal Group*

## INTRODUCTION

This practice note provides information on recent changes in the law in England and Wales; it does not seek to cover the entire range of legislation and Regulations. It also addresses changes that have taken place since Practice Note 29 (*The Children Act: Implications for adoption practice in England and Wales*).

## LIST OF REGULATIONS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 (SI 1964 of 1983)

The Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997 (SI 649 of 1997) (called “the first 1997 Regulations” in this Practice Note)

The Children (Protection from Offenders) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997 (SI 2308 of 1997) (called “the later 1997 Regulations” in this Practice Note)

Local Authority Circular LAC(97)13

Local Authority Circular LAC(97)17

Department of Health Guidance to Local Authorities on Intercountry Adoption, June 1997 (to be revised shortly)

Children Act Advisory Committee Best Practice Guidance, July 1997

## AMENDMENTS TO ADOPTION AGENCIES REGULATIONS 1983

The 1983 Regulations remain in force, subject to amendments contained in the two 1997 sets of Regulations. The principal amendments are contained in the first 1997 Regulations, but there are also minor amendments in the later 1997 Regulations.

## Changes to adoption panel composition

The first 1997 Regulations substitute an entirely new Regulation 5A to set out the requirements for the composition of the panel. This part of the Regulations came into force on 1 November 1997. Except where two or three local authorities establish a joint panel, the panel must consist of no more than 10 members, including at least one man and one woman, appointed as follows:

- The chairperson
- Two social workers in the employment of the agency
- The agency’s medical adviser (or, if the agency has more than one medical adviser, one of them)
- One councillor (for local authorities) or a member of the agency’s management committee (for voluntary organisations)
- Three members independent of the agency – i.e. neither employees nor members. The Regulations stipulate that, ‘where reasonably practicable’, the independent members should include an adoptive parent and an adopted adult. The Guidance acknowledges that it is desirable for the independent members to include any people with personal experience of adoption, birth parents as well as adopters and adopted people. The Guidance also reminds agencies of the need to reflect the composition of the local community in the choice of their independent panel members. For suggestions on the recruitment of panel members see *Effective Panels*.<sup>1</sup>

One of the panel members must be appointed by the agency to be Vice Chair of the panel, to act in the absence of the Chair.

The quorum for panel members consists of six members, to include the Chair or Vice Chair and a social worker from the agency.

As under the original 1983 Regulations, the other panel members may be chosen by the agency as they wish, but there is no provision for casual appointments or for other individuals to deputise for appointed panel members.

### **Length of service of panel members**

Apart from the medical adviser, panel members must be appointed to serve for no longer than three years, which may be immediately followed by a further term of three years. In order to ensure some continuity, Regulation 5A(2) requires agencies to arrange panel members' tenure so that as far as possible one third of the members retire each year, even if this means that some will only serve one or two years. After two terms of office, a panel member may not be reappointed to the same panel for three years.

### **Joint panels**

The amended Regulations permit two or three local authorities to establish a joint panel. In this case the maximum number of members is eleven. One councillor from each local authority must be appointed, and one social worker from each agency. The quorum is increased to seven. Since the wording of Regulation 5(4) still applies to this larger quorum – i.e. that it must include, as well as the Chair or Vice Chair, 'a social worker from the agency', this leaves some ambiguity in the Regulation itself as to whether this means one social worker from each agency. Although the Guidance (paragraph 10.17) says that it does, this advice is shortly to be amended, and the small number of authorities which have set up joint panels are being advised that it is not necessary to have a social worker from each agency present to ensure a quorum. If the agencies have different medical advisers, the medical adviser from one agency only is to be appointed to the panel.

### **Changes in process**

#### **Agency decision maker**

As was previously the case, the panel makes recommendations, not decisions. It is for the agency to decide who is to have the power to make the decisions, taking into account the panel's recommendations. The decision maker, however, must not be a member of the panel.

#### **Prospective adopters**

- *Criminal records*  
The later 1997 Regulations set out for the first time in Regulations (rather than merely in Guidance) the requirement for the agency to obtain details of any conviction or caution recorded against the prospective adopter or any adult members of their household. Convictions or cautions for any offence specified in the schedule to the Regulations make it impossible for the agency to approve the applicant as a prospective adopter. The Regulations and Guidance are silent as to the frequency of repeated criminal records checks; good practice suggests that applicants who are being considered for a possible placement should have a further check if the previous one is three years old, or possibly if it is more than two years old. There may need to be negotiations with the local police authority to establish what will be workable in practice. Obviously if anything has occurred to alert the agency staff to the need for a further check within a shorter period this should be carried out.
- *Reports*  
Regulation 8(2) (as amended by the first 1997 Regulations) provides that the agency, when it has completed its report for presentation to panel, must give the prospective adopter(s) a copy of the part of the report consisting of the assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability, and must allow them 28 days to send observations in writing on the assessment which will also be presented to the panel. If the prospective adopters confirm that they do not wish to make observations, or send them in before the 28 days have expired, it is not necessary to wait for the full 28 days. Although the Regulations provide for observations to be submitted in writing, there is no reason why the agency should not make provision for the applicants to make oral representations to the panel, and the Guidance says that any such request should be considered sympathetically. Indeed, an increasing number of panels now provide for applicants to attend panel meetings routinely.
- *Adverse decisions*  
If, after taking into account the panel's recommendation, the agency decision maker is inclined to decide that the prospective adopter is not suitable to be an adoptive parent, the agency must give the prospective adopter written notice that this is the case, and set out the reasons for the proposed decision, with the panel's recommendation, if different. The prospective adopter then has 28 days

to make representations to the agency. Any representations must be considered, and the agency decision maker may refer them to the panel or to another panel; if they are referred, the panel must consider them and make its recommendation. The decision maker then makes the final decision, taking into account the panel's recommendation if the case was referred back to it; if the decision is that the prospective adopter is not approved, the reasons must be given. It appears that there has been some confusion in practice about this process. It is not the panel's adverse recommendation that must be notified to the prospective adopter, but the provisional decision by the agency's decision maker. The decision maker must therefore have considered the panel recommendation and formed his or her own view. If the decision maker's provisional decision is at odds with the panel recommendation, the prospective adopter must also be given notice of the panel's recommendation. It should be noted that where a decision not to approve a prospective adopter is required because the adopter or a member of his or her household has a "specified conviction" as defined by the later 1997 Regulations, the agency is not required to give the prospective adopter an opportunity to make representations before the decision is confirmed. The Regulations (Reg 8A(3)) do, however, require the agency to notify the prospective adopter as soon as possible after becoming aware that there is a relevant conviction or caution, and this should allow the possibility of any error to be investigated. For some discussion of potential difficulties over confidentiality see *Effective Panels*.

## Notifications

The first 1997 Regulations also provide that the Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 no longer apply to the placement of children for adoption. Instead, amendments to the Adoption Agencies Regulations ensure that the necessary notifications are provided for. This rectifies some previous inconsistencies between the unamended 1983 Regulations and the Arrangements for Placement Regulations.

- *Parents*  
Parents or guardians of a child (including a father without parental responsibility where the agency considers this to be in the child's interests) must be given written notice not only of the agency's decision that adoption is in the child's best interests but also of a proposed placement for adoption once a match has been agreed. Notification of a plan to place the child will only be unnecessary if the child has been freed for adoption and the parent has made a declaration that he or she does not wish to have any further involvement.
- Although the first 1997 Regulations disapply the Arrangements for Placement Regulations to the placement of a child for adoption, where a child is looked after by a local authority, a decision as to whether adoption is in a child's best interests is clearly a decision under s21(4) Children Act 1989, and therefore requires the local authority to consult with the relevant people before making the decision, including of course the child, relatives, and current carers. The Arrangements for Placement Regulations require that any people thus consulted should be informed of the decision when it is reached, and it will therefore be a requirement (as well as good practice) to inform a child (of sufficient age and understanding) and all other people who have been consulted, once a decision is made that adoption is in the child's best interests.
- *The child*  
Under the Adoption Agencies Regulations the child is to be informed of a decision about a placement with prospective adopters at the point when they have accepted the agency's proposal to place the child. This will be in addition to any duty under the Arrangements for Placement Regulations to keep the child informed of earlier decisions.
- *Others*  
The notifications to be given to other agencies (local authority, health authority and education authority) prior to placement are as set out in Regulation 12(2) AAREgs 1983, and any discrepancies with the requirements of the Arrangements for Placement Regulations are removed. As mentioned above, it will be necessary to ensure that information is shared with other appropriate individuals following important decisions whether or not there is a statutory requirement. Obvious examples are relatives who have been consulted about plans for the child, and current carers.

## **Health monitoring**

There is little change in practice to the health monitoring of a child after placement for adoption, but the requirements are now all included in the amended Adoption Agencies Regulations i.e., the requirement for regular medical examinations (at six-monthly intervals for children under two, and annually for older children). The paragraph of the Regulations requiring the child's health to be monitored during placement 'to the extent that the agency's medical adviser considers necessary' is removed, but the need in practice to consult with the medical adviser about the appropriate level of monitoring remains. The new Part VIII of the schedule to the Regulations (Considerations to be included in review) also draws attention to the need for appropriate monitoring.

## **Reviews**

Provision for reviews on children placed for adoption is now included in the amended Adoption Agencies Regulations. Arrangements for conducting these reviews are to be set out in writing, and these written arrangements must be drawn to the attention of the child (of sufficient age and understanding), the prospective adopters and any other person the agency considers relevant (Reg 12(3)). The fact that these reviews are no longer governed by the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 does not mean, however, that many of the practice guidelines for the conduct of other reviews have no relevance to the reviews of children placed for adoption. It will be advisable for the arrangements to be looked at alongside the written arrangements for adoption generally which must be drawn up in consultation with the adoption panel as required by Regulation 6. There is no requirement as under the Review Regulations for a nominated co-ordinating officer to be appointed, but the involvement of the reviews co-ordinating officer in the consideration of the arrangements for reviews and their monitoring is likely to be helpful. The way in which the reviews are conducted will differ in some respects from the arrangements for reviews on other looked after children (the presence of the birth parents, for example, will probably be unusual) and the Regulations take account of this. They also acknowledge, in the "Considerations to be included in the review" (new Part VIII of the schedule to the Regulations), that some of the matters which need to be considered in other cases will not apply to children placed for adoption. Although there is no specific requirement for the review to consider why no application has yet been lodged for an adoption order, or whether any particular action is needed to enable this to happen, this should clearly be one of the questions to be addressed. If the adoption panel is to be kept informed about the progress of individual cases (as is suggested in paragraph 55 of LAC (97) 13) it is likely to want to know the answer to such a question. The "Considerations" in Part VIII of the schedule set out only a minimum list – there are likely to be other matters, particularly in relation to ongoing post-placement support, which will need to be considered and it is important that the prospective adopters are given opportunities to raise these issues. Regulations 12(3)(C) and 12(4) set out the requirements for recording information and decisions arising from a review, and for notifications of the result and any consequential decision of the review to be given to the relevant people – the child (if of sufficient age), the birth parents (including a father without parental responsibility if the agency considers this to be in the child's interests), the adopters and any others the agency considers appropriate.

## ***Frequency of reviews***

The agency is required to hold a review within four weeks of the placement, again after a further three months, and thereafter at intervals of not more than six months. The second and subsequent reviews are not required by the Regulations once an application has been lodged for an adoption order, but if the proceedings are protracted it is advisable for a further review to be held in any case. Indeed the Guidance indicates that reviews continue to be required at the same frequency until the adoption order is made, and this is undoubtedly good practice.

## ***Reviews of children freed for adoption but not placed***

Regulation 13(1) of the 1983 Regulations is retained which means that a review must be held six months after the making of a freeing order if the child has not been placed for adoption. It may be possible to combine this review with the six monthly review under the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 (which, of course, will still apply since the child is not placed for adoption) but it is important to ensure that this review specifically addresses the reasons why no placement has been made and what further action is needed to achieve an adoptive placement. Logically, the arrangements for conducting these reviews should be drawn up alongside those required under Regulation 12(3). Again, consideration should be given to the involvement of the panel in such cases.

## **Other amendments**

### **“Package” of information**

The first 1997 Regulations insert a new Regulation 13A which requires the agency, as soon as practicable after the making of the adoption order, to provide the adopters with ‘such information as they consider appropriate’. The agency is also required to advise the adopters that the information is to be made available to the child when they consider it appropriate, but no later than the child’s 18th birthday. There is, of course, no means for the agency to enforce this, but the preparation of the adopters should have included consideration of what, how and when they are going to share with the child information about his or her background. This new requirement does not in any way replace the existing requirement under Regulation 12(1) to provide the prospective adopters with full information about the child and his or her history and background before the adopters decide whether they wish to accept the agency’s proposal to place the child with them. The Guidance to the new Regulations suggests that the information to be provided under Regulation 13A will be material that was not given to the adopters before placement, but agencies will want to consider whether the information they have already provided is still readily available, and whether the adopters appreciate the need to make it accessible to the child. In case of loss the agency will need to ensure that it keeps a copy of any material which is given to the adopters under this provision.

Some confusion has been caused by the wording of paragraph 58 of the Guidance (LAC(97)13) which says, ‘Care must nevertheless be taken to anonymise the material and exceptionally, exclude confidential information about third parties, or information provided in confidence and not for wider dissemination’. The confusion is heightened by the fact that this paragraph appears in the context of setting out advice about what should be in a child’s adoption case record, but seems to be talking about what should be passed to the adopters for the child. There cannot be any justification for anonymising the material actually held on the adoption case record, but there may be material which will need to be “edited” before it is passed on to the child or a third party. Examples of information that may need to be anonymised, unless the individuals have agreed to the sharing of the information concerned, could include details of siblings placed elsewhere for adoption, and arguably any information about the child’s father where he was not married to the child’s mother and has not acknowledged paternity. Other material on the child’s adoption case file that should probably not be included in the information handed to the adopters to hold for the child includes the minutes of the adoption panel meeting where the proposed match with the adopters was recommended (particularly when the panel meeting also included consideration of alternative adopters) and the Schedule 2 Report prepared under the Adoption Rules, which is only to be disclosed with the court’s permission. Certain material held by the agency will be of particular importance to the adopted person in the future – material such as original letters from members of the birth family and photographs, and where there are not duplicates of these a decision will have to be made, in discussion with the adopters and the child if he or she is old enough, about where the originals should be kept. If the original is given to adopters, a copy must be kept on the file.

### **Storage of records**

Minor amendments are made to Regulations 14 and 15. New Regulation 14(4) (which had to be amended by the later 1997 Regulations because of a printing error in the first 1997 Regulations) requires the records to be stored in such a way as to minimise the risk of fire or water damage. Regulation 15 is amended to provide specifically, in case of doubt, that the records may be disclosed to a person appointed by the agency to investigate a complaint.

### **Reports to court in non-agency adoptions**

The later 1997 Regulations insert a new paragraph 17A into the 1983 Regulations to require local authorities to undertake police checks in respect of adoption applicants and adult members of their household in non-agency adoptions. It is helpful to have this requirements clarified, since this has in the past been a matter of some uncertainty, particularly with regard to relative and step-parent adoptions. It should be noted that there are no exceptions. This particular requirement is rather curiously placed within the Adoption Agencies Regulations, since the duties falling on a local authority under section 22(2) Adoption Act 1976 fall on it as a local authority rather than as an adoption agency. The Regulations do not, because they cannot, amend Schedule 2 of the Adoption Rules 1984 to require any information gained from a police records check to be included in the Report, but obviously it is appropriate for the court to be informed. Where a local authority’s organisation means that section 22(2) investigations and Schedule 2 Reports are prepared by social workers outside the specialist

family placement team, it is important that this requirement is brought to the attention of those responsible for this task, since the format of the Schedule 2 Report will not specify it.

## **OTHER DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH GUIDANCE**

As well as Guidance on the amending Regulations, LAC(97)13 includes Guidance on other aspects of the adoption agency's work. This circular states that the earlier circular issued in relation to the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 (LAC(84)3) remains in force, and the earlier circular does indeed include much helpful Guidance. Unfortunately some of it has been rendered out of date by a combination of practice developments and the implementation of the Children Act 1989, for example, the advice in paragraph 36 concerning 'access' which refers to legislation that is now repealed, and the instructions in paragraph 94 about arranging for the child to be given an NHS card with the proposed new name immediately after placement. In many cases compliance with these instructions would be in breach of the prohibition in the Children Act against change of a child's surname without the agreement of all those with parental responsibility. The contents of this circular should therefore be approached with caution, but they should certainly not be ignored.

### **Circular LAC(97)13**

References in this circular to the amending Regulations are dealt with in this practice note in the section above on the Regulations. The additional Guidance deals with the following topics:

- *Assessment stages*  
The Guidance divides the assessment process into four stages
  - Introduction (which includes the provision of information and advice)
  - Pre-assessment checks – medical reports, police and other checks, and references
  - Early referral to the adoption panel – in those cases where the pre-assessment checks have suggested that the applicant may not be suitable. The panel may advise that, in the light of the information revealed by the checks, they would be unlikely to be able to recommend approval of the applicant, or they may request the agency to continue with the full assessment. (This third stage will not apply where the pre-assessment checks appear satisfactory.)
  - The full home study report and assessment, followed by referral to the adoption panel
- *Work of adoption panels*  
The Guidance reminds panels that they will be expected to satisfy themselves that the agency has thoroughly explored and discounted all other possible options for the child before proposing adoption as in the best interests of the child
- *Protocol for panel members*  
Suggestions are made as to what might be included in a protocol for panel members. For details see *Effective Panels* which also includes additional suggestions.
- *Urgent Business*  
Agencies are reminded of the need to avoid unnecessary delay, and advised to ensure that they have a procedure for dealing with urgent cases which cannot wait for the next scheduled panel meeting. This procedure must include a means of convening a quorum of the panel at short notice – it cannot bypass the panel.
- *Decision making procedure*  
Paragraphs 50-53 of the circular restates the requirements for ensuring that the panel's recommendations are distinct from the agency's decisions. It emphasises that the decision making should be a 'measured procedure' taken only after careful consideration of the panel's recommendations. (For further discussion see *Effective Panels*.)
- *Keeping panels informed of outcomes of their work*  
Agencies are encouraged to make information available to the panel on a regular basis on the progress of cases with which they have been involved. This will obviously help to inform future work of the panel, as well as providing a possible additional safeguard for children against inappropriate delays in implementing the plan.
- *Contents of case records*

A checklist (not exhaustive) is given of material that could be expected to be kept on a child's adoption case record. As mentioned above, there is some confusion about advice on the contents of the file, and advice on the information to be handed to the adopters.

### **Guidance to local authorities on intercountry adoption**

Guidance issued by the Department of Health to local authorities in June 1997 incorporates previous Guidance in various "Chief Inspector" letters, and amends it to some extent. This Practice Note does not contain detailed information about this Guidance, but it is important to know of its existence. The Guidance among other things reiterates the advice that it is good practice for local authorities to refer to their adoption panels assessments of prospective intercountry adopters.

### **CARE PLANS**

Under the Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991, agencies looking after or accommodating children are required to draw up plans for their care. Although court rules contain no reference to these "care plans", case law has established that when local authorities bring care proceedings under s.31 Children Act 1989 they must present a clear plan to the court setting out what their plans for the child are if a care order is made.

If the care plan at the time of care proceedings is for adoption, there has in the past been some uncertainty as to the timing of the presentation of the child's case to the adoption panel. The *Best Practice Guidance*, published in July 1997 by the Children Act Advisory Committee, contains the following Guidance:

*8. If permanent placement in an alternative family is the plan, prepare the ground as far as possible without pre-empting the court's decision.*

*9. If the plan is for an adoptive placement, the court will be handicapped in assessing the plan and the time scale, unless the child concerned has already been considered and approved by the adoption and fostering panel, and potential suitable adoptive families have been identified. It is not good practice to await the making of a care order before obtaining such information, because the court is deprived of important background information and significant delay can occur in placing the child in the event of the court approving the plan*

*11. If the plan depends upon the findings of facts or determination of particular issues by the court, state why and set out clear alternative proposals.*

*12. If no firm proposal can be made, that should be made clear and explained.*

In practice, compliance with this Guidance may not be straightforward, and it is important for local authorities, in conjunction with their legal advisers, to consider how their adoption procedures can provide for the necessary work to be undertaken for a child's case to be presented to the adoption panel while care proceedings are still in train. The regulatory requirements for providing information and counselling to the child (where old enough) and the parents will still apply, but, at least where care proceedings are contested, the parents may well be in no frame of mind to take part in counselling sessions. They are, however, more likely to have ready access to legal advice than they might be if there were no court proceedings, and their solicitor may be able to help them understand the legal implications of the proposals. Agencies may wish to consider involving a social worker from another agency to provide counselling in these situations. Where parents are able to understand the reasons for the local authority's proposal for adoption, and to appreciate that the local authority has a duty to present and explain its plans to the court, without this pre-empting the court's decision, they may find it easier to co-operate with the provision of the background information that will be needed for the report to the panel. In many cases some of the material needed for the adoption panel may have been presented to the court in the form of statements or reports, and it is likely to save time if this can be used for the panel. *The court's permission will be needed, however, before any documents filed in the proceedings can be used for this purpose.* If the content of any of the reports is disputed it is essential that this is made clear to the panel.

It will sometimes be impossible for local authorities to make care plans until fundamental questions relating to the grounds for the proceedings have been dealt with, and in these circumstances case law

has established that it can be appropriate for care proceedings to be “split” into two parts. Where, for example, there is a dispute as to whether injuries are accidental or not, or whether they have been inflicted by a parent or someone outside the family, it will not be realistic to formulate a detailed care plan until the court has made a finding of fact on the issues in dispute. If the court finds that the “threshold” criteria under s.31 are satisfied, it will then be necessary to ask the court to fix the adjourned time for considerations of the appropriate order, and to allow sufficient time for any necessary assessments, and for the case to be presented to the adoption panel if appropriate.

In other cases, the principal dispute may be not over the existence of the grounds for a care order, as over matters of judgement as to the parents’ ability to meet the child’s needs. As paragraphs 11 and 12 of the *Best Practice Guidance* (above) point out, there will be some circumstances where the care plan cannot be firmly decided, and it will be important to explain the local authority’s reasoning. Where adoption is a possibility, it may nevertheless be appropriate for the panel’s views to be sought, even if they concluded that there is not yet sufficient information to enable them to make a firm recommendation.

A further area of difficulty is the question of the involvement of the child’s extended family. It will be necessary, before plans for adoption outside the family are pursued, for the local authority to consider whether there is a possibility of the child’s care being undertaken by relatives. Sometimes relatives will already have put themselves forward for consideration while the care proceedings are taking place, and there may have been sufficient time for an assessment to have taken place, but frequently relatives may hesitate to put themselves forward at this stage because they do not wish to appear to undermine the parents. Where local authorities have “permanency panels”, which consider plans for long-term fostering as well as adoption, it may be possible for the panel to make a recommendation that a permanent placement apart from the birth parents is in the child’s best interests, although at this stage no recommendation for adoption can be made, pending assessment of the possible extended family placements.

Still more controversial is the question of identifying potential adoptive families. From the agency’s point of view, this may seem premature, when not only the making of a care order but also issues about continuing contact have yet to be decided. Courts have often felt frustrated at having no time scale for implementation of an adoption plan presented to them, and they are aware that in practice there may be considerable delay in identifying a suitable placement. If it is possible to do so, therefore, prospective adopters should be identified. However, this will often not be possible not only because issues such as contact may still be unresolved, but also because adopters for many of the children needing placement are a very scarce and valuable resource: it will often not be practicable or fair to keep these families waiting while court proceedings which may be adjourned, and the outcome of which is uncertain, take place. If it is not possible to identify prospective adopters, a firm timetable for family finding should be outlined and an indication given of the likely national availability of appropriate families. BAAF’s *Be My Parent* and BAAFLink staff can be approached to give a view on this. If the identification of families hinges on matters such as the court’s views on continuing contact, then alternative plans, as suggested in paragraph 11 of the *Best Practice Guidance*, may need to be outlined.

This aspect of planning calls for the co-ordination of the activities of all the different agencies and individuals involved, and different courts and even individual judges have differing views as to the appropriate procedure. Where possible it will be helpful if the social services department and the local authority legal adviser try to ensure that they establish liaison with the courts in their area, through the Family Court Business Committee or other forum, so that the practical issues can be aired and understood.

## Reference

<sup>1</sup> Lord J, Barker S and Cullen D, *Effective Panels: Guidance on regulations, process and good practice in adoption and permanence panels*, BAAF, 1997.

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