

# Adoptees and relatives who wish to contact one another using the Adoption Contact Register: trends, relationships and proportions of records matched

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This article - the second of two on the subject of the Adoption Contact Register - gives some fuller statistical analyses on the patterns of use, and includes the proportions of the records of different groups of adoptees and relatives which have been matched.

## INTRODUCTION

The previous article<sup>1</sup> described the background to the introduction of the Adoption Contact Register and outlined what it does and how it operates. The article also gave some summary statistical results.

The Adoption Contact Register was introduced in England and Wales on 1 May 1991 for three groups of adults: those adopted in England and Wales; those born in England and Wales but adopted overseas; and the birth relatives of these two groups of adoptees. For the purpose of the Register, “relative” includes the adopted person’s birth parents and anyone related to him or her by blood, half-blood or marriage – it does not include those who are relatives as a result of adoption.

The Adoption Contact Register is operated and maintained by the Registrar General of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As was emphasised in the previous article, ONS has no systematic record of contacts made between adoptees and their relatives by any of the possible formal and informal means of doing so – apart from information on the use of the Adoption Contact Register. The results presented in this article therefore do not give the whole story of the extent to which contacts have been made since 1991, but it does

document the extent of the contribution of the Adoption Contact Register to that (unestimated) total picture. The previous article<sup>1</sup> listed the alternative ways in which contact can be made – such as by first obtaining a copy of one’s original birth entry; another article<sup>2</sup> estimated the proportion of adoptees who have done so.

### APPLYING TO BE PLACED ON THE ADOPTION CONTACT REGISTER

Both adoptees and relatives who wish their name to be entered on the Adoption Contact Register must complete an application form, which collects the basic details needed to make a link. Adoptees, who must be aged at least 18, need to supply their full birth name, the full names of both their birth parents, their full adopted name, the full names of both their adoptive parents, as well as the adoptee’s date and place of birth and year of adoption. The relatives, who have to complete a different application form from that for the adoptees, must provide most of the above particulars on the adopted person; they need also to state their relationship to the adoptee and provide appropriate documentary evidence. The two kinds of application form are reproduced in Appendices 1 and 2.

The details of new applicants are added on a daily basis to the Adoption Contact Register, which is held on a secure computer system. After doing so, a program is run to detect whether there are any matches between the entire sets of adoptee and relative records. If there are, the details of the adoptee record are added to those of the relative record and the name and address of the relative is sent to the adoptee. It is therefore up to the adoptee to make contact with the relative if he or she decides to do so. ONS does not have a record of whether the adoptee did in fact contact their relative, so that when mention is made of a successful link or match of records, it does not necessarily mean that an actual contact was made. However, given that the adoptee originally made a conscious choice to try to make contact with a birth relative, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority do so.

### THE PREVIOUS STUDY – UPDATED TO MID-2001

Most of the above details were given in the previous article, which gave key results on entries onto the Adoption Contact Register up to November 2000. Results in the present article relate to a longer period – from May 1991 to the end of June 2001. The results therefore cover just over ten years of operation of the Register. Up to 30 June 2001, just under 20 thousand adoptees and 8½ thousand relatives had placed themselves on the Adoption Register (see Table 1). During that time, 539 pairs of records were linked, so that the average was just over one successful match of records per week over the entire 10-year period.

**Table 1** Adoptees and relatives registered on the Adoption Contact Register on 30th June 2001, England and Wales

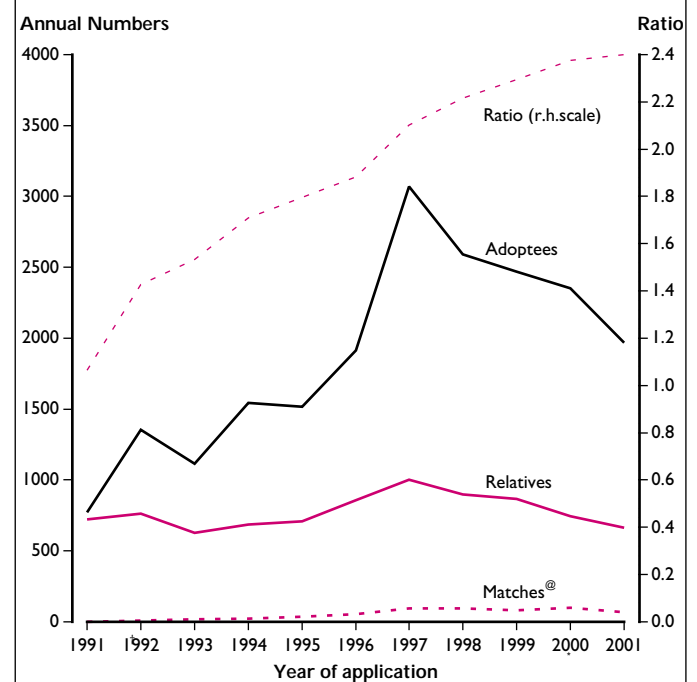
	Men	Women	Persons
<b>Numbers</b>			
Adoptees	7,084	12,599	19,683
Relatives	1,253	7,239	8,492
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,337</b>	<b>19,838</b>	<b>28,175</b>
<b>Percentages</b>			
Adoptees	36	64	100
Relatives	15	85	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

### THE BUILD-UP OF THE ADOPTION CONTACT REGISTER

During 1991, or rather the last 8 months of 1991, after 1st May when the Adoption Contact Register was first set up, approximately equal numbers of adoptees and relatives – around 750 – applied for their names to be registered (see Figure 1 and Appendix A). However, since 1991, the number of new adoptees applying has always exceeded the number of new relatives. Furthermore, on a cumulative basis, the total number of adoptees to the total number of relatives as a ratio has consistently widened over the years, more than doubling between 1991 to 2001 so that by the end of June 2001, there were well over 2 adoptees for every relative on the Register (see Figure 1).

It might have been expected that the Adoption Contact Register would be used more by adoptees than relatives, but perhaps not to be expected that the gap would consistently widen over the years. The numbers of new adoptee and new relative applications both reached a peak in 1997, since when both numbers have declined. Not surprisingly, the trend in the number of successful matches has mirrored that in the number of new applications, the number also reaching a peak of 95 in 1997 – an average of almost two matches per week.

**Figure 1** Annual numbers of new applications – by adoptees and relatives – onto the Adoption Contact Register, the ratio of their cumulative numbers and the annual numbers of successful matches, 1991–2001, England and Wales



† 8 months from 1.5.1991

\* 2001 numbers estimated from double the ½ year number

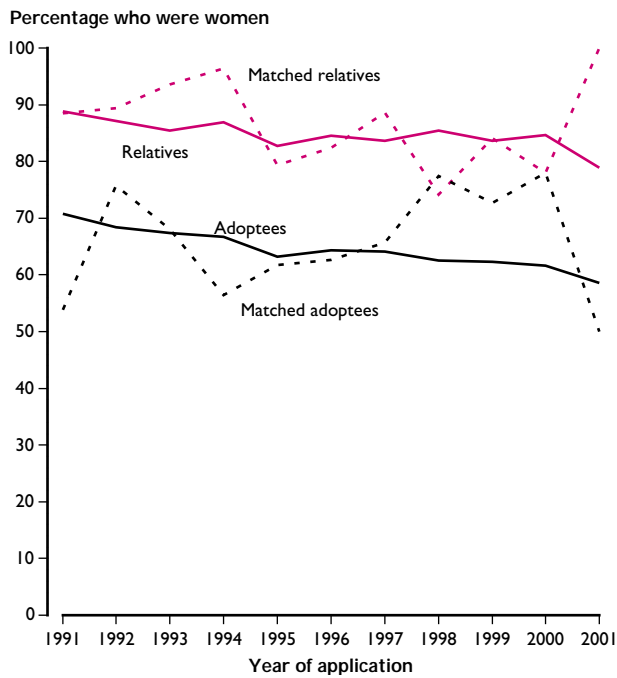
® Year is that of match

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOPTEES AND RELATIVES ON THE REGISTER

#### Men and women

An important characteristic of both adoptees and relatives who place themselves on the Adoption Contact Register is that the majority are women – 64 per cent of adoptees and 85 per cent of relatives (Table 1). Evidently women adoptees are more likely than men adoptees to wish to contact their birth relatives, since roughly equal numbers of boys and girls have been adopted in past years. Similarly, women relatives are

**Figure 2** Percentage of new applications onto the Adoption Contact Register who were women, 1991–2001, England and Wales



more likely – much more likely, in fact – than men relatives to try to contact their adopted relatives by means of the Adoption Contact Register. As will be seen, a large proportion of women relatives placing themselves on the Register are mothers wanting to be put in touch with their children.

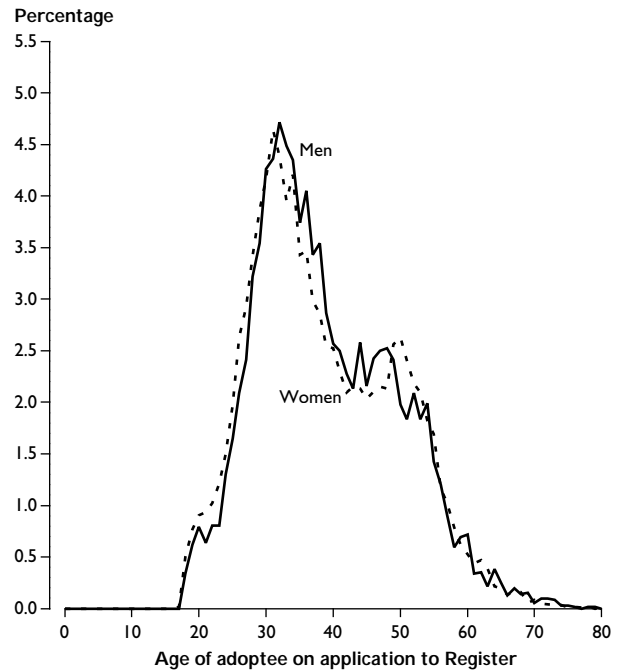
Although the majority of adoptees and relatives are women, the proportion has slightly declined over the years – see Figure 2. Whilst the proportions of adoptions and relatives who are women have changed only very slightly from year to year, the corresponding proportions *amongst those who were successfully matched* have been much more volatile, primarily because of the comparatively small numbers involved. Also, it needs to be remembered that, in a successful match of records, the adoptee and relative can have applied to be placed on the Register several years apart.

### Age at application

Most of the men and women adoptees who registered on the Adoption Contact Register were in their thirties when they applied – see Figure 3 and Appendix A. This is a not unexpected finding since adoptions ran at their highest post-war level around the late 1960s in England and Wales. It is also apparent from Figure 3 that a sizeable proportion of men and women adoptees were in their forties and early fifties; since most would have been adopted as babies or very young children, four or five decades would have elapsed since their adoption – and their parents would be at least 60 or 70. The profile of ages at application for men adoptees is very slightly older than that of women adoptees, but otherwise they are very similar.

It is informative to consider the corresponding age profiles of the adoptees *whom the relatives wished to contact*: that is, the age the adoptee would have been when the *relative* applied to the Adoption Contact Register. These age profiles appear in Figure 4. Of course, this latter group of adoptees is not the same as the adoptees who registered *themselves* – though there is a very small overlap represented by the small number of successful matches. (As was apparent from Figure 1, the large majority of relatives on the Register have *not* been successful in being put in touch with their adopted relative).

**Figure 3** Profile of ages of adoptees on applying to enter the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales



**Figure 4** Profile of ages of adoptees whom the relatives wished to contact, by age of adoptee on the relatives application to the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales



There are three striking differences between the age profiles of these two groups of adoptees (shown in Figures 3 and 4). First, the adoptees which the relatives were hoping to contact (Figure 4) tended to be much younger than the adoptees who wished to contact their relatives (Figure 3). In addition, the adoptees whom the women relatives wished to contact were four or five years younger than the adoptees which the men relatives wished to contact. In contrast, the ages of men and women adoptees were much the same.

The third interesting feature is that an appreciable number of relatives obviously apply to be registered as soon as their adopted birth relative has reached age 18 – the peak in Figure 4 is very pronounced – particularly for the adoptees whom women relatives hope to contact – and in complete contrast to the picture for adoptees themselves applying to register – very few of whom apply at the earliest age of 18 (Figure 3). (Possibly these, and other, differences in the two groups of adoptees – those registering themselves, and those the relatives wished to contact – may help to explain why the number of successful matches has been fairly low).

It is remarkable too that a small proportion of relatives put their name on the Adoption Contact Register when their adopted relatives are quite young – well under 18. Although adoptees cannot have their name placed on the Register until they reach age 18, there is no restriction on a relative putting their name on the Register if the adoptee they hope to contact is not yet 18. In such situations, ONS advises the relative that the adoptee cannot register until they reach 18, but nevertheless many relatives still want to register in the hope that the adoptee will register as soon as that happens. Also, a few relatives wrote to ONS *before* the Adoption Contact Register was set up asking to be put in touch with their adopted relative; ONS was unable to comply, but as soon as the Register was in operation, the relative was able to use the new facility. Because of the way in which the age of the relative’s adoptee has been estimated – see Appendix A – the age is that of the adoptee when the relative *first* contacted ONS with their request.

The age profiles of the adoptees whom the men and women relatives were trying to contact show some distinct contrasts (Figure 4). The first broad age range of contrast covers the ages from 18 to about 30 where there are relatively more women than men trying to contact their adopted relative, and the second age range is from 40 to 60 where there are proportionately more men relatives than women relatives wishing to be put in touch with their adopted relative. The explanation lies in relatively more women than men wanting to contact their *child*, and relatively more men than women wanting to establish – or re-establish – links with a *brother or sister*.

### Age of adoptee at relative’s application and relationship to adoptee

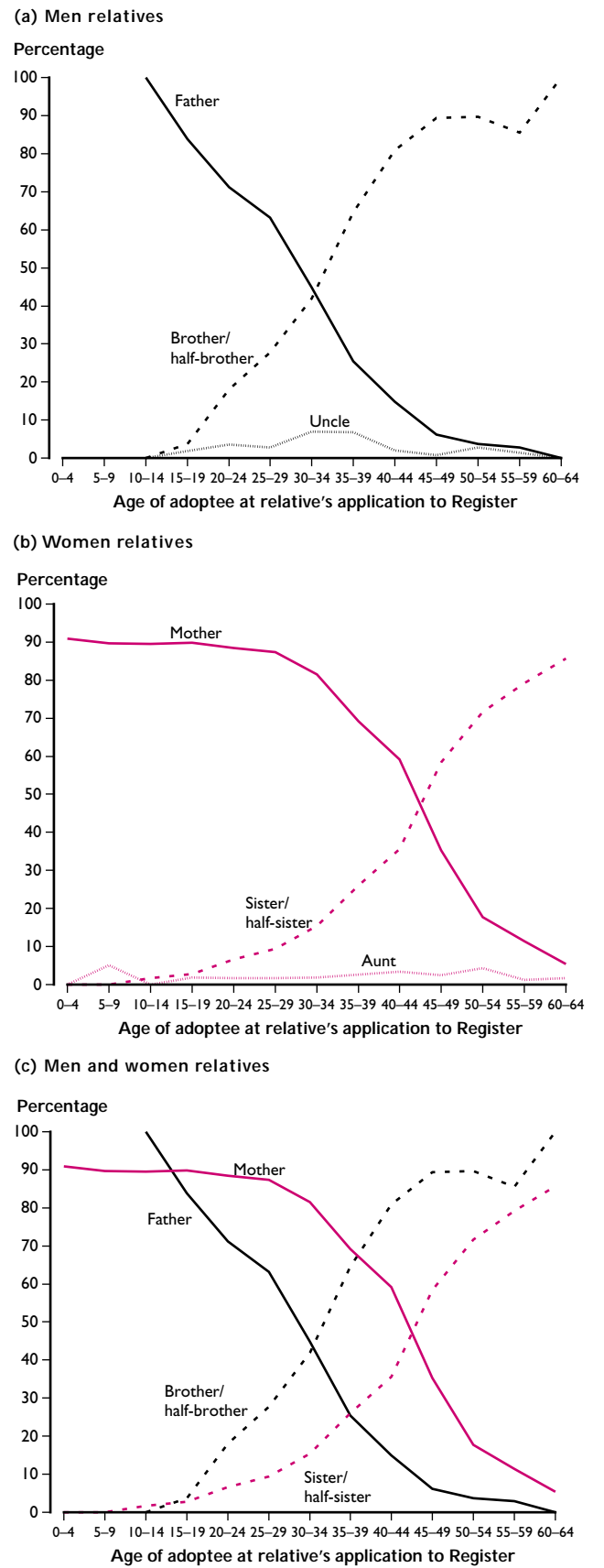
A further analysis by age of adoptee at their relative’s application gives an additional insight when also considered with the relative’s relationship to the adoptee. Figures 5a and 5b show the profile of these relationships, separately for each age group of adoptees, whom the relatives wish to contact. For the youngest age groups of adoptees, the vast majority of men and women relatives are fathers and mothers, respectively, of the adoptee – and over one half the relatives are still parents for adoptees in their late twenties. However, for older groups of adoptees, increasing proportions of men and women relatives are brothers/half-brothers and sisters/half-sisters, respectively. Somewhat surprisingly, aunts and uncles form an approximately constant, but low, proportion of all relatives, irrespective of the age of their adopted niece or nephew. (The proportions covering “other relatives” are very small – and are not shown in Figures 5a, 5b, 5c, for clarity.)

However, although the changing patterns of relationships with older age of adoptee are similar between men and women relatives, it is notable that the proportion of women relatives who are mothers is larger than the proportion of men relatives who are fathers for every age group of adoptee (see Figure 5c which combines the results from Figures 5a and 5b). Conversely, for every age group of adoptee, relatively fewer women relatives are sisters or half-sisters of the adoptee than men relatives are brothers or half-brothers.

### Relatives’ relationships to the adoptees

Overall, women relatives on the Adoption Contact Register are almost twice as likely to be mothers as men relatives are to be fathers

**Figure 5** Profile of relationships of relatives to their adoptee relation, for each age-group of adoptee, by age of adoptee on the relation’s application to the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales



**Table 2** Numbers of relatives registered on the Adoption Contact Register on the 30th June 2001 by their sex and relationship to their adoptee relative, England and Wales

Relationship to adoptee	Numbers			Percentages		
	Men	Women	Persons	Men	Women	Persons
Father/mother/parent	488	5,348	5,836	39	74	69
Brother/sister/sibling	343	707	1,050	27	10	12
Half-brother/half-sister/half-sibling*	304	822	1,126	24	11	13
Uncle/aunt/both	47	156	203	3.8	2.2	2.4
Grandfather/grandmother/grandparent	28	113	141	2.2	1.6	1.7
Step-relation**	15	13	28	1.2	0.2	0.3
Cousin†	14	33	47	1.10	0.50	0.60
Nephew/niece/both	0	5	5	0.0	0.07	0.06
Other	14	42	56	1.10	0.60	0.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,253</b>	<b>7,239</b>	<b>8,492</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Includes half-relation

\*\* Includes step-mother/step-father

† Includes second cousin

Note: the relationships are those as originally stated on the application form by the relative. Some may have stated their relationship to be brother or sister when it should have been half-brother or half-sister (or even step-brother or step-sister). Similarly, some gave the general term step-relation rather than, for example, step-brother or step-parent.

(Table 2). On the other hand, men relatives are more than twice as likely as women relatives to be the siblings or half-siblings of the adoptees with whom they wish to re-establish contact. Also, men relatives are proportionately more likely to wish to contact every *other kind* of adoptee relative than women – the result of the large preponderance of women relatives being mothers wanting to get in touch with their children.

Three quarters of all women relatives on the Adoption Contact Register are mothers, whereas only two in five men relatives are fathers. It should be noted that the relationships analysed in Table 2 – and elsewhere – are those as originally stated by the relative on the application form, and may not contain sufficient detail to distinguish between different kinds of relatives. For example “half-relation” has been interpreted as “half-brother” or “half-sister”.

### Age profiles of different kinds of relatives on the Register

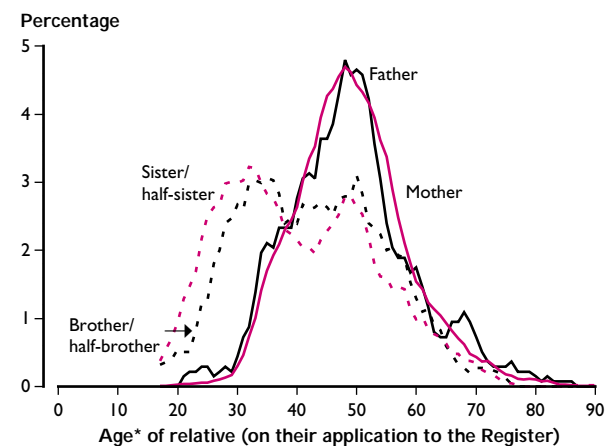
When relatives apply to be entered onto the Adoption Contact Register, they do not have to give their age, but they are required to provide documentary evidence of their relationship to the adoptee whom they wish to contact. Depending upon the kind of relation they are, certified copies of the appropriate birth and/or marriage entries have to be supplied – and, in the majority of cases, the age of the relative at the time of application can be derived from their date of birth or age given in one or other of the certified copies. As a special exercise, the ages of as many relatives as possible – numbering just over 6½ thousand – who were on the Adoption Contact Register at the end of April 2000 were estimated.

The age profiles of the men and women relatives – shown in Figure 6a – are very similar, although, rather unexpectedly, the men relatives tend to be slightly younger than the women relatives – the result, perhaps, of proportionately more men than women wishing to contact their siblings and relatively more women than men wanting to re-establish contact with their child. The median ages of the men and women relatives in Figure 6a are 46 years and 48 years, respectively (derived from unsmoothed data). In addition, the ages of the women relatives are more concentrated around the early 50s, probably another consequence of a large proportion of women relatives being mothers.

The age profiles of some important kinds of relatives – those closest to the adoptee – can be compared from this special analysis – and are shown in Figure 6b. The ages of mothers and fathers on the Register are

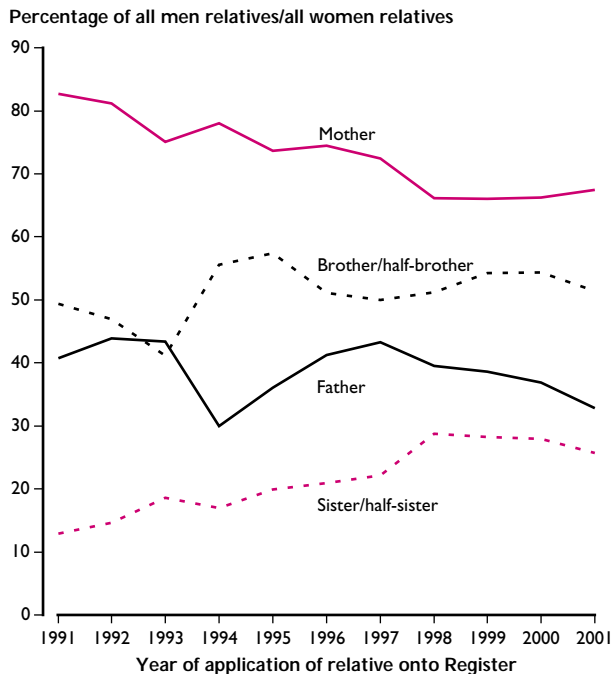
**Figure 6(a)** Profiles of ages\* of men and women relatives on application to the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales

\* Estimated (see text); data have been smoothed using a 5-year moving average.

**Figure 6(b)** Profiles of ages\* of various kinds of relatives on their application to the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales

\* Estimated (see text); data have been smoothed using a 5-year moving average.

**Figure 7** Percentages of all men relatives/all women relatives who were fathers/mothers and brothers/sisters of the adoptee, by year of application of relative onto the Adoption Contact Register, 1991–2001, England and Wales



very similar indeed in profile; the median ages are 49 and 50, respectively. In contrast, sisters of adoptees tend to be several years younger than brothers of adoptees; the median ages are 39 years and 43 years, respectively. Possibly a larger proportion of sisters hope to contact an *older* brother or sister than a younger one – and a larger proportion of brothers hope to contact a *younger* brother or sister than an older one. (The above median ages have all been derived from unsmoothed data.)

**Trends in the relationships of relatives to adoptees**

There have been some changes over the last decade in the profiles of men and women relatives on the Adoption Contact Register. In 1991, more than 8 in every ten women were mothers, but the relative number was fewer than 7 in every 10, ten years later in 2001 (Figure 7). In contrast, sisters and half-sisters have doubled in relative number to over one quarter of all women relatives. The pattern for men relatives has been more variable over the years, overall with fathers becoming slightly fewer, and brothers and half-brothers slightly more numerous.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOPTEES AND RELATIVES WHOSE RECORDS WERE SUCCESSFULLY MATCHED**

The characteristics of the adoptees and relatives who were successfully paired are of interest in their own right, but they are particularly interesting when they identify the different categories of adoptees and relatives who are more – or less – likely to be paired than the average. That is, the number successfully paired – the number *observed* – can be compared with the number *expected* in order to indicate the *relative* success of different categories of adoptees’ and relatives’ records being matched.

Table 3 gives the results of such an analysis; for example, the numbers of relatives whose records were matched, according to their relationship to their adopted relative. For example, 367 of the women relatives who

**Table 3** Characteristics of adoptees and relatives whose records were successfully matched up to the 30th June 2001; observed and expected numbers and their ratios, England and Wales

Characteristic	Observed number, O			Expected number, E			Ratio O/E		
	Sex of relative			Sex of relative			Sex of relative		
	Men	Women	Persons	Men	Women	Persons	Men	Women	Persons
<b>(a) Relationship of relative to adoptee</b>									
Father / mother / parent	30	367	397	30	342	370	1.01	1.07	1.07
Brother / sister / sibling	19	34	53	21	45	67	0.91	0.75	0.80
Half-brother / half-sister / half-sibling	19	47	66	18	53	71	1.03	0.89	0.92
Uncle / aunt / both	4	9	13	3	10	13	1.40	0.90	1.01
Grandfather / grandmother / grandparent	1	2	3	2	7	9	0.59	0.28	0.34*
Others	3	4	7	3	6	9	1.15	0.67	0.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>
<b>(b) Age of adoptee at relative's application</b>									
Under 25	10	84	94	16	121	137	0.61	0.70**	0.69**
25 – 39	40	293	333	34	253	286	1.19	1.16*	1.17**
40 and over	26	86	112	26	90	116	1.00	0.96	0.96
<b>All ages</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>
<b>(c) Year of application of relative</b>									
Before 1994	18	156	174	18	135	153	1.03	1.15	1.14
1994 – 1997	26	184	210	31	175	206	0.84	1.05	1.02
1998 – 2001	32	123	155	28	152	180	1.16	0.81*	0.86
<b>All years</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>

\* Calculated from the distribution of the variable concerned amongst all men / all women / all persons relatives on the Register (i.e. matched plus unmatched). (see text). Difference between the observed and expected numbers: significant at the 5% level (\*); significant at the 1% level (\*\*).

were matched were mothers, 79 per cent of the total of 463. This proportion is slightly larger than the proportion of all women relatives registered on the Adoption Contact Register who were mothers – 74 per cent (see Table 2). As a result, the observed number of mothers amongst the matched relatives is slightly larger than the number expected (0.74 x 463 = 342); in fact, by a factor of 1.07 (final column of Table 3). So mothers on the Adoption Contact Register have a slightly above-average chance of their record being matched compared with all women relatives. (However, this increased chance for mothers is not statistically significant). The same finding also applies to men relatives who were fathers; the observed number of fathers is slightly larger than expected, but not significantly so. Apart from mothers, the factors for women relatives in Table 3a are all less than one; so that, for example, sisters or grandmothers are *less* likely than the average woman relative of being matched with their adopted relative.

A similar analysis by age of adoptee whom the relative wished to contact confirms what was apparent from Figures 3 and 4 – that significantly fewer relatives whose adoptee relatives were aged under 25 were matched than expected. Conversely, significantly more relatives whose adoptee relatives were aged between 25 and 39 were matched than expected – the result of there being a relatively large number of adoptees in that age group wishing to be put in touch with their relatives.

Table 3c shows the pattern of numbers of men and women relatives successfully matched according to different periods of the relatives entering the Register within the ten-year lifetime of the Adoption Contact Register. Relatives – both men and women – who applied in the early years of the Register appear to have had a slightly above-average chance of being matched – albeit after a possible wait. The picture for men and women relatives contrasts in each of the other two periods, however; one sex being more likely than the average of that sex to be matched, and the other sex less likely.

## MEN AND WOMEN ADOPTEES AND RELATIVES

It is of interest whether, overall, women relatives are more likely to be matched with men adoptees than women adoptees, and similarly for men

relatives. Unfortunately, the sex of the adoptee whom the relative wishes to contact is not readily available from the application form of the relative, since the only relevant item of information the relative has to provide is the original forename of the adoptee – see Appendix 2. Consequently, a similar analysis to those in Table 3 is not easily undertaken. However, the expected numbers of men and women relatives being matched with their men and women adoptees can be calculated on a different basis to that used in Table 3 – by assuming that, over all the matched pairs, the factors of the sex of the relative and the sex of the adoptee are independent. Table 4a provides such an analysis, and, although the ratios differ from unity – particularly for men relatives – none does statistically significantly. The conclusion is, therefore, that, amongst matched pairs, the sexes of the adoptee and the relative *are* independent.

## THE FIRST PARTY TO REGISTER

The numbers of men and women adoptees and relatives can also be considered according to whether the adoptee was first to be entered on the Adoption Contact Register (Table 4b), or whether it was the relative of the matched pair who was first to be entered (Table 4c), and similar analyses undertaken to that in Table 4a. (See also Appendix A.) The observed and expected numbers differ to a proportionately larger extent in cases where the adoptee was first on the Register than where the relative was first (but none of the differences are statistically significant). Consequently, the pattern of men and women relatives being matched with men and women adoptees shows no departure from that expected; overall the numbers are also consistent with the sex of the adoptee and relative being independent.

The same information – on which party of the matched pair of adoptee and relative was the first to register – can be viewed in another way. Table 5 gives such an analysis. Overall, in about two thirds of the matched pairs of records, it was the relative who entered their name first, although this proportion varies for different groups. In 7 out of every ten matched pairs involving a man adoptee, the relative was the first party to register, whereas the corresponding proportion was fewer than 6 out of every ten for matched pairs involving a man relative.

**Table 4**

**Adoptees and relatives whose records were successfully matched up to 30th June 2001; by sex of adoptee and of relative and by first party on the Adoption Contact Register; observed and expected<sup>†</sup> numbers and their ratios, England and Wales**

Sex of adoptee	Observed number, O			Expected number, E			Ratio O/E		
	Sex of relative			Sex of relative			Sex of relative		
	Men	Women	Persons	Men	Women	Persons	Men	Women	Persons
<b>(a) All matched pairs</b>									
Men	19	156	175	25	150	175	0.77	1.04	1.00
Women	57	307	364	51	313	364	1.11	0.98	1.00
Persons	76	463	539	76	463	539	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>(b) Pairs where adoptee was first on the Register</b>									
Men	3	47	50	9	41	50	0.35	1.13	1.00
Women	29	109	138	23	115	138	1.23	0.95	1.00
Persons	32	156	188	32	156	188	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>(c) Pairs where relative was first on the Register</b>									
Men	16	109	125	15	110	125	1.04	0.99	1.00
Women	27	197	224	28	196	224	0.98	1.00	1.00
Persons	43	306	349	43	306	349	1.00	1.00	1.00

<sup>†</sup> Expected numbers calculated on the assumption of the independence of the factors: the sex of adoptee and the sex of relative

Note: there were two matched pairs where the adoptee and relative were both registered on the same day (omitted from (b) and (c))

**Table 5**

For successful matches of adoptees and relatives, analysis of first party registered on the Adoption Contact Register who had to wait for the other party, 1991–2001†, England and Wales

Group considered	First party on Register			
	Adoptee	Relative	both*	Total
<b>(a) Numbers</b>				
Men adoptees	50	125	0	175
Women adoptees	138	224	2	364
Men relatives	32	43	1	76
Women relatives	156	306	1	463
All adoptees/all relatives	188	349	2	539
<b>(b) Percentages</b>				
Men adoptees	29	71	0.0	100
Women adoptees	38	62	0.5	100
Men relatives	42	57	1.0	100
Women relatives	34	66	0.2	100
All adoptees/all relatives	35	65	0.4	100

† up to 30.6.2001.

\* i.e. adoptees and relatives both entered the Register on the same day.

**SPEED OF SUCCESSFUL MATCHING OF RECORDS**

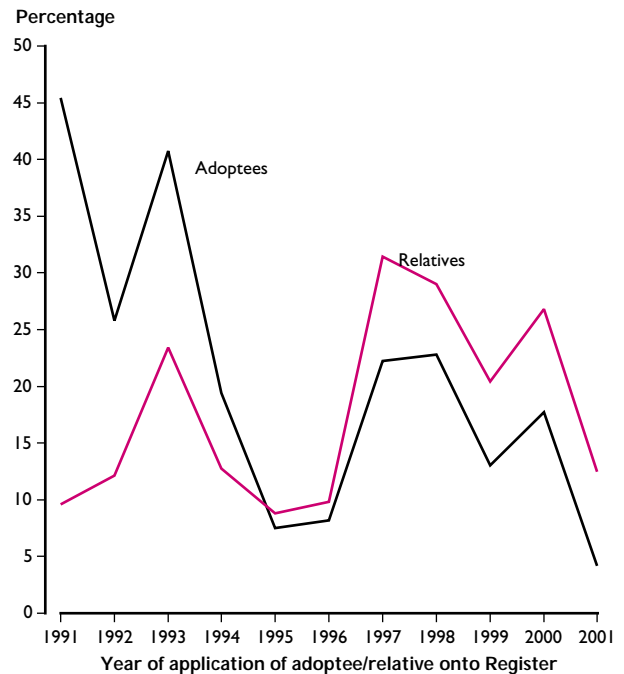
For some matches, the second party to register follows quickly after the first and in other cases follows after a much longer period, perhaps a number of years. Amongst all matched adoptees who applied to be registered in a given year, the proportion in which *both* the adoptee and the relative applied *in that same year* can be considered as a simple measure of a relative quick matching. The corresponding proportion of all matched relatives can also be examined, and the two measures are shown in Figure 8. It may be seen that amongst the matched adoptees and relatives who applied in the first few years of the Adoption Contact Register, there were relatively large proportions in which both parties applied to be registered in the same year. The proportions fell to a much lower level after a couple of years, though.

On initial inspection of Figure 8, it might be concluded that shortly after setting up the Register, there was an initial surge of quick matchings, which was followed by a fall because the numbers of new adoptees and relatives – particularly containing a proportion which matched – was not sufficiently large. However, this would be a misinterpretation since the numbers of applications – and matches – in the early years were relatively small (as may be appreciated from Figure 1), so that a “surge” of matches is quite misleading, particularly since Figure 8 essentially shows the proportion of *matches* which were quick matches. Nevertheless, of the relatively smaller numbers of matches which were made in each of the early years, the proportion of same year applications was quite high. The proportion of quick matches rose again in 1997 – when the numbers of new applications of adoptees and relatives reached a peak (as also did the number of matches made)(see Figure 1). After 1997, the proportion of “same year” matches generally declined, but about one in 5 matches remained same year matches.

In fact, for every year, the number of same year applications by matched adoptees and relatives is larger than would be expected assuming that any matched adoptee and relative were equally likely to apply in any year, quite independently of the other. (The only exception is 1996, when the proportion of same year applications is lowest). In addition, if *pairs* of years are considered – that is, if the numbers of matched adoptees and relatives who applied to the Adoption Contact Register in the same pair of years are considered, the numbers are (statistically) significantly larger

**Figure 8**

Percentage of all matched adoptees who applied to the Adoption Contact Register in a given year where the matched relative applied in the same year, by year of application of adoptee, 1991–2001, England and Wales



\* and the corresponding percentage of all matched relatives who applied in a given year where the matched adoptee applied in the same year, by year of application of the relative

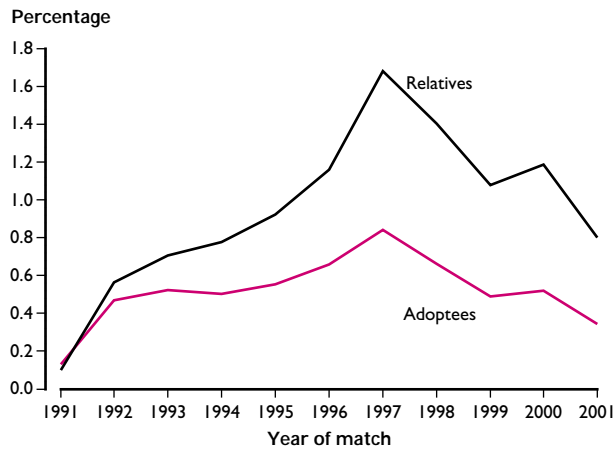
than those expected (apart from 1995–96.) Possibly high profile cases, reported from time to time in the Press, of relatives and adoptees being reunited may have resulted in other pairs deciding to try to contact each other at roughly the same time. A further analysis of the interval of time between the first and second party registering for matched pairs of adoptees and relatives is given in Appendix A, using date of entry, rather than year of application.

**THE PROPORTIONS OF ADOPTEES AND RELATIVES MATCHED**

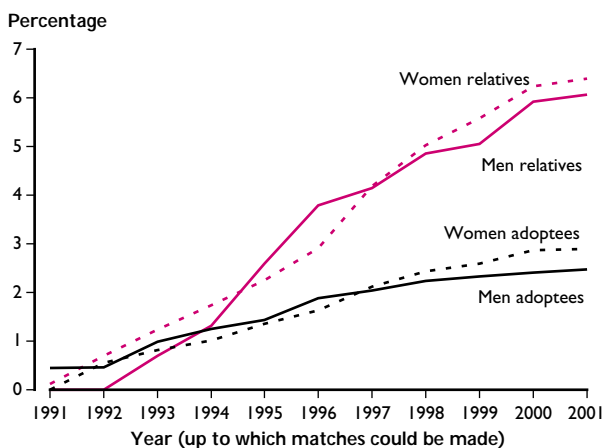
The likelihood of a match being made in a given year can be analysed by considering the proportion of, say, adoptees whose records were matched with their relatives in that year. That is, the number of adoptees who were successfully matched during a given year, is expressed as a proportion of the estimated total number of adoptees who were on the Adoption Contact Register at the end of that same year – since it was this latter group who were eligible to be matched, and from whom the matches were, in fact, drawn. Such proportions have been calculated for both adoptees and relatives for every year from 1991 to 2001, and are depicted in Figure 9a.

The proportions of adoptees and relatives who were matched grew strongly until 1997, after which they generally declined (Figure 9a). There is a similarity between the trends in the proportions matched in Figure 9a and the corresponding trends in the numbers of new adoptees and relatives entering the Register as shown in Figure 1. This parallel is not surprising, since one would expect the number of new matches each year to rise or fall with the number of new adoptees and relatives. The decline in the proportions matched since 1997 has been quite pronounced – resulting in levels returning to those in the early years of the operation of the Register.

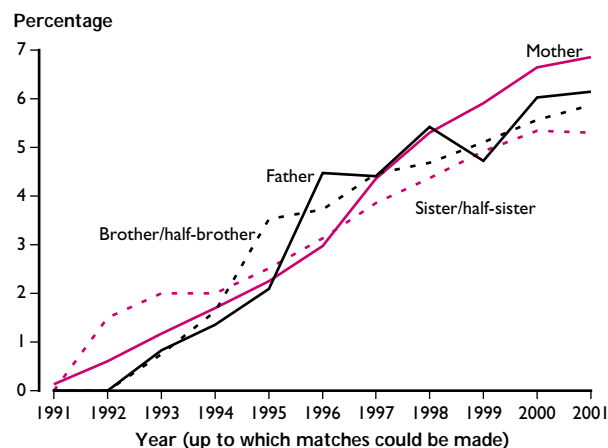
**Figure 9a** Proportions of adoptees and relatives being matched, by year of match, 1991–2001, England and Wales



**Figure 9b** Cumulative proportion of a given party being successfully matched up to each year of match, 1991–2001, England and Wales



**Figure 9c** Cumulative proportion of a given kind of relative being successfully matched with their relation who was adopted, for up to each year of match, 1991–2001, England and Wales



The corresponding *cumulative* proportions matched can also be usefully considered, that is, the total number of matches up to a given year, expressed as a proportion of the total number of those who could be matched up to that year. Further, since the *cumulative* numbers of matches are much larger, it is possible to calculate the cumulative proportions for different groups of adoptees and relatives, and be able to compare them. Cumulative proportions for men and women adoptees and relatives are shown in Figure 9b, and those of mothers/fathers and brothers/sisters – the latter including half-siblings – in Figure 9c.

Judging from the proportions shown in Figure 9a, one might expect the *cumulative* proportions to increase quickly and uniformly up to 1997, and then to rise at an increasingly slower pace. This pattern of trend can be seen for men and women adoptees in Figure 9b, but not for men and women relatives, where the cumulative proportions matched show no sign of slackening after 1997, apart, perhaps, from after 2000.

Overall, the cumulative proportions of men and women relatives who have been matched have risen at a faster pace than those for men and women adoptees (Figure 9b). Also, the cumulative proportions of men and women *relatives* matched have been twice as large as those of men and women *adoptees*, respectively, with women being slightly more likely to be matched than men, no matter whether they were adoptees or relatives. The picture is more variable in the early years of the Adoption Contact Register, with the differentials in the cumulative proportions matched only clearly emerging after 1997 – when the cumulative numbers of those on the Register, and those matched, reached decisively large sizes.

Cumulative proportions for the numerically more important kinds of relatives appear in Figure 9c. The pattern of growth for the four kinds of relation shown in Figure 9b is very similar – and each has grown at roughly the same rate. Again, the differentials are only really apparent after 1997, but not even then for fathers. By 2001, the cumulative proportion of mothers matched exceeds that for fathers – as might be expected from Figure 9a where the proportions of women relatives matched were larger each year than those for men relatives. However, the cumulative proportion of brothers and half-brothers matched has been larger than that of sisters and half-sisters. Table 6 gives all the cumulative proportions matched up to mid-2001.

**Table 6** Percentages of adoptees and relatives whose records were successfully matched, 1991–2001\*, England and Wales

Group considered	%	Group considered	%
<b>(a) Adoptees</b>			
Men	2.5	Women	2.9
<b>(b) Relatives</b>			
Fathers	6.1	Mothers	6.9
Brothers / half-brothers	5.9	Sisters / half-sisters	5.3
Uncles	8.5	Aunts	5.8
Others	5.6	Others	2.8
All men relatives	6.1	All women relatives	6.4

\* up to 30.6.2001

**CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions from the first article still hold – perhaps the most important one being that the number of successful records matched has been relatively small compared with the total numbers of adoptees and relatives on the Register. Nevertheless, by mid-2001, ten years after the setting up of the Adoption Contact Register, about one in 40 adoptees has been matched – and one in 16 relatives. In the peak years of 1997 and 2000, there were, on average, two matches per week.

The present article has added some important background detail to the basic picture; that many relatives register on the point of their adoptee relative reaching age 18 in the hope that they will register then or soon afterwards; that men relatives tend to be several years younger than women relatives; that mothers try to contact their children to older ages of their children than fathers, but that relatively more men relatives try to contact their brothers or sisters to older ages than women relatives; that for matched pairs, relatives are almost twice as likely as adoptees to be first on the Register, and so on.

Overall, perhaps the most important conclusion from the present analysis is that all aspects of the operation and use of the Adoption Contact Register are asymmetric: more women than men register; there are far more adoptees registered than relatives; mothers are relatively far more numerous than fathers, whilst brothers outnumber sisters, etc. Of course, these asymmetries reflect the differentials in demand for contact by adoptees and their relatives (and different groups within them); the fact that “demand” and “supply” do not match as precisely as all the parties might wish is inevitably the brake to the size of the proportion matched. This is well illustrated by the comparative numbers of adoptees and relatives; each adoptee might be expected to have several close birth relatives, at the very least, yet the number of *adoptees* on the Register exceeds the number of *relatives* by over 2 to 1, rather than vice versa.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Registration Division for access to the (anonymised) statistical information and for advice and practical assistance in the special study mentioned. Particular thanks are due to Roger Errington, Liz Carrigan (who answered many questions and undertook many checks and investigations - including the special study of the ages of the different kinds of relatives), and Lesley Murison who extracted the anonymised statistical computer files.

## REFERENCES

1. Haskey J and Errington R. Adoptees and relatives who wish to contact one another: the Adoption Contact Register. *Population Trends* 104. The Stationery Office (2001), pp. 18–25.
2. Rushbrooke R. The proportion of adoptees who have received their birth records in England and Wales. *Population Trends* 104. The Stationery Office (2001), pp. 26–34.

## Appendix 1

ACR105

### ADOPTION CONTACT REGISTER

#### APPLICATION FOR ENTRY IN PART I OF THE REGISTER BY THE ADOPTED PERSON

I .....

of .....

.....

(enter your current full name and address) wish to have my name and address entered in Part I of the Adoption Contact Register and give notice that I wish to contact any relative of mine. I declare that I have attained the age of 18 years.

#### DETAILS RELATING TO MY BIRTH

Name and Surname .....

Date of Birth .....

Place of Birth .....

Birth Mother's Name and Surname .....

Birth Mother's Maiden Surname .....

Birth Father's Name and Surname (if known) .....

#### DETAILS RELATING TO THE RECORD OF MY ADOPTION

Adopted Name and Surname .....

Adopted Mother's Name and Surname .....

Adopted Father's Name and Surname .....

Year of Adoption (if known) .....

I have read and accept the conditions relating to the Adoption Contact Register and request that my name and address is entered in Part I.

I request that the name and address of any relative for whom there is an entry in Part II be sent to me.

I understand that my name and address will not be disclosed to any relative in Part II.

If I wish my name and address to be removed from the Register, I will give 28 days' notice in writing to the Registrar General.

Signed .....

Date .....

*(continued over)*

## Appendix 2

ACR108

### ADOPTION CONTACT REGISTER

#### APPLICATION FOR ENTRY IN PART II OF THE REGISTER BY A RELATIVE OF THE ADOPTED PERSON

I .....  
of .....  
.....

(enter your current full name and address) wish to have my name and address entered in Part II of the Adoption Contact Register and give notice that I wish to contact an adopted person to whom I am related. I declare that I have attained the age of 18 years.

#### DETAILS RELATING TO THE ADOPTED PERSON

Original Name and Surname .....  
Date of Birth .....  
Place of Birth .....  
Mother's Name and Surname .....  
Mother's Maiden Surname .....  
Father's Name and Surname .....  
Year of adoption (if known) .....

I declare that I am related to the above adopted person.

Please state the nature of your relationship .....

#### \* THIRD PARTY ADDRESS

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**if this space is left  
blank your home  
address from the  
first paragraph will  
be inserted in the  
Contact Register**

\* To be completed only if applicable. Please refer to paragraphs 23 and 24 in booklet ACR110.

*(continued over)*

## Appendix 2 (continued)

TABLE OF EVIDENCE REQUIRED TO PROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

	your child's certificate	your own birth certificate	*your marriage certificate	your sister's/ brother's birth certificate	your mother's/ father's birth certificate and aunt's/ uncle's certificate	your mother and father's marriage certificate	your son's/ daughter's birth certificate
mother			✓				
father	✓						
brother		✓					
sister		✓	✓				
grandparent							✓
aunt		✓	✓	✓			
uncle		✓		✓			
cousin		✓	✓		✓		
half relation		✓	✓				
step relation		✓	✓			✓	

\* or change of name document

Photocopies of certificates are not acceptable

## Appendix A Timing of entry on the Register: year of application and date of entry – some practical details

In most of this article, the timing of when an applicant is entered on to the Adoption Contact Register is measured by the “year of application”. This variable has been taken from the file number for each applicant in a given year, 1991, say, which takes the form: 1/91; 2/91; 3/91 etc. – which indicates both the order and the year in which the application was first received within ONS.

The details of the majority of adoptee and relative applicants are entered directly onto the Register, but, for a minority, one or more queries need resolving before the applicant can be placed on the Adoption Contact Register. Most such queries delay the entry onto the Register by a couple of months at most, so that for the vast majority, the “year of application” is exactly the same as “year of entry onto the Register”.

Quite separately, the full “date of entry” (onto the Register) is also recorded on the secure Adoption Contact Register computer system, but, unfortunately, if the applicant contacts ONS again after having his or her name initially placed on the Register, then the original date of entry is overwritten with the date of the most recent contact with the office. (An applicant may need to contact ONS again, for example, to inform the office of a change of address). Consequently, the “date of entry” is not thought to be as reliable as “year of application” for calculating rates, proportions and time intervals – all of which need to be related to the period during which – or ideally the day on which – the name was first entered on the Register (and so began to be eligible for matching from that time).

However, from 2.11.2000, the computer system was amended so that the existing date of entry was *not* overwritten. In addition, because the computer system was redeveloped and a new one instituted on 4.10.1999, the set of dates of entry which existed on 4.10.1999 were fortuitously preserved. To try to correct as many dates of entry as possible, all the dates of entry on the system after 4.10.1999 and before 2.11.2000 were compared with the corresponding ones in the preserved file, and in cases where they differed, the earlier date from the preserved file was substituted.

This correction should improve the reliability of the dates of entry between 4.10.1999 and 2.11.2000. However, the dates of entry could still be incorrect – that is, not the dates of *original* entry – in the following situations:

1. For dates of entry before 4.10.1999;
2. For dates of entry between 4.10.1999 and 2.11.2000 where the date of entry in the preserved file was not the *original* date of entry (even if it were an earlier date than the one on the system after 4.10.1999);
3. For dates between 4.10.1999 and 2.11.2000 where the *original* date of entry was within this period, but the applicant subsequently contacted ONS within this period.

However, it is thought that the majority of adoptees whose names are entered onto the Adoption Contact Register do *not* recontact ONS after they initially register, so that, for this large group, the date of entry is indeed the date of *original* entry. Nevertheless, all the analyses in this article are based upon year of application rather than the amended date of entry as described above. There is one exception – the analyses in Tables 4 and 5 which consider which party entered first on the Adoption Contact Register, which is concluded from comparing the dates of entry of the matched adoptee and relative onto the Register.

It should be noted that the effect of amending the date of entry would tend to make the interval of time between the first and second party entering the Register longer. Table A1 analyses these amended dates of entry for the matched pairs of adoptees and relatives in terms of the intervals of time which elapsed between the first and second parties entering the Register. Overall, just under one quarter of pairs were matched within 6 months, and just over one third within one year. This latter proportion is broadly consistent with the results in Figure 8 giving the proportions of adoptees and relatives who were matched in the same application year as that of their matched relative or adoptee. On that basis, the more detailed results in Table A1 may be viewed slightly more confidently, albeit still cautiously.

**Table A1** For successful matches of adoptees and relatives, profile of waiting times before the links were made, by which party had to wait, 1991–2001, England and Wales

Sex	Party who had to wait <sup>†</sup>	Waiting time (in completed months)							Percentages	
		0*	0–5	6–11	12–23	24 and over	Total %	Total no.	Median**	
<b>(a) by sex of adoptee</b>										
Men	adoptee	0.0	34	10	26	30	100	50	15	
Men	relative	0.0	24	9	14	54	100	125	28	
Women	adoptee	1.0	21	13	19	45	100	140	20	
Women	relative	0.9	20	11	16	52	100	226	26	
<b>(b) by sex of relative</b>										
Men	adoptee	3.0	21	12	18	45	100	33	20	
Men	relative	2.0	27	14	16	41	100	44	20	
Women	adoptee	0.6	25	12	22	40	100	157	18	
Women	relative	0.3	21	10	15	54	100	307	29	
<b>All matched pairs</b>		<b>0.4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>24</b>	

<sup>†</sup> includes cases where:

\* i.e. adoptee and relative both entered the Register on the same day (2 cases)

\*\* In months – computed excluding the “same day” matches