



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Catholic Caring Services (Diocese of Lancaster)

**218 Tulketh Road
Ashton on Ribble
Preston
Lancashire
PR2 1ES**

Lead Inspector
Maureen Moore

Announced Inspection
10th October 2005 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above.

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Catholic Caring Services (Diocese of Lancaster)
Address	218 Tulketh Road Ashton on Ribble Preston Lancashire PR2 1ES
Telephone number	01772 732313
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Catholic Caring Services (Diocese of Lancaster) Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Christine Sutherland
Type of registration	Voluntary Adoption Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The category of registration is:- Domestic Adoption Services only (DA)
2. The agency must only operated from the branches named in condition 2-3:- Catholic Caring Services, 2 Rodney Street, Barrow in Furness, Cumbria
3. Catholic Caring Services, Chapel Court, 40/44 Cecil Street, Carlisle CA1 1NT

Date of last inspection

This is the first inspection by CSCI.

Brief Description of the Service:

Catholic Caring Services is a registered charity, which was established in 1934. The agency provides a range services to children who are looked after, and community services to adults.

The adoption service was first registered in 1943. The agency provides the following services:

- recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents
- matching adoptive parents to children
- pre-adoption support for approved adopters
- support groups for adopters
- therapeutic services for children post-placement
- counselling and support for birth parents and families
- post adoption contact; both direct and indirect
- counselling services for adult adoptees
- post-adoption training
- pregnancy counselling.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was undertaken in October 2005 by two inspectors. It was the first time that Catholic Caring Services had been measured against the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2003) (the regulations). As a result, there are statutory requirements and good practice recommendations, for which the agency must produce an action plan.

The methodology for the inspection included the following:

- reading of documents provided by the service
- questionnaires received from adopters; placing social workers; the legal and medical advisers
- file reading
- interviews with staff at all levels of the service; a member of the board of trustees and 4 sets of adopters
- observation of the adoption panel.

The agency prepared well for the inspection and people across the service were welcoming, open and informative.

What the service does well:

The adoption service has a well-established history of providing a range of adoption services. It has a solid value base that is underpinned by sound principles, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. There was evidence throughout the inspection that the agency's practice is child-centred, and it is clear that their service is aimed at finding families for children, rather than the other way around. This is balanced very well with the service they give to adopters. One adopter said, "[the agency] clearly cared about us".

The service is managed efficiently and employs knowledgeable and experienced social workers who are committed, and who demonstrate a clear understanding of the lifelong implications for all concerned in the adoption process. Adopters were "very impressed" with all of the staff and the manager, and their "availability outside of normal hours". One adopter said that the agency had "exceeded our expectations".

The agency's preparation training is very comprehensive. Adopters confirmed its effectiveness: "...insightful, enjoyable and eye-opening ..."; "...well suited to

our needs”; “...very valuable...honest and informative” and “well presented” were some of the comments received.

The assessment process is thorough, and the social workers were found to be professional and sensitive. One adopter commented that “...our social worker was professional, experienced...and knows us well”. Others spoke of how the process involved a lot of work and “soul searching”, but all thought it a worthwhile experience. One adopter said “it was a very detailed process and very necessary”.

The service has good matching policies and procedures, which are borne out in practice. Careful attention is paid to ensure that the best possible matches are achieved between children and adopters. One placing social worker commented on the “...excellent matching process”. The agency has a well-managed letterbox system of contact, which enables birth families to be kept up to date with their child’s progress.

The agency has a service level agreement with a local authority to provide birth records counselling as well as a variety of other services. The local authority was positive about the quality of this work, as well as Catholic Caring Services’ role in providing an alternative choice of services for birth parents and adopters.

The service provides excellent support services to adopters, who expressed the utmost confidence in the “service as a whole being there” for them whenever needed. One adopter commented thus: “although we are having some behavioural problems with our child, our social worker is doing everything she can to help”.

Catholic Caring Services is a good employer; staff expressed a high degree of job satisfaction. The agency invests in the training and development of its social workers, which enables them to keep up to date with best practice in adoption work.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection by CSCI.

What they could do better:

Catholic Caring Services should consider taking a more marketing based approach in its targeting of potential adopters, based on the analysis of the information on children for whom they are best placed to provide families. It should also on build the research undertaken so far, to gauge the prospect of recruitment from local minority ethnic communities. This would improve the diversity of placements the agency is able to offer children in need of adoptive parents.

The service needs to develop and implement robust quality assurance systems to ensure that practice is maintained at a sufficiently high standard.

The agency must ensure that the personnel files of employees and panel members contain the information required by the regulations.

Catholic Caring Services must review the security arrangements of its Barrow office without delay, to minimise the risk of burglary.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

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Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15,19,24.

Catholic Caring Services provides an adoption service that is fundamentally child-centred, which means that children and young people are matched with permanent families who meet their needs.

EVIDENCE:

The welfare of children is central to the work of the adoption service. This is reflected within the agency's policies and procedures, and was in evidence through discussions with staff across the service and in comments received from adopters, as well as observation of the panel.

The agency produces an annual strategy for the recruitment of adopters, which is also outlined in the statement of purpose. The service might benefit from taking a more targeted approach to this activity by, for example, analysing the statistics on children for whom they are best placed to provide adoptive families, and applying marketing techniques to its campaigns, which should include in-built evaluation. The agency acknowledges that the overwhelming majority of its adopters are white British in origin. At the time of the inspection, the manager was undertaking some research into the feasibility of engaging with predominant minority ethnic communities within the diocese,

which would enhance the agency's ability to offer more diversity in placement choice.

The adoption service has a clearly set out policy for matching adoptive families to children, which include the need to ascertain a child's view (as appropriate), before a placement can proceed. This helps ensure that families meet the child's assessed needs and takes into account their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. Evidence was seen in minutes of linking meetings, of work done with colleagues from local authorities to determine best possible matches. One placing social worker commented that they "always had a positive experience of placing children with CCS (sic) families".

Catholic Caring Services offers a thorough preparation and assessment programme to applicants. The preparation course is comprehensive and was highly praised by adopters. All of the preparation training takes place in Preston and some adopters alluded to the long distance involved (one adopter said it meant two and a half hours travelling time for each session). This is something the agency is aware of, and which might be resolved if the service continues to expand its activity in Cumbria.

The questionnaires from, and interviews with, adopters revealed that the social workers employed an extremely professional and sensitive manner towards the applicants throughout the assessment process: "Extremely supportive and caring"; "[the social worker] was a tower of strength...and was endlessly patient" were among the comments received. There was also evidence of considerate involvement of applicants' birth children in the assessment procedure, which made them feel very engaged in the process.

The agency uses the BAAF form F model of assessment and the method applied by the service places great emphasis on the adopters doing vast amounts of work themselves on specially designed worksheets, which is then discussed with and assessed by the social workers. The majority of forms F seen during the inspection were very good and analytical in content, with only one or two exceptions. Adopters commented that although initially daunted by this process, they found it very a useful and insightful experience, which helped them to be sure that adoption was for them. The adoption team manager undertakes all second officer visits, which is good practice, as it adds to the information available to panel. Adopters reported that the Forms F were produced in a timely fashion, and that they were given plenty of time to read and amend them as necessary. However, there is a need for tighter quality assurance of the assessment process, which is referred to in the management section of this report.

The health and safety checklist should be amended to include firearms and other weapons kept by adopters, and the agency should consistently report on the financial viability of all prospective adopters, which was not the case in all files seen.

Catholic Caring Services' panel is properly constituted and comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people. The panel that was observed was well chaired and extremely child-focused. It was clear that all papers had been carefully considered, and questions were insightful and appropriate. Panel members forward questions for applicants to the agency, which are then collated by the panel chair and agency adviser, and given to applicants for consideration prior to their cases being discussed. This is a relatively new practice, and there was confirmation of its working; however care should be taken to ensure panel members who, for whatever reason, cannot submit their questions in advance, are not overlooked.

Applicants have the opportunity to attend panel, and those who did and commented on the experience, were all very positive. The agency is in the process of producing a booklet about the operation of the panel, which will include photographs and individual profiles of each of the members. This should help to further applicants' understanding and alleviate anxieties.

The panel is efficiently organised, and the minute taking is of a high quality. The agency should ensure that individual minute items are kept on adopters' files and illustrate who was in attendance. Agency decisions are taken in a timely manner, but the service should make explicit the protocol for making decisions in the absence of the director of the agency. Decisions are confirmed in writing, but the standard letter sent to newly approved adopters would benefit some revision to make it more personal and reflective of the significance of the event.

Catholic Caring Services has appropriate recruitment and selection procedures for staff that meet the regulations and NMS, which means that all employees are subject to CRB checks prior to starting work. Staff undergo a thorough induction programme on joining the agency, which enables them to become familiar with the workings of the agency prior to developing a caseload.

Birth records counselling is provided by workers who are appropriately experienced in the work and evidence was seen of excellent systems in place to facilitate this work, ensuring that service users receive an efficient and sympathetic response. This is illustrated in the individually prepared booklets that are prepared for adoptees, which contain a précis of their adoption records.

There is a comprehensive complaints policy and attendant procedures, of which staff and adopters are aware and which is clearly explained in the statement of purpose.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

6,18

Catholic Caring Services offers excellent support to its adoptive parents; this helps to ensure that children get the optimum chance of a secure family life.

EVIDENCE:

Catholic Caring Services helps and supports adopters to provide stable and permanent homes for children through a wide variety of means which include the preparation and assessment process, the adopters' support group, post-approval training programme and considerable input from the adoption team social workers. The agency also sponsors adopters' attendance at external training events as needed. Details of post-adoption support services are outlined in the statement of purpose, and adopters receive a thoughtfully worded letter to remind them of services on offer once a match is approved; this demonstrates the agency's commitment to continued support for adoptive families.

Discussion with adopters and social workers revealed that the agency is very aware of the importance of keeping safe any information relating to a child's birth heritage and of helping children to develop and maintain a positive self-identity. All those spoken to demonstrated this by their understanding of the importance of children's life-story work and later-life letters. Adopters related incidents of their social workers' efforts to ensure that appropriate life-story work was undertaken on behalf of children, and that local authorities provided other relevant information.

Adopters provided much evidence of the highly valued input the agency affords them from pre-placement to post-adoption order. One adopter commented: "We have always been given... support... including many home visits to spend time preparing our birth daughter for the adoptive placement." Adopters

clearly have confidence in the adoption service, which means that they will not hesitate to ask for help and so the risk of placement disruption is lessened.

The service has access to appropriately qualified and experienced legal and medical advisers as well as the services of a child psychologist. There is a clearly set out protocol that governs the use of such advisers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7,8,9.

Catholic Caring Services demonstrates an understanding of the life long implications of adoption, which means that children and young people are able to maintain their birth heritage.

EVIDENCE:

Although it is several years since the agency has facilitated the adoption of a relinquished baby, Catholic Caring Services has a clear strategy for working with birth parents, which includes their full involvement in the matching process.

Adopters demonstrated clear understanding of the importance of maintaining a child's birth heritage, particularly in how the use of the life-story work would be used with their children, as they get older.

The letterbox system of post-adoption contact is well managed and ensures that children maintain links with their birth families.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1,3,14,16,17,20,21,22,23,25,26,27, 28,29,30,31.

The adoption service is well managed, and is staffed by knowledgeable and committed social workers. This means that the agency is able to achieve good outcomes for children requiring secure, permanent homes.

EVIDENCE:

The adoption service has a statement of purpose that clearly sets out its aims and objectives, as well as the principles that govern the agency's work. The document, whilst meeting the NMS, needs amending to include the system in place to monitor and evaluate service provision, as well the address and

telephone number of the CSCI's adoption inspection team to be fully compliant with the regulations. It would also benefit from a more dynamic presentation, as the statement of purpose serves essentially as a brochure for the service.

The agency has also produced a children's guide, which was still in draft form at the time of the inspection. This is commendable as it explains the role Catholic Caring Services has in a child's adoption and will be of benefit in helping children and young people to understand the process better.

Also commendable is the fact that the service welcomes applications from all sections of the community including co-habiting heterosexual and same-sex couples. The agency has an excellent information pack that explains each stage of the procedure, and which is sent out to enquirers in a very timely manner. This serves to inspire confidence in the service from the beginning: "...[the agency] had an open door policy"; "Plenty of relevant information" and "The promptness and quality of information [was most satisfying]" were just some of the comments received.

There was much evidence of applicants being treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Catholic Caring Services has a clear management structure. The board of trustees oversees the activity of the agency and is responsible for the approval of policy and annual budgets. Staff demonstrated an understanding of the board's role, and there are staff representatives on sub-committees. On occasions, social workers present case studies to the board of trustees, which enables members to gain insight into operational matters.

In 2002 Catholic Caring Services restructured its organisation in response to increased activity and the post of assistant director, children's services, was created. This has enabled the agency to take a more strategic approach to the management of the adoption service. The current business plan covers the five years from 2003 to 2008 in which there are several targets for the adoption team to meet. The plan is monitored via the senior management team and the board of trustees, who receive quarterly updates on its progress from the team manager. Care is taken to balance the reaching of these targets without compromising good social work practice, or losing sight of the agency's child-centred ethos. For example, although one of the targets is the number of successful placements to be achieved in a given period of time: there was evidence that prospective placements had not gone ahead because of social workers' concerns about potential breakdown.

Current methods for producing management information are laborious and are under review. The installation of a new database is planned, which should help to ensure the steady progress of the adoption work in a way that measures its effectiveness, and informs future development. This will prove crucial if the service continues to expand as anticipated in the business plan, particularly in relation to targeted recruitment of adopters.

There are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication and accountability between them. The service is underpinned by sound policies and procedures, copies of which each member of staff has in their professional development portfolios. However, the adoption procedures manual is in need of updating to take into consideration recent legislative changes – as well as its own policies, such as the eligibility criteria.

The restructuring of the service also established the post of team manager and the social work staffing complement was increased to the equivalent of 6 full-time workers. The manager of the adoption team is professionally qualified and very experienced in childcare and adoption work. She is to commence NVQ level 4 in management in April 2006. Social workers spoke highly of the support, leadership and professional development they receive, particularly in relation to complex cases: “you don’t leave [her] office being unclear, you know exactly what you have to do” is how one worker put it. The manager demonstrated insight into the particular strengths of the social workers as well as areas for development, and provided evidence of strategic handling of issues as they arose.

Staff were particularly praiseworthy of Catholic Caring Services as an employer. They spoke of “being a part of the whole agency” and of the high degree of job satisfaction. They welcome the agency’s positive approach to training, workload management and the flexibility allowed in working arrangements. This professional fulfilment undoubtedly contributes to the successful outcomes the adoption service achieves.

Secretarial staff within the agency are conscientious and very sensitive to the nature of the work. Administrative arrangements are due to be reviewed with a view to make systems more efficient.

The adoption service keeps appropriate, separate files on adopters and children. Files were generally well ordered and case recording was comprehensive, enabling the reader to get a clear view of the progression of work. However, the agency should make more robust the system of file auditing, as there was no evidence of management oversight on the files seen during the inspection. Particular attention should be paid to cross-referencing information contained in case recording to ensure that any issues are fully addressed during the assessment process, and that they are reflected properly in the Form F, as the inspection revealed anomalies in some cases. Decisions made during supervision should be recorded on all files, and any signatures on documents should be dated and supplemented by the manager’s or social worker’s full name. Also, care should be taken to ensure that any references to other professionals include the individual’s full names.

Those staff personnel files seen during the inspection all contained evidence of current CRB clearance and two written references. On two of the files there was no evidence of references being followed up by telephone calls, although

the agency confirmed that this was routine practice. The agency should ensure that chronological employment histories are illustrated in months as well as years, and that any gaps are accounted for. The service must revise its selection procedures to ensure that personnel files contain the information required by schedules 2 and 3 of the regulations. Panel members' files did not meet the regulations either, and must be amended to meet the same requirements.

All three premises were visited during the inspection; the Preston and Carlisle offices were generally fit for purpose. However, the security arrangements of the Barrow office must be reviewed, preferably by an expert; there is no alarm and the office is vulnerable to burglary, which could have a devastating effect, given the nature of information stored there. Consideration should also be given to wheelchair accessibility for employees, should it be needed in the future.

Catholic Caring Services is apparently financially viable. The financial statement confirms that the agency has sufficient resources to fulfil its obligations. There are procedures in place to deal with situations of financial crisis that reflect the need to safeguard the welfare of children. Catholic Caring Services has clearly documented financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
8	3
9	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3
4	3
5	3
10	3
11	3
12	3
13	3
15	3
19	3
24	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
6	4
18	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
3	4
14	3
16	3
17	3
20	3
21	3
22	4
23	4
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	1
29	2
30	3
31	3

N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	28	14 (d) (2003)	The agency must ensure that its staff and panel members' personnel records comply with Schedules 2 & 3 of the regulations.	31/01/06
2	1	2 (2003)	The agency must amend its statement of Purpose so it complies with the regulations.	31/01/06
3	29	18 (2) (a)	The security arrangements of the Barrow office must be reviewed.	31/01/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	2	<p>The agency should consider adopting a more targeted approach to its recruitment of adopters.</p> <p>The agency should develop further its work with minority ethnic communities, with a view to recruitment.</p>

2	4	<p>The health and safety checklist should be amended to include firearms and other weapons.</p> <p>Assessments should include reference to the financial viability of applicants in all cases.</p>
3	10	The system for panel members submitting questions prior to the meeting should continue to be monitored for its effectiveness.
4	13	The agency should consider revising its letter confirming agency decisions, to make it more personal to adopters.
5	16	The agency's procedures' manual should be updated to reflect recent and imminent legislative changes, as well as its own policies.
6	25	<p>The agency should establish a robust system of quality assurance for Form F assessments, and improve its system for the auditing of files.</p> <p>Individual panel items and records of supervision decisions should be kept on adopters' files.</p> <p>Any signatures on documents should be dated and supplemented by the manager's or social worker's full name.</p> <p>Any references to other professionals involved in cases should include the individual's full names.</p>
7	28	The agency should ensure that chronological employment histories (for adopters and employees) are illustrated in months as well as years, and that any gaps are accounted for.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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