

Education Committee

Historical Forced Adoption

Eighth Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1713

Education Committee

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1 Introduction

1. On 10th March 2026, we took evidence from four women who have survived forced adoption and are now some of the UK's leading campaigners in this area. Ann Lloyd Keen, a retired nurse and an MP for 13 years, had her son forcibly adopted in 1966 when she was 18, having given birth in an NHS hospital. Diana Defries, now Chair of the Movement for an Adoption Apology, had her daughter forcibly adopted when she was 16, having also spent part of her pregnancy in a Mother and Baby Home and given birth in an NHS hospital. Sally Ells, co-founder of Adult Adoptee Movement, was forcibly adopted in 1967; Debbie Iromlou, co-founder of the Adult Adoptee Movement and a transracial adoptee, was forcibly adopted in 1968.

2. **CONCLUSION**

We are in agreement as a Committee that the survivors' testimony, which was a formal Parliamentary proceeding and live broadcast, was some of the most powerful, moving and compelling evidence we have heard. We would like to place on the record our heartfelt thanks for their bravery, honesty and eloquence.

3. **CONCLUSION**

To give an idea of the scale of this issue, it is estimated that around 185,000 children were adopted between 1949 and 1976. Not all adoptions happened in the appalling circumstances described by our lived experience witnesses - for example, sometimes children were orphaned. People with lived experience may have a diverse range of views on what happened, and of course not everyone's experience was the same, with some happily more positive; but a diversity of views does not dilute the harm that many suffered and whose testimony we have heard.

4. We launched this short inquiry in January 2026, following up on the extensive 2022 inquiry and report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.¹ In its report, the JCHR made a series of recommendations, including on access to adoption records, the sharing of medical information, complaint mechanisms, and notification processes for birth mothers. The Committee also called for an apology by the Government and official recognition that what happened to these mothers and their children was

¹ JCHR, [The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976](#), July 2022.

wrong. Progress on implementing the recommendations has been slow and inconsistent, with little progress at all in several major areas, including the central call for an apology by the Government.

5. We launched this inquiry to build on and further the work started by the JCHR. In addition to the evidence session with survivors, our inquiry has included an evidence session with academics, experts on the experiences of apologies in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and it was informed by a private roundtable during which we also heard from survivors including mothers who had been forced to have their babies adopted, adult adoptees, and mothers who experienced a Mother and Baby Home but were able to keep their baby.
6. Around halfway through our evidence session, having answered many of the Committee's questions, Ann Lloyd Keen herself paused and asked a question:

I would be amiss if I did not mention this and ask the Committee and Chair a question. Do you know why we have to keep repeating our evidence? We feel that we have done everything possible that we can, we have co-operated, and we have done so well, from our point of view; why are we having to continue with this campaign?²

7. At the end of the session, the witnesses were asked what they would like the Committee to put forward to the Government. Diana Defries gave a simple answer:

We would like to bring this to a close. We would like to move on with our lives and not have to revisit and relive all this again and again and again. I will stop there, because that is it.³

8. **CONCLUSION**

Survivors of forced adoption must not have to repeat, in public, their harrowing stories anymore. It is clear that decisive Government action, beginning with a co-authored apology, and continuing with a programme of fully funded support for survivors, must now happen without delay, so that survivors can get on with their lives. We go on to consider the evidence for an apology, as well as other measures, in detail in the remainder of this short report; but we begin by stating that the Government must act now; and by asking, exceptionally, that the Government provides an initial response, setting out a timetable for developing and issuing its apology, within one month in recognition of the huge cost to survivors of continued delay and inaction.

2 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q12.

3 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q15.

2 An apology

9. The evidence we heard from survivors of forced adoption described devastating suffering and lifelong consequences.

The experiences of mothers

10. The treatment of mothers-to-be, many under the age of 18, during pregnancy and labour was inhumane:

When I went to the [Mother and Baby] home, it was like a punishment: the whole time I was there, my role was to scrub steps from morning until the evening. When I got to the bottom, I was told to go back to the top and do them again When I went into labour and into the hospital, I was given nothing for pain because I was told, “You will remember the pain because you’ve been a bad girl.” I had an episiotomy and I was stitched without any local anaesthetic. Every time I moved, the doctor slapped my leg. This was an NHS hospital in January 1967...I have never felt more worthless in my life.⁴

11. The parting of mother and child was similarly cruel:

On the journey back was the longest I held my daughter—it was two hours—and it was like everything suddenly made sense. I just felt like this was absolutely right, and I wouldn’t let go of her. I held her all the way to the agency, and we stood in reception and a woman appeared and said, “It’s time.” Then my mother just looked at me, and I shook my head. I said no, and she was just taken her from my arms and handed over. And she [the baby] howled—I assume I did; I don’t know—and the following week they sent me back to school.⁵

Coercion and consent

12. Neither of the mothers who presented oral evidence to the committee gave consent to their children being adopted. Our evidence from academics suggests that this was the norm. Dr Michael Lambert of Lancaster University told us that “coercion was baked into the entire system”, arguing that the appearance of due process masked how decisions were being made in

4 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q2.

5 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q2.

reality. He explained that although organisations could claim that informed consent had been obtained, this was a “misrepresentation of what took place.” According to Dr Lambert, the power held by the state, social workers and religious bodies meant that “consent was pretty hollow, vacuous and meaningless throughout.” He characterised the system as one “designed to supply infants to adoptive families”, rather than to support mothers in making a genuine decision about the future of their baby.⁶

13. When asked whether some mothers had been misinformed, pressured or prevented from withdrawing consent, Dr Lambert said that this was the case and referred to two sources of evidence. First, he noted “a significant volume of files in the Home Office archive” documenting cases in which mothers attempted to have their children returned, and in which agencies and Mother and Baby Homes sought advice on how to respond. He said that the Government’s position at the time was that “once the child had been passed over and due process...had been followed, that was the end of the matter.” Second, he highlighted a 1951 document from the Standing Conference of Societies Registered for Adoption, in which agencies themselves acknowledged that mothers had “no meaningful choice” and that the decision was effectively taken away from them.⁷
14. Professor Gordon Harold of the University of Cambridge summarised the adoption system for unmarried mothers as one “designed to punish and place - an unmarried mother is to be punished; a child is to be placed”, adding that the processes mothers experienced amounted to “chronic, calculated trauma delivery.”⁸ Dr Janet Greenlees of Glasgow Caledonian University told the Committee that in Scotland, none of the oral histories she had encountered involved a mother who felt she had a choice: “It was all coercion”, including cases where mothers resisted, sought the return of their child, or intended to marry the father.⁹

The experiences of adult adoptees

15. Adult adoptees described the life-long impact of this separation from their birth mothers, which had in some cases been described to birth mothers as being ‘for the best’ for the child:

For me, being separated at the point when attachment, identity and safety should have been forming, there was a loss there, but that was never acknowledged. We were not allowed to express it; we had to bury it and get on with our lives. Forced adoption stripped me

6 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q7.

7 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q8.

8 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q8.

9 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q8.

of my identity. I had my name changed, I had no family or medical information, and I grew up with people who did not mirror me physically or otherwise. I felt alien throughout my childhood, and that is a feeling that persists ... When I met my family, I could not believe that they actually did want me. They looked like me, they sounded like me, they had the same sense of humour as me. I realised that I wasn't alien any more, but I was in my early 50s when I finally plucked up the courage to do that, because I had been told I was unwanted.¹⁰

16. Adult adoptees described being a 'solution' for their adoptive parents, and being required to suppress their own emotional needs. Transracial and transnational adoptees "were expected to assimilate into families and cultures that were not their own, and they had to endure the racial naivety of white adopters. There was no safeguarding—nobody came to check on us—and neglect and abuse in adoptive families was common."¹¹ Debbie Iromlou described being placed in an unsuitable home:

Local authorities had warned them that my foster mother—soon to be adoptive mother—was not fit to take children in. They ignored those recommendations, and I was left there anyway I was seen as a problem case, possibly because of my international roots and parentage. I feel that I was not cared for and given the family life that I was supposed to have been given."¹²

17. She went on to describe her experiences as a transracial adoptee:

I grew up as a transracial adoptee in a small, white community—as many of us did during those years—with no access to any racial mirroring or role models whatsoever. Also, my biological background was middle eastern, so I was raised with racist views towards my own biological family and my own people, and that has had a massive impact on my life. Trying to assimilate within my own culture, to learn my own language and to be accepted in my own community has proved really difficult for me.¹³

18. A shocking theme running through the testimony of both birth mothers and adult adoptees was being infantilised, and made to bear shame and guilt for circumstances that were not of their making. For birth mothers this happened throughout pregnancy, labour and the aftermath; while many adopted children were told that their birth families did not want them or were bad families, and adult adoptees were made to feel that they

10 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q3.

11 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q3.

12 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q3.

13 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q3.

were being troublesome when seeking information about their identity or asking for support. For many mothers and adoptees, this infantilisation has continued later in life when seeking information about their records.

Health impacts

19. We were also told that survivors of forced adoption are at significantly increased risk of a host of serious negative health outcomes, for both physical and mental health. According to Professor Harold, research shows an incidence of 80% for clinically significant depression amongst mothers who experienced forced adoption, compared to 20% of the general population; with 20% having attempted suicide, compared with 8% of the general population.¹⁴ Adult adoptees described having had their medical history erased, making it impossible to know about increased health risks due to genetics; as well as a host of physical and mental health difficulties and increased risk of suicide.

Wider community impacts

20. In this short inquiry we have not been able to document comprehensively the full range of individuals who have been affected by historical forced adoption, rather we focused on mothers and adult adoptees. However, it is clear that a wider range of individuals have also suffered profound impacts, including women who experienced abuse in Mother and Baby Homes although they were not parted from their children, including Karen Constantine, who has written compellingly about her situation;¹⁵ as well as fathers, grandparents, and siblings.

The timeframe of forced adoptions

21. Witnesses told us that, although the 1976 Adoption Act marked a significant shift in the law, some practices associated with historical forced adoption appear to have continued into the late 1970s and early 1980s. Emily Frith, CEO of Adoption UK, explained that although her organisation had not undertaken extensive research into the post1976 period, she had heard from adult adoptees that these practices “went beyond that period of time.” Similarly, Emma Crowther-Duncan from PAC-UK described case files she had seen that continued to contain “incredibly shameful and blaming” language well after 1976. She also reported that birth mothers attending reunions had described feeling coerced into adoption decisions into the early 1980s.¹⁶

14 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q9.

15 Karen Constantine, Taken: Experiences of Forced Adoption, (2024).

16 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q37.

Why does an apology matter?

22. We asked the four survivors who gave us evidence why a Government apology for historical forced adoption matters, and what it would mean to them. Their answers speak for themselves:

It would mean the world, because I still blame myself. You do a job that I used to do [Ann Lloyd Keen was an MP for 13 years] and the Daily Mail writes about me regularly—or they did when they found out that I [had] had a baby. As far as everybody was concerned, I did not have any children—which I did not. People would say, “I suppose you wanted a career rather than children,” without knowing what the circumstances were. They would always write, “She gave him up for adoption,” or, “She gave him to be adopted,” or other words, especially in the Daily Mail. That was vile to me. I want this apology to clear not only my name of that but of my son, because I did not give him away. My son did not know he was adopted until he was 27 years old. I cannot tell you how much it means, other than saying that a Government apology would help to set the record straight, and would help me to stop blaming myself and to heal, because I have not—I still feel shame.¹⁷

A Government apology would be an acknowledgment of the state’s role in all this, which is really what we need. We need somebody to say sorry, and to recognise the fact that there was all this machinery running in the background that allowed people, like parents, GPs and adoption agencies, to do what they did.¹⁸

An apology matters to us because the state harmed us, and we are still living with the consequences. It matters enormously...The truth is that we were forcibly separated from our mothers. We lost our identities, our medical histories and our sense of belonging. A meaningful apology would correct that harmful narrative. It would acknowledge that our adoptions were forced, that they caused harm and that adult adoptees and mothers deserve redress. That recognition matters to us hugely. It would reduce our shame. It would allow adoptees like me to seek trauma informed support with some dignity.¹⁹

An apology is important to me because the state was involved in my adoption; an agency was involved in my adoption, and that has created in me a lifelong impact from not being given a stable family home environment, from being placed in an unsuitable home, from

17 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q5.

18 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q5.

19 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q5.

being overlooked and from being made to feel such shame for asking questions as to why. That was really it for me—why? Nobody gave me the answers. An apology would mean that the state had admitted wrongdoing and it would ease the shame I carry for asking why.²⁰

Apology as a process rather than an event

- 23.** Dr Gallen encouraged the Committee to view an apology as “a process and not a single event.” He said that the process matters as much as the outcome and that “the involvement of people, the respect people are given, the way they are spoken to and brought into the process makes a meaningful difference.”²¹ Professor Gordon Harold of the University of Cambridge concurred with this assessment, saying that “an apology starts the process of recovery trajectory.” Professor Harold argued that without an apology, mothers, children and other survivors could not begin the process of recovery: “until that happens, everything else around redress is an academic discussion. We are talking about human cost and human recovery, and therefore apology activates that process.”²² Dr Michael Lambert of Lancaster University also stressed that an apology should be understood as only the first step in a wider process that requires meaningful follow-up action:

I also want to emphasise the point that an apology that is words alone, without action, is completely hollow, meaningless and sometimes more harmful. The Catholic Church [in England and Wales] formally apologised for their role in this area in 2016 but have done absolutely nothing since. They have taken no action, made no redress, and made no changes to their processes; people are still trying to access records now under the same processes. That, for me, is more insulting than doing something about it. Dr Gallen’s point about process is absolutely integral.²³

- 24.** Evidence from survivors of historical forced adoption strongly supported this view.

20 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q5.

21 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q15.

22 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q20.

23 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q22.

Urgency

25. It is also clear to us that an apology is needed with great urgency, as those who have suffered through forced adoption are in later life now, ranging from their 50s through to their 90s, and for some who have passed away, it is already too late, as Diana Defries and Ann Lloyd Keen explained:

We have already lost people. There are women I know who were hale and hearty when I first got involved, but they are now in homes, or confined to their home ... The founder of our organisation died two years ago. She was a real fighter but she won't be able to see this.²⁴

26. Even for those who are not nearing the end of their lives, there is the simple fact that they continue to live with the injustice and injury they have suffered, as Sally Ells put it simply:

The longer we wait, the longer the shame continues, and the longer that injury endures.²⁵

The current position

27. Josh MacAlister, the Minister for Children and Families at the Department for Education, attended our session with survivors of historical forced adoption as an observer, and gave evidence to us directly after the survivors. We welcome the Minister's commitment to meet with survivors. The Minister said:

I understand the campaigners' case for a formal apology, and that is being actively considered, as of now, by the Government. It needs to be done with a level of gravity, and by someone senior in the Government to reflect the gravity of what happened ... if we were to do that apology, it would need to be worked up in close collaboration with the campaign groups you have heard from today and others to ensure that it is comprehensive and, in a meaningful way, lifts the shame and stigma that far too many people have been living with for far too long I put emphasis on the word 'actively'. It is a live conversation. I cannot give the Committee a timetable for it, but I know it is urgent. I know that those who have been directly affected by this awful abuse have had to tell the stories you have heard today many times. I do not want them to have to do that anymore. We will move as fast as we can.²⁶

24 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q6.

25 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q6.

26 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q17 and Q35.

28.

CONCLUSION

Historical forced adoption practices involved systemic coercion, the removal of parental choice and often resulted in deep trauma and lifelong consequences for mental and physical health. A formal apology is necessary to acknowledge these harms and to recognise the state's role in permitting them. We should be clear that the scope of the apology should extend beyond the 1949–1976 period as we have received clear evidence that the practices associated with forced adoptions happened before 1949 and continued after the introduction of the Adoption Act 1976.

29.

CONCLUSION

Furthermore, many of those affected - both mothers and adult adoptees - are now elderly, and any further delay risks denying them the recognition they have waited decades to receive. Given the advancing age of those affected, time is now a critical factor.

30.

CONCLUSION

The meaningful involvement of survivors in the design and implementation of an apology is essential to ensure that the apology validates their experiences and that the mitigations put in place thereafter support them directly. The Government must embed mothers and adoptees' voices at every stage of the process of an apology.

31.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must provide an unqualified, formal apology to all those affected by historical forced adoption practices, including unmarried mothers who were forced to give up their children for adoption, adult adoptees who were forcibly taken from their birth families, unmarried mothers who were able to keep their children, but who were nevertheless subject to cruel practices, punishments and stigma, as well as birth fathers, siblings and other family members.

32.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must give an initial commitment to an apology, and must undertake the preliminary work for an apology - including working with survivor groups - as quickly as possible and commit publicly to a clear timetable for developing and issuing its apology.

33.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must work directly with mothers, adult adoptees and lived-experience organisations to co-author both the apology and the measures that follow it. Co-production should run through all subsequent commitments on accessing records, trauma-informed health support, intermediary services, research and long-term representation in policymaking.

3 The State's involvement

34. It is clear that there was no one author of, or perpetrator of, historical forced adoptions. Religious institutions, charities, GPs, hospitals, the Government and families of pregnant, unmarried women all played a role. However, it is not acceptable for organisations who were involved to evade culpability by saying that the practice was a societal norm at the time, and because it was widely accepted by many elements of society, no-one can be held responsible. We have challenged this view when it was expressed to us during this inquiry, and are pleased that some organisations have clarified their position on this, following initial statements to us that were deeply distressing to survivors of forced adoption. We have not sought to interrogate the precise balance of responsibility across different organisation or different parts of society, but have focused instead on clarifying the state's role in historical forced adoption, building on the previous work of the JCHR.
35. The state was aided in enacting its policies by charities and religious institutions, who were, for example, responsible for the operation of Mother and Baby Homes. Whilst this in no way absolves the state of the ultimate responsibility for the harm done, it is nevertheless regrettable that the Church of England has not issued a full and formal apology for the role it has played in this scandal. The Catholic Church in England and Wales has issued a formal apology but no meaningful remediation. The Salvation Army and Barnardo's both provided evidence to this inquiry during which they gave the impression of justifying their historical involvement, rather than accepting responsibility. However, both The Salvation Army and Barnardo's have subsequently written to the Committee to clarify their position. It is to be hoped that any Government apology encourages organisations like these to reflect on their own legacy and take genuinely meaningful steps to address that legacy.
36. Professor Harold of the University of Cambridge told us that "evidence shows very clearly that the state was in the engine room of those practices, if not necessarily at the wheel." Professor Harold emphasised that government policy, funding arrangements and legislative frameworks shaped the environment in which adoptions took place and enabled the system to function as it did.²⁷ Dr Lambert similarly argued that it was "the truth that the state was central to what took place." He noted that adoption

27 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q12.

practices changed rapidly once state funding and legislation shifted, arguing that “without it, when the funding stopped and the legislation changed, adoption declined very quickly, or the nature of it changed.” He concluded that “the state was absolutely central. To say otherwise is completely untrue.”²⁸

37. The Minister, Josh MacAlister, gave a full acknowledgement to the Committee of the state’s role in historical forced adoptions:

The Government acknowledges that the state had a role in this and that it is not good enough to describe what happened simply as a result of the actions of society.²⁹

38. **CONCLUSION**

Evidence shows that government policy decisions, funding arrangements and legislative frameworks shaped the environment in which unmarried mothers were routinely denied any meaningful choice in whether or not they could keep their children and were often shamed and coerced into submitting to have their children put up for adoption.

39. **CONCLUSION**

We are encouraged by the Minister’s acceptance that the state had a role in historical forced adoptions. However, the Government must go further by acknowledging the central role that the state had during this time.

40. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Government should formally and publicly recognise that the state played a central role in enabling and sustaining historical forced adoption practices. Acknowledging this responsibility is essential in order to correct the public record, address previous misrepresentations, reduce the burden of blame and shame felt by many mothers and adoptees and the feelings of abandonment and rejection felt by many adoptees, and lay the groundwork for a credible apology and meaningful redress for those affected.

28 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q12.

29 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q17.

4 Working with survivors

41. When discussing the importance of an apology, the survivors who gave evidence to us also emphasised how important it was that survivors help to co-author the apology with the Government, and the process that follows. Diana Defries told us:

The concern we have is that other apologies have been made, in other nations, and promises were made and broken. We are anxious not only to be part of the co-authoring process and to make sure the apology hits where it is meant to—which is to make people feel like they have been seen, heard and validated—but to make sure there is follow-through on anything that is agreed by way of mitigation, remedy or reparation. The concern that has been expressed privately—I am taking this opportunity to express it publicly—is that in other nations there has been an apology and everyone has been appreciative, but there has been no follow-up or follow-through. If we lose that, then the apology becomes meaningless. The co-authoring needs to be of both the apology and, as Sally so wisely said, the measures that follow, because we need to make sure that people receive the help they need.³⁰

42. In describing how an apology should be sequenced with follow-up measures, Dr Gallen told the Committee about the “co-design model” that has been used in Northern Ireland. He also cited a “victim-survivor consultation mechanism” used in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales and suggested that a similar mechanism could be used “to ensure meaningful buy-in across the spectrum of experience.”³¹ The Movement for an Adoption Apology has said that the process of composing an apology “must include representatives from MAA and AAM to meet our respective needs.”³² The Adult Adoptee Movement has also called for a Government apology that is “co-authored with survivors.”³³

30 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q8.

31 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q25.

32 Movement for an Adoption Apology.

33 Adult Adoptee Movement, Follow-up written evidence sent to the Education Committee, January 2026.

43.

CONCLUSION

Survivors of historical forced adoption practices have stressed the profound emotional burden of continually recounting their experiences and the many years they have spent campaigning without feeling heard by Government. It is clear to us that ongoing, structured dialogue with survivors is not an optional extra but a foundation for meaningful progress.

44.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must listen to and engage with survivors of forced adoption practices. The Government should commit to a survivor engagement strategy that guarantees regular consultation and clear lines of accountability, both in the short term as the Government works towards an apology, and for the long-term to ensure that survivors' experiences and insights directly inform the Government's decision-making processes and that they are able to hold the Government to account for the impact of the apology.

5 Learning from other countries

45. Forced adoption is not a practice that was confined to England, or the UK. The Movement for an Adoption Apology refers to the apology issued in 2013 by then Prime Minister of Australia Julia Gillard as an example of best practice. The MAA says that the Australian Government “apologised unreservedly to mothers, adoptees, fathers and families impacted by forced adoption in Australia [and] promised that money would be set aside to ensure the provision of extensive support for those whose lives had been blighted.”³⁴ We heard about the approaches taken by Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the Republic of Ireland.

Scotland

46. In March 2023, the Scottish Government issued a formal apology in the Scottish Parliament for the “cruel” historical adoption practices that forced many unmarried women to give up their babies until the late 1970s. The First Minister at the time, Nicola Sturgeon, described these practices as “unjust and profoundly wrong” and, addressing the mothers and adopted children directly, said that “no words can ever make up for what has happened to you, but I hope this apology will bring you some measure of solace. It is the very least that you deserve - and it is long overdue.”³⁵
47. Since then, campaigners have continued to press for meaningful follow-up actions, arguing that the apology must be accompanied by practical support for mothers and adoptees. They have called for measures including councils delivering trauma-informed counselling services, easier access to birth records, reunion services and formal apologies from institutions which administered services that resulted in coerced or forced adoption - all of which, campaigners have said, have “failed to emerge” since the time of the Government’s apology.³⁶
48. Dr Janet Greenlees told us that the First Minister’s apology was welcomed by those affected. However, she said that survivors had expected a “series of concrete measures in reparation” to follow, but that “all that was

34 Movement for an Adoption Apology, [About the campaign](#), accessed March 2026.

35 Scottish Government, [Historical adoption practices: A formal apology](#), 22 March 2023.

36 STV News, [We had our babies taken from us - we didn’t give them away](#), March 2024.

introduced was the new peer support services,” which had already been planned. She noted that the Scottish Government committed £145,000 to these services, but “there was nothing to deal with the trauma, finding families, finding out the truth about what happened, or indeed the human rights violations that occurred.” When asked why further measures had not followed, Dr Greenlees said that, in her view, the barrier was “lack of Government will.”³⁷

Republic of Ireland

49. Ireland’s Government established a Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes in February 2015 in order to establish what happened to the women and children who lived in these Homes between 1922 and 1998. The Commission submitted its final report to the Irish Government in October 2020.³⁸ Following the publication of the Commission’s report, the Irish Government issued a formal state apology in January 2021. The then-Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, apologised for the “profound generational wrong” to survivors of Mother and Baby Homes. Mr Martin said “I apologise for the shame and stigma which they were subjected to and which, for some, remains a burden to this day. In apologising, I want to emphasise that each of you were in an institution because of the wrongs of others. Each of you is blameless. Each of you did nothing wrong and has nothing to be ashamed of. Each of you deserved so much better.”³⁹
50. Since then, the Irish Government has taken a series of further steps to address the Commission’s findings. In 2022, it enacted the Birth Information and Tracing Act, granting adopted people and those with questions about their origins a legal right to access their birth certificates, early life records, and related information for the first time. In November 2022, the Government legislated for the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, offering financial redress and enhanced health supports to eligible survivors of Mother and Baby and County Home institutions. Work has also continued on memorialisation, including plans for a national centre of remembrance and the preservation of institutional records.⁴⁰
51. Dr James Gallen told the Committee that the apology was delivered “without survivor consultation or engagement with survivors,” did not mention the word ‘adoption’ and presented the Commission’s report as “the definitive account of what took place.” As a result, he said it was received

37 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Qq13–14.

38 The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, [Final Report](#), published January 2020.

39 Oireachtas Éireann, [Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes: Statements](#), January 2021.

40 Government of Ireland, [Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme](#), accessed February 2026.

poorly by survivors who questioned the report's findings. Despite these concerns, Dr Gallen described the apology as "a significant moment," noting that it was accompanied by "a number of material elements of redress."⁴¹

Northern Ireland

52. In March 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive appointed a three-person Truth Recovery Design Panel to work with survivors of forced adoption practices and to explore options for an investigation or inquiry. The Panel published its final report in November 2021 and recommended the establishment of a public investigation, a formal apology, an immediate redress payment scheme for survivors, access to records, and specialist health and psychosocial supports.⁴² The Stormont executive agreed to set up a public inquiry, with Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill telling the assembly all steps would be put in place "as quickly as possible."⁴³ Draft legislation is currently before the Stormont Assembly to establish an inquiry into Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses.

53. Dr Gallen described the Northern Irish experience as an example of good practice:

The better practice of apology ... came from Northern Ireland in 2022, following the recommendation of the Hart inquiry to provide an apology. The Government there adopted international best practice for an apology using the five elements of a sincere and thoughtful apology. That was a result of significant survivor advocacy and engagement - survivors had key words they wanted to see in the apology.⁴⁴

54. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Government must undertake a rigorous assessment of international responses to historical forced adoptions, with special attention to the redress mechanisms introduced in Australia, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This learning should inform a UK approach that avoids symbolic or incomplete action and instead delivers a comprehensive, fully-resourced, survivor-led response.

41 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Qq15–18.

42 Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability, [Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland Report](#), November 2021.

43 BBC, [Mother-and-baby homes inquiry to be set up in Northern Ireland](#), November 2021.

44 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q15.

6 Improving access to adoption records

55. We asked the survivors of forced adoption who gave evidence to our inquiry about their experiences of accessing records relating to their adoptions. They described experiences which were not only frustrating, but humiliating; having to fight for information; and delays spanning decades, with heartbreaking consequences. Debbie Iromlou told us:

I went to the agency, and they refused to show me any file, and told me that my birth mother's life would be in danger if I tried to search for her. Over a period of four decades, I have been trying to access my file. On each occasion, I am given one or two more pieces of paper, but I have never physically been shown any file. The most degrading part was 10 years ago when I sat in an office with a social worker who had my file on the table in front of her. She turned the pages, but she would not let me physically hold it or look at it myself, and she decided what should and should not be photocopied. I have now once again tried to contact the agency that is holding my file, because the original agency has closed down. In those 40 years, over time, my file has ended up in various different agencies and warehouses. I have now been told I have to wait two years to get a social worker to find my file, redact what information they see fit, which I am not allowed to view myself, and then I will be able to access it.⁴⁵

Once a social worker has accessed your files, they have to make redactions to those files. We also ask that no redactions are made. We understand it where third-party information is seen as unnecessary for us to look at, but sometimes the redactions can be so extreme that you are given one A4-size piece of paper with one sentence at the bottom that you can read, and the rest is all blacked out. This is our past: our life and how we came into the world. I see it as my human right—it is my basic human right to know who I am, where I came from and why I was left.⁴⁶

45 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q3.

46 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q10.

To complement that, we hear again and again—we have all experienced this—that our records are held by social workers, churches and agencies, and when we go to them, we are treated as if the information about our own lives does not belong to us—it is theirs, not ours. We are told our records are lost, but often, if we persevere, that turns out to be false. These are repeating stories, again and again and again. As Debbie says, much of what relates to us is redacted, so we cannot even see it when we do get something, and the process is so painfully slow. We understand that at the moment it is 12 to 18 months, and PAC-UK is saying it is two years in some cases.⁴⁷

56. Our witnesses requested the development of a single online database held by an organisation that does not have historical culpability for forced adoption; and a clear service standard, with requests met within a specified and reasonable timeframe. They also said that only third-party information should be able to be redacted, and then, only with an explanation.
57. Emily Frith, CEO of Adoption UK, told the Committee that those seeking information often find “incomplete, heavily redacted or missing” adoption records, and that support for accessing information is “inconsistent and sometimes non-existent.”⁴⁸ Brenda Farrell of Barnardo’s explained that adoption records held by Barnardo’s begin only “from the point at which Barnardo’s became involved”, meaning that earlier information held by local authorities or other agencies may be missing. She described this as “one of the biggest gaps”, whilst acknowledging the importance of “the full picture” for individuals seeking answers. Ms Farrell said that Barnardo’s tries to mitigate these gaps by contacting other agencies “within three to five months” in order to bring as many records together as possible.⁴⁹ Colonel Forrest acknowledged similar limitations for The Salvation Army, saying “We do have gaps. We acknowledge that.” He noted that historically the most important thing was to record details about the mother and where the child ended up, but that responsibility for other details is unclear: “Who would have those details, I do not know.”⁵⁰
58. Emma Crowther-Duncan, National Development Lead at PAC-UK, painted a similar picture, saying that accessing adoption records can be “traumatic and dehumanising” due to the “fragmented processes and inconsistent handling across local authorities and agencies.” Ms Crowther-Duncan told the Committee that record-keeping practices can vary wildly, with records stored in disparate locations and lacking co-ordinated digital preservation.

47 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q10.

48 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q43.

49 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q41.

50 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q42.

“We often hear that files have been lost in a fire or a flood. These are people’s histories, and it feels that these barriers are just consistent for people, and they should not be.”⁵¹

59. When asked about these calls for a single, standardised point of access for adoption records, witnesses during the first oral evidence session were largely in favour of the proposal.⁵² However, the Minister told us that setting up such a system would be difficult.
60. Witnesses were also asked if there is a need for Government to legislate around adoption records, including in relation to their preservation, the obligations on organisations and local authorities that hold records, and on the redactions often seen in adoption records. Adoption UK and PAC-UK both recognised that legislation could strengthen rights and set enforceable standards, particularly around the retention of records. Emily Frith said that legislation could be “really beneficial particularly around the retention of records” but that in the meantime further statutory guidance would be helpful.⁵³ Emma Crowther-Duncan said that the issue of retention of records is important and that she agrees with calls for records to be held for a much longer period. Ms Crowther-Duncan said that guidance around redactions is vital but that “a legislative approach may delay that.”⁵⁴ Dr Greenlees from Glasgow Caledonian University also stated that legislation was necessary to preserve adoption records.⁵⁵
61. We took evidence from two organisations which hold adoption records - Barnardo’s and The Salvation Army - there are of course many other such organisations which were involved in historical forced adoption either through managing adoptions or running Mother and Baby Homes, and still hold records. Both spoke about the limitations in the information they hold, and their processes and time frames for helping people access information. Aside from these difficulties, our evidence session also clearly demonstrated the deeper difficulties survivors may face in accessing records from organisations such as these who were involved in historical forced adoption. We were surprised by the initial answers both organisations gave to us, which in our view fell far short of acknowledging their roles in forced adoptions, something survivors may have found distressing. Whilst both organisations subsequently clarified their position, it underlines the importance of sensitive communication which acknowledges the wrongs of the past with honesty, rather than hiding behind historical societal norms.

51 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q43.

52 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q49.

53 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q54.

54 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q54.

55 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q14 and Q24.

62.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must take urgent action to ensure that all existing adoption records are preserved and protected from deterioration, destruction or loss. It should legislate to introduce a clear statutory duty on every record-holding institution to maintain and securely store their records.

63.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must take steps to ensure that all affected individuals receive timely, consistent and transparent access to adoption records. This obligation should be underpinned by clear statutory duties requiring every record-holding body to maintain accurate records and meet nationally defined standards for disclosure. The Government should establish a single, standardised national access point for adoption records, something that survivors recommended to us.

64.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should issue new guidance to local authorities to improve the experience of birth mothers and adult adoptees seeking information about their records, with additional resources provided to local authorities so that requests for access to records do not have to compete with current child safeguarding priorities and that access to records is supported by better training of local authority staff.

65.

RECOMMENDATION

Beyond this, it was clear from our evidence that as well as safeguarding and maintaining records, organisations holding records must ensure they take steps to respond to and help survivors in a way that is sensitive to the challenges for survivors in approaching an organisation that may have been complicit in the harm that was done to them. This should involve not only enhanced training for staff, but also ensuring that organisations reflect on their history and present it in a way which reflects the evidence as we now understand it - that women were coerced into adoption without consent, and suffered abuse, and that this resulted in lifelong trauma both for mothers and for their children; and that the system was cruel, traumatising and stigmatising for women who were placed in Mother and Baby Homes, even when they were able to keep their babies.

7 Improving intermediary support for adoptees and birth families

66. Evidence presented to the JCHR showed variation in the quality of services provided by intermediary agencies, often to the detriment of the individuals seeking support. One mother described “an amazing social worker who was tireless in her attempts to contact my daughter.” During a roundtable event in April 2022, a number of participants raised concerns about the standard of certain intermediary work and expressed a strong view that intermediaries should not only make initial contact with relatives but also facilitate ongoing communication - for example, by leaving contact details so that relatives could reach out if they later changed their minds.⁵⁶
67. As part of its previous inquiry, the JCHR also heard evidence of the experience of reunions between mothers and grown children, who were often well into adulthood. Some had built happy relationships. “I’ve reunited with my son, and we have a wonderful relationship”, wrote one; “We have not looked back since”, said another. In the words of one mother: “The man is returned to me, but not the child. The lost child is forever lost.” Many felt unable to continue the contact, however: “I no longer have any contact with my daughter or grandchildren”, wrote one mother.⁵⁷
68. When we asked our witnesses with lived experience about what support survivors of forced adoption needed in tracing and reuniting with birth families, the answer they gave was simple: practical help with finding the right information; and emotional support that recognises how frightening tracing and reunion can be for adult adoptees. Diana Defries told us that “people assume it will be a happy ever after...with families holding hands and skipping into the sunset”, which very often it is not.⁵⁸ This view was supported by the evidence we heard from adoption charities.

56 JCHR, [The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976](#), July 2022, p27.

57 JCHR, [The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976](#), July 2022, p24.

58 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q14.

69. Emily Frith of Adoption UK stressed that many people begin searching for relatives without understanding the emotional and practical complexity involved. According to Adoption UK evidence, people often begin the process of tracing family members without the right support, which can mean “that those relationships cannot be sustained and there is a sense of regret.”⁵⁹
70. Online ancestry tracing sites and DNA testing are now widely available; these raise the possibility that people will discover they were adopted, and also of being able to trace relatives directly - currently this happens in an entirely unsupported way. There may be a need for organisations providing such services to be regulated, and to offer advice and guidance and signpost users to available support.
71. PAC-UK is the largest national provider of intermediary support services, but our witnesses were all clear that the current provision cannot meet demand, as there is insufficient funding for it. When asked how intermediary services could be strengthened to reduce the risk of distressing outcomes, Emily Frith said that “the funding is key” and that “there just is not enough availability of services.”⁶⁰ Funding is also a concern for the Movement for an Adoption Apology who have called for a “fully funded intermediary service to assist with making and sustaining contact, including guidance on initial contact and further support as required, to help ensure these fractured relationships can last.”⁶¹
72. We also heard that provision of tracing and intermediary services for transnational adoptees are woefully inadequate. Debbie Iromlou told us that “as an inter-country adoptee, there is absolutely no provision whatsoever for me for tracing birth parents.” She described how it had taken her over 40 years to find her birth parents, by which time her father, tragically, had already passed away.⁶²

73.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government must introduce a nationally funded and regulated intermediary service to ensure that all adoptees and birth relatives have access to skilled, trauma-informed professionals who can support them in navigating contact, reunion, or information-sharing processes safely and sensitively. As part of this process the Government should also ensure that online ancestry tracing and DNA testing sites offer clear support and signposting for people who find out they are adopted, and should consult on whether such sites need to be regulated.

59 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q58.

60 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q59.

61 Movement for an Adoption Apology, [Recommended measures for an Apology](#), accessed March 2026.

62 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q14.

8 A dedicated mental health support pathway

- 74.** We heard that survivors of forced adoption are at significantly increased risk of mental health problems. However, our witnesses with lived experience were damning in their assessment of the provision available, particularly emphasising that services need to be specific to the experiences of adoption, recognising that many will need trauma-specific support rather than standard mental health interventions.

“I am not aware of any services that effectively provide for mothers.”

“The support is ‘not there’.”

“Current provision is scarce and it is harmful.”⁶³

“Clinicians don’t recognise that we need trauma treatment.”

“Provision for counselling support is scarce or non-existent.”⁶⁴

- 75.** We were told that a simple solution would be to fast-track forced adoption survivors into existing trauma-informed pathways like those for veterans. We have heard significant evidence that trauma-informed services are not sufficiently available to everyone who needs them. Witnesses with lived experience also emphasised the need to have appropriate support available all their lives; to have their need for trauma-informed support codified within NICE guidelines; an adoption-specific marker added to NHS records; and, crucially, for support to be delivered by independent organisations, not previously or currently involved in adoption.⁶⁵
- 76.** This evidence was strongly supported by what we heard from organisations working in this area. At the first oral evidence session in February, Emma Crowther-Duncan, National Development Lead at PAC-UK, told the Committee that people often struggle in “normal NHS pathways”, because adoption-linked trauma is often overlooked, and that “adoptees are seen as blank slates or as infants, often leading to missed or delayed treatment.

63 Sally Ells elaborates on the harmful nature of current provision in answer to Q13, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026.

64 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q13.

65 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q15.

That creates more significant barriers, including misdiagnoses and a lack of trauma-focused therapy. That emotional burden of repeatedly explaining adoption history to clinicians who are not adoption-aware has an impact.”⁶⁶

- 77.** Emily Frith, CEO of Adoption UK, said that 72% of respondents to its 2025 Adoption Barometer survey⁶⁷ reported that they had accessed professional services as an adult from a range of providers, but less than a third said that they know where they can access counselling and therapeutic services that are “adoptee-competent”. Ms Frith continued: “To have a therapist who really understands the impact that adoption has had, and continues to have, on your life is really important. We are trying to work with organisations such as the BACP and UKCP to see what better guidance and competency frameworks can be available, and to provide more information and advice for adoptees on where they can access therapy.”⁶⁸

78. RECOMMENDATION

The Government must introduce a dedicated, trauma-informed health pathway for all those affected by historical forced adoption. This should include improved access to specialist psychological support for birth mothers and adult adoptees, national clinical guidance recognising the heightened prevalence of complex PTSD and suicide risk in these groups, and consistent provision across England through a single national service specification.

79. RECOMMENDATION

Adult adoptees told us that one of the harms they experienced was the loss of their health records. The Government should introduce an adoption marker on health records so that requests for medical history can be sensitively handled and additional screening and testing offered where needed.

66 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q55.

67 Adoption UK, *The Adoption Barometer*, September 2025, p75.

68 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 24 February 2026, Q55.

9 Learning and improving practice

80. Finally, the survivors who gave us evidence told us very compellingly of the need for further research, as there is very little research on outcomes for survivors of forced adoption. Describing reunions, Diana Defries told us:

This person's daughter was taken, they were reunited and it all went very well, and then when it started going wrong, she thought, "I'll look at the research," because she is an academic. But she found that there isn't any. One of the many things that we are asking for is research.⁶⁹

81. Sally Ells went on to explain the importance of closing this research gap, for improving services:

Research is essential because, again, it goes back to this: adoption has failed—there are so many reports about how it is failing now we would ask ... that the Government commissions research on lifelong adult adoptee outcomes—physical and mental health outcomes, addiction, mortality and abuse in adoptive families—because unless you know what is actually happening, how can you do it better? we would ask for an adoptee marker to be created on NHS records to enable research.⁷⁰

82. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Government should commission and fund independent research into historical forced adoption, including quantitative and qualitative studies on outcomes and on best practice for support interventions, to build a comprehensive evidence base that informs future policy decisions and improves support for survivor.

69 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q14.

70 Education Committee, [Historical Forced Adoptions](#), 10 March 2026, Q15.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. We are in agreement as a Committee that the survivors' testimony, which was a formal Parliamentary proceeding and live broadcast, was some of the most powerful, moving and compelling evidence we have heard. We would like to place on the record our heartfelt thanks for their bravery, honesty and eloquence. (Conclusion, Paragraph 2)
2. To give an idea of the scale of this issue, it is estimated that around 185,000 children were adopted between 1949 and 1976. Not all adoptions happened in the appalling circumstances described by our lived experience witnesses - for example, sometimes children were orphaned. People with lived experience may have a diverse range of views on what happened, and of course not everyone's experience was the same, with some happily more positive; but a diversity of views does not dilute the harm that many suffered and whose testimony we have heard. (Conclusion, Paragraph 3)
3. Survivors of forced adoption must not have to repeat, in public, their harrowing stories anymore. It is clear that decisive Government action, beginning with a co-authored apology, and continuing with a programme of fully funded support for survivors, must now happen without delay, so that survivors can get on with their lives. We go on to consider the evidence for an apology, as well as other measures, in detail in the remainder of this short report; but we begin by stating that the Government must act now; and by asking, exceptionally, that the Government provides an initial response, setting out a timetable for developing and issuing its apology, within one month in recognition of the huge cost to survivors of continued delay and inaction. (Conclusion, Paragraph 8)

An apology

4. Historical forced adoption practices involved systemic coercion, the removal of parental choice and often resulted in deep trauma and lifelong consequences for mental and physical health. A formal apology is necessary to acknowledge these harms and to recognise the state's role in

permitting them. We should be clear that the scope of the apology should extend beyond the 1949–1976 period as we have received clear evidence that the practices associated with forced adoptions happened before 1949 and continued after the introduction of the Adoption Act 1976. (Conclusion, Paragraph 28)

5. Furthermore, many of those affected - both mothers and adult adoptees - are now elderly, and any further delay risks denying them the recognition they have waited decades to receive. Given the advancing age of those affected, time is now a critical factor. (Conclusion, Paragraph 29)
6. The meaningful involvement of survivors in the design and implementation of an apology is essential to ensure that the apology validates their experiences and that the mitigations put in place thereafter support them directly. The Government must embed mothers and adoptees' voices at every stage of the process of an apology. (Conclusion, Paragraph 30)
7. The Government must provide an unqualified, formal apology to all those affected by historical forced adoption practices, including unmarried mothers who were forced to give up their children for adoption, adult adoptees who were forcibly taken from their birth families, unmarried mothers who were able to keep their children, but who were nevertheless subject to cruel practices, punishments and stigma, as well as birth fathers, siblings and other family members. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)
8. The Government must give an initial commitment to an apology, and must undertake the preliminary work for an apology - including working with survivor groups - as quickly as possible and commit publicly to a clear timetable for developing and issuing its apology. (Recommendation, Paragraph 32)
9. The Government must work directly with mothers, adult adoptees and lived-experience organisations to co-author both the apology and the measures that follow it. Co-production should run through all subsequent commitments on accessing records, trauma-informed health support, intermediary services, research and long-term representation in policymaking. (Recommendation, Paragraph 33)

The State's involvement

10. Evidence shows that government policy decisions, funding arrangements and legislative frameworks shaped the environment in which unmarried mothers were routinely denied any meaningful choice in whether or not they could keep their children and were often shamed and coerced into submitting to have their children put up for adoption. (Conclusion, Paragraph 38)

11. We are encouraged by the Minister's acceptance that the state had a role in historical forced adoptions. However, the Government must go further by acknowledging the central role that the state had during this time. (Conclusion, Paragraph 39)
12. The Government should formally and publicly recognise that the state played a central role in enabling and sustaining historical forced adoption practices. Acknowledging this responsibility is essential in order to correct the public record, address previous misrepresentations, reduce the burden of blame and shame felt by many mothers and adoptees and the feelings of abandonment and rejection felt by many adoptees, and lay the groundwork for a credible apology and meaningful redress for those affected. (Recommendation, Paragraph 40)

Working with survivors

13. Survivors of historical forced adoption practices have stressed the profound emotional burden of continually recounting their experiences and the many years they have spent campaigning without feeling heard by Government. It is clear to us that ongoing, structured dialogue with survivors is not an optional extra but a foundation for meaningful progress. (Conclusion, Paragraph 43)
14. The Government must listen to and engage with survivors of forced adoption practices. The Government should commit to a survivor engagement strategy that guarantees regular consultation and clear lines of accountability, both in the short term as the Government works towards an apology, and for the long-term to ensure that survivors' experiences and insights directly inform the Government's decision-making processes and that they are able to hold the Government to account for the impact of the apology. (Recommendation, Paragraph 44)

Learning from other countries

15. The Government must undertake a rigorous assessment of international responses to historical forced adoptions, with special attention to the redress mechanisms introduced in Australia, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This learning should inform a UK approach that avoids symbolic or incomplete action and instead delivers a comprehensive, fully-resourced, survivor-led response. (Recommendation, Paragraph 54)

Improving access to adoption records

16. The Government must take urgent action to ensure that all existing adoption records are preserved and protected from deterioration, destruction or loss. It should legislate to introduce a clear statutory duty on every record-holding institution to maintain and securely store their records. (Recommendation, Paragraph 62)
17. The Government must take steps to ensure that all affected individuals receive timely, consistent and transparent access to adoption records. This obligation should be underpinned by clear statutory duties requiring every record-holding body to maintain accurate records and meet nationally defined standards for disclosure. The Government should establish a single, standardised national access point for adoption records, something that survivors recommended to us. (Recommendation, Paragraph 63)
18. The Government should issue new guidance to local authorities to improve the experience of birth mothers and adult adoptees seeking information about their records, with additional resources provided to local authorities so that requests for access to records do not have to compete with current child safeguarding priorities and that access to records is supported by better training of local authority staff. (Recommendation, Paragraph 64)
19. Beyond this, it was clear from our evidence that as well as safeguarding and maintaining records, organisations holding records must ensure they take steps to respond to and help survivors in a way that is sensitive to the challenges for survivors in approaching an organisation that may have been complicit in the harm that was done to them. This should involve not only enhanced training for staff, but also ensuring that organisations reflect on their history and present it in a way which reflects the evidence as we now understand it - that women were coerced into adoption without consent, and suffered abuse, and that this resulted in lifelong trauma both for mothers and for their children; and that the system was cruel, traumatising and stigmatising for women who were placed in Mother and Baby Homes, even when they were able to keep their babies. (Recommendation, Paragraph 65)

Improving intermediary support for adoptees and birth families

20. The Government must introduce a nationally funded and regulated intermediary service to ensure that all adoptees and birth relatives have access to skilled, trauma-informed professionals who can support them in navigating contact, reunion, or information-sharing processes safely and sensitively. As part of this process the Government should also ensure

that online ancestry tracing and DNA testing sites offer clear support and signposting for people who find out they are adopted, and should consult on whether such sites need to be regulated. (Recommendation, Paragraph 73)

A dedicated mental health support pathway

- 21.** The Government must introduce a dedicated, trauma-informed health pathway for all those affected by historical forced adoption. This should include improved access to specialist psychological support for birth mothers and adult adoptees, national clinical guidance recognising the heightened prevalence of complex PTSD and suicide risk in these groups, and consistent provision across England through a single national service specification. (Recommendation, Paragraph 78)
- 22.** Adult adoptees told us that one of the harms they experienced was the loss of their health records. The Government should introduce an adoption marker on health records so that requests for medical history can be sensitively handled and additional screening and testing offered where needed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 79)

Learning and improving practice

- 23.** The Government should commission and fund independent research into historical forced adoption, including quantitative and qualitative studies on outcomes and on best practice for support interventions, to build a comprehensive evidence base that informs future policy decisions and improves support for survivor. (Recommendation, Paragraph 82)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Darren Paffey

Manuela Perteghella

Mark Swards

Peter Swallow

Chris Vince

Caroline Voaden

Historical Forced Adoption

Draft Report (*Historical Forced Adoption*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 82 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 24 March 2025 at 9.45am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 24 February 2026

Professor Gordon Harold, Professor of the Psychology of Education and Mental Health, University of Cambridge; **Dr Michael Lambert**, Lecturer in Medical Humanities, Lancaster University; **Dr Janet Greenlees**, Reader in Health History, Glasgow Caledonian University; **Dr James Gallen**, Associate Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University [Q1–25](#)

Emma Crowther-Duncan, National Development Lead, PAC-UK; **Brenda Farrell**, UK Director for Fostering, Adoption & Children In Care, Barnardo's; **Colonel Peter Forrest**, Chief Secretary, The Salvation Army UK and Ireland; **Emily Frith**, CEO, Adoption UK [Q26–62](#)

Tuesday 10 March 2026

Diana Defries, Chair, Movement for an Adoption Apology; **Ann Lloyd Keen**, Trustee, Movement for an Adoption Apology; **Sally Ells**, Co-Founder, Adult Adoptee Movement; **Debbie Iromlou**, Co-Founder, Adult Adoptee Movement [Q1–15](#)

Josh MacAlister MP, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education [Q16–35](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
7th	Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings	HC 1399
6th	Further Education and Skills	HC 666
5th	Solving the SEND Crisis	HC 492
4th	Children's social care	HC 430
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
7th Special	Solving the SEND Crisis: Government Response	HC 1565
6th Special	Further Education and Skills: Government Response	HC 1555
5th Special	Children's social care: Government Response	HC 1350
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628

Number	Title	Reference
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627