

A young child with curly hair, wearing a light-colored jacket and blue jeans, is riding a red and yellow balance bike in a grassy park. A woman with glasses and a yellow top is crouching behind the child, smiling and watching them. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

Adoption pay: Levelling up for the self-employed

May 2022

Foreword



Home for Good is a UK charity with an ambitious vision to find a home for every child who needs one. We do this by inspiring, equipping and resourcing individuals and families to play their part in caring for vulnerable children by exploring adoption, fostering or supported lodgings, and by facilitating wraparound support to ensure children and their families can thrive.

At present, there are numerous barriers that stand in the way of homes being found for children in a timely manner. As an organisation that holds the best interests of children and young people at the centre of all we do, we are committed to unlocking these barriers at the systemic level to ensure that every child can experience permanence, belonging and the love and care they need.

This report focuses on one specific barrier within the adoption system. Currently, self-employed adopters are unable to access statutory adoption pay, even though this is available to employed adopters. As the stories within this report show, this is a substantial barrier to self-employed individuals stepping forward to adopt. As a charity, we regularly hear from self-employed individuals who want to pursue adoption and have room in their homes and hearts to welcome in a child who is waiting, but who feel that this loophole makes adoption financially unviable. This is particularly lamentable in cases where someone's background and skills would enable them to consider adopting children who wait the longest, such as a sibling group or a child with additional needs.

This issue can be easily resolved by Government, and at relatively little cost. Yet, we know that the impact of a safe and loving home for children is invaluable. Finding adoptive homes for children has repeatedly been set out as a priority for this Government, which we wholeheartedly welcome. As such we, along with many other organisations, agencies and families, urge the Government to take action now and address this unnecessary discrepancy. Together, we can find a home for every child who needs one.

Tania

Tania Bright
CEO, Home for Good



“Currently, self-employed adopters are unable to access statutory adoption pay, even though this is available to employed adopters. As the stories within this report show, this is a substantial barrier to self-employed individuals stepping forward to adopt.”

Headlines

There are currently **1,890 children** waiting to be adopted in England.

Many people are stepping forward to adopt, but more individuals and families are still needed in the right places with the right skills who can adopt the children who are waiting.

There are many barriers at play within the system that are preventing people from adopting.

One barrier particularly affects self-employed individuals.

SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS ARE UNABLE TO ACCESS STATUTORY ADOPTION LEAVE AND PAY. THIS IS DISCRIMINATORY.

✓
Employed birth parents can access statutory maternity leave and pay.

✓
Self-employed birth parents can access Maternity Allowance, which is equivalent to maternity pay.

✓
Employed adopters can access statutory adoption leave and pay.

✗
Self-employed adopters cannot access any form of statutory adoption leave or pay.

There is no justifiable reason for this discrepancy. It is a loophole that urgently needs to be remedied.

We are calling on the Government to take action so that parity is achieved for self-employed adopters.



“We want to co-parent. We’re trying to parent a traumatised child struggling with attachment who could really do with both parents at home...with one of us being self-employed, we can’t do this.”

Adoptive parents

Introduction

In England, there are currently 1,890 children waiting to be adopted. 53% of those children have been waiting 18 months or longer and of these children, 51% are part of a sibling group and 20% are from an ethnic minority background.¹

Over the past several years, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that the families these children need are found in a timely manner. In July 2021, the Government published its three-year National Adoption Strategy, which outlined an overarching vision and ambition to reform the adoption system and to deliver excellence in adoption services across England.²



AS PART OF THIS STRATEGY, THE GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO ENSURING THAT:

Adopters are recruited from all communities so that there are enough parents able and well prepared to meet the different needs of children put forward for adoption.

The adoption system is open-minded and actively encourages prospective adopters from all walks of life rather than discriminating on grounds of income or social class or other irrelevant lifestyle issues.

All adopted children get the family support they need to experience a full and happy childhood. Children are supported to build strong attachments and to bond with their adoptive parents from the first introductory meeting.³

In March 2022, the Government announced a £160 million investment in adoption over the next three years. In a statement accompanying the announcement, the Secretary of State for Education said:



“The importance of a loving, stable family cannot be overstated, no matter what shape it takes. Family are crucial in giving children the warmth, background and opportunities they need to succeed in life.”⁴

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP

Although the total number of approved adopters who are waiting to be matched to children has been increasing over recent years, there is still a shortage of adoptive parents in England who have the right skills and backgrounds to meet the needs of the children who are waiting. This is because there continue to be barriers at play for those who would consider adoption. This report is concerned with the unnecessary financial barrier faced by self-employed individuals within adoption and will now explore the nature of this barrier and the change needed at Government level.

1. Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. 2022. *Headline Measures: Q3 2021/22*. Available [online](#).

2. Department of Education. 2021. *Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere*. Available [online](#).

3. Ibid. Page 8.

4. Department for Education. 2022. *Multi-million Pound Boost for New Families as Adoptions Increase*. Available [online](#).

The Barrier



Statutory adoption leave for employed people, first introduced in the UK in 2002 and a 'day one' right since 2014, enables adoptive families to access the same rights and financial benefits as those available through statutory maternity and paternity leave and pay. Adoption pay has been a significant step in providing financial support for adoptive families and in recognising and communicating that adoption is an equally valid way for people to grow their family.

However, if an individual is self-employed, they are currently unable to access adoption leave and are ineligible for any form of statutory adoption pay. There is also no equivalent arrangement to the Maternity Allowance that is available to self-employed birth parents.⁵ This places those who are self-employed at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to employed adopters, who are able to access adoption leave as a 'day one' right.

This is a significant loophole that not only undermines adoption as an equally legitimate choice to having birth children, but also creates additional financial barriers for self-employed people who are pursuing adoption. This disadvantage particularly affects single self-employed prospective adopters who are unable to draw on the financial earnings of a partner or spouse.

STATUTORY ADOPTION GUIDANCE ISSUED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN 2013 STATES THAT:



“The local authority should consider making a payment of financial support equivalent to the Maternity Allowance to adoptive parents who are ineligible to receive [statutory adoption pay] because of low earnings, length of service or self-employment, but otherwise satisfy the relevant criteria for Maternity Allowance.”⁶

However, there is no legal requirement for local authorities to make such payments and if local authorities do consider providing financial support, the payment is means-tested, which is not the case for employed adopters. This is yet another disparity.

Furthermore, if one individual in a couple seeking to adopt is self-employed, they are unable to access shared parental leave, which is increasingly seen as beneficial for adoptive families as it enables both parents to spend significant time with the newly adopted child in order to allow essential attachment and bonding to take place.

5. See GOV.UK. *Maternity Allowance*. Available [online](#).

6. Department for Education. 2013. *Statutory Guidance on Adoption*. Available [online](#). Page 175.

The Barrier (continued)

Without the option of adoption pay, self-employed adopters face a significant financial barrier to adoption, with many unable to consider it at all as they cannot afford to take unpaid adoption leave. Self-employed prospective adopters are significantly disadvantaged by this discrepancy, which impacts the number of adoptive homes available for children waiting.

The denial of these vital entitlements for self-employed individuals is unnecessary and unjustifiable. Many prospective adopters who are self-employed will have much to offer a child through adoption, and rather than disincentivising individuals who are self-employed by placing demands on them that their employed peers do not face, we should do everything we can to ensure that those who are altruistically motivated and equipped to care for children are able to do so.



Background: Self-employment

Self-employment refers to individuals who run their own business and take responsibility for its success or failure.⁷ They receive an income from business profits and are not paid through PAYE.⁸ As such, they do not have the rights and responsibilities of an employee.⁹

In February 2022, there were **4.23 million self-employed people** in the UK, constituting 13% of the total workforce.¹⁰ Over recent decades, self-employment in the UK has grown steadily, from 3.2 million in December 2000¹¹ to a high of 5 million in November 2019, an increase of 55%.¹² This growth is reflected across all regions of the UK, but especially in London and the South West, where the percentage of workers who are self-employed is around 16%.¹³ Notwithstanding the recent

decline in self-employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, self-employed individuals continue to contribute around £303 billion to the UK economy.¹⁴

GENDER

Demographically, 35% of those who are self-employed are women and 65% are men.¹⁵ Rising self-employment trends have been particularly influenced by the employment decisions of women, with the number of female self-employed workers increasing by approximately 70% between 2001 and 2021.¹⁶



ETHNICITY

In 2019, 23% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers were self-employed, which is the highest percentage of all ethnic groups.¹⁷ 18% of all Asian workers were self-employed and 11% of all Black workers were self-employed, which was the lowest percentage.¹⁸



AGE

While there has been a significant increase in individuals over the age of 65 who are self-employed, the 16-24 age category has also seen strong growth in self-employment between 2001 and 2016, with a 74% increase up to 181,000.¹⁹ In light of the focus of this report, this younger cohort of self-employed individuals is particularly vital to consider based on the likelihood of them making decisions about how they will grow their family both in the near and distant future, which could include adoption.



Crucially, full-time employees earn more on average than those who are full-time self-employed. In 2016, full-time male and female employees respectively earned 47% and 76% more than their self-employed counterparts.²⁰ This means that self-employed individuals generally tend to be less financially well off in comparison to employed individuals. Indeed, research shows that the number of solo self-employed individuals who are claiming universal credit has increased by 15% between 2020 and 2021.²¹ This is significant in light of the financial support that self-employed individuals are unable to access if they decide to adopt.

7. GOV.UK. *Employment Status*. Available [online](#).

8. PAYE ('Pay As You Earn') refers to the system used to deduct income tax from an employee's salary before they receive it.

9. GOV.UK. *Employment Status*. Available [online](#).

10. Office for National Statistics. 2022. *A01: Summary of Labour Market Statistics*. Available [online](#).

11. The National Archives. 2014. *Self-employed Workers in the UK, 2014*. Available [online](#).

12. Office for National Statistics. 2022. *A01: Summary of Labour Market Statistics*. Available [online](#).

13. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper. 2021. *Labour Market Statistics: UK Regions and Countries*. Available [online](#).

14. *Ibid.*

15. Office for National Statistics. 2022. *Dataset EMP14: Employees and Self-employed by Industry*. Available [online](#).

16. *Ibid.*

17. Office for National Statistics. 2021. *Self-employment*. Available [online](#).

18. *Ibid.*

19. Office for National Statistics. 2018. *Trends in Self-Employment in the UK*. Available [online](#).

20. *Ibid.*

21. IPSE. 2022. *The Self-Employed Landscape in 2021*. Available [online](#).

The Benefits of Self-employment for Adoptive Families

A key reason for the increase in self-employment is the flexibility that it enables.²² With increasing numbers of parents deciding to work alongside balancing family responsibilities, self-employment can provide the flexibility needed to fit work around family routines and demands.

Every child placed for adoption has experienced trauma through loss and separation and it is therefore vital that adoptive parents have the necessary flexibility to respond to their needs as they navigate the legacy of that trauma. Thus, self-employment can be hugely beneficial as a work lifestyle for adoptive families and should be seen in a positive light.

Instead, self-employed individuals are finding themselves financially penalised if they choose to adopt, due to their type of work. Preventing access to adoption pay for self-employed individuals not only serves to invalidate the option of adoption as equally valid to having birth children, but it also disincentivises self-employed individuals from perceiving adoption as a financially viable option, when their working patterns may in fact be better suited to adopting a child than many employed individuals.

In addition, children from ethnic minority backgrounds are one of the groups of children who wait the longest for adoption. **20% of children who have been waiting 18 months or more are from an ethnic minority background.**²³ Of children adopted each year, only 1% and 2% are from Asian and Black ethnic backgrounds respectively.²⁴ Part of the solution to finding more adoptive homes for these children is to encourage more individuals and families from ethnic minority communities to step forward to adopt, recognising that they are currently underrepresented in the adopter population. Given that many individuals from ethnic minority communities are overrepresented within the self-employed workforce, it is vital to ensure that barriers to these individuals being able to adopt are understood and removed. Research commissioned by Home for Good and conducted by Savanta ComRes in October 2019 found that there is a greater openness and willingness within ethnic minority communities to consider adoption than in White communities, but also higher levels of concern about particular barriers, including how adoption will be received by their community and family, how they will be treated by social workers and, crucially, the financial challenges of adoption.²⁵

For many who are self-employed, adoption is simply not a financially viable option because of the current loophole. Denying access to paid adoption leave means that self-employed individuals are experiencing seemingly random discrimination and are quite literally paying a higher price for choosing adoption to grow their families. In the context of such high numbers of children waiting, it is imperative that the Government does everything it can to enable self-employed individuals to pursue adoption.

22. See Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). 2015. *Understanding Self-employment*. Available [online](#). See also IPSE. 2020. *What Makes a Freelancer?* Available [online](#).

23. Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. 2022. *Headline Measures: Q3 2021/22*. Available [online](#).

24. Department for Education. 2021. *Adopted and Looked-after Children*. Available [online](#).

25. Home for Good. 2019. *Savanta ComRes – Home for Good Adoption Poll: British Attitudes and Barriers Towards Adoption*. Available [online](#).



“We came into this because we want to make a difference for a child and offer a home...but it just feels like you’re having to jump through hoops. In an ideal world, we want to provide everything for a child, which means we have to provide financially and therefore means we have to work.”

Adoptive parent

CASE STUDY

BEN AND EMMA’S STORY

Ben (40) and Emma (38) live in the North East of England, where Ben works as a self-employed IT consultant and Emma works for a charity. They began the adoption process in 2014, after hearing about the number of children in need of an adoptive family. During their adoption preparation training, Emma was made redundant from her job and began working as a freelance writer. While Emma went on to secure a job in communications at a charity a few months later, both Emma and Ben were self-employed at the point of assessment, which was recorded on their Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). It took a year for this document to be updated to reflect the change in Emma’s employment status.

Throughout this first year of waiting, Emma and Ben received little interest from social workers. They felt that this was due to their self-employed profile on their PAR, which disincentivised social workers from approaching them as it would be harder for Emma to take adoption leave. At the time, there had been a national recruitment drive to encourage more families to step forward to adopt due to growing numbers of children waiting. Speaking about their position within this context, Emma reflects:



“Our profile wasn’t very competitive against other families because it didn’t look good that we couldn’t take adoption leave due to financial reasons.”

This perception of them on paper did not accurately reflect Emma’s full-time, permanent employment status. At the end of the year, they were able to update their PAR and within two months had been matched with James who became the newest addition to their family in 2016.

Despite the joy of having James in their lives, Ben and Emma experienced a number of challenges during their first year as a new adoptive family. Ben being unable to access shared parental leave due to his self-employed status only added to the challenges experienced by this family.




“We want to co-parent. We’re trying to parent a traumatised child struggling with attachment who could really do with both parents at home...with one of us being self-employed, we can’t do this.”


Parliamentary Action and the Government's Response

Over the past several years, various reviews, reports, debates and written parliamentary questions have highlighted the existing gap in financial provision for self-employed adopters.

In 2016, the Government commissioned an independent review of self-employment, chaired by Julie Deane OBE.²⁶ The review's findings highlighted the unjustifiable inequality experienced by self-employed adopters and strongly stated that the support provided by Government to those wishing to grow their family should be consistent, regardless of whether an individual is employed or self-employed. The report recommended that Government should introduce a new 'Adoption Allowance' for self-employed adopters that mirrors the level of support provided to self-employed birth parents. The chair of the review stated:

 **“In considering the evidence, I have not been able to find a compelling explanation for this difference in treatment, and looked at objectively it seems that there is a fundamental principle that the self-employed should not be treated any less favourably than employees where they are planning to start or extend their family.”** ²⁷

In July 2020, the Petitions Committee published an inquiry report titled *The Impact of COVID-19 on Maternity and Parental Leave*, which also drew attention to the disadvantage faced by self-employed adopters and the lack of Government action taken to remedy this discrimination.²⁸ The inquiry found:

 **“By leaving self-employed adoptive parents to entirely self-fund their adoption leave, it places another barrier to the adoption process. A prospective adopter will have a strengthened application if they can show how one parent can commit to adoption leave. We can see no good reason why self-employed adoptive parents are excluded from receiving support in line with that offered to other parents through Maternity Allowance and adoption leave.”** ²⁹

Despite the irrefutable and compelling evidence given, Government has yet to take definitive action to address the issue. The response has consistently been along the following lines:

26. Deane, Julie. 2016. *Self-Employment Review: An Independent Report*. Available [online](#).

27. Ibid. Page 25.

28. House of Commons Petitions Committee. 2020. *The Impact of Covid-19 on Maternity and Parental Leave*. Available [online](#).

29. Ibid. Page 40.



“The Government has focused on supporting employed parents to take time off work to care for and bond with their adopted child because they have less flexibility with their work than self-employed parents. However local authorities can provide a discretionary payment equivalent to Maternity Allowance to self-employed adopters. This payment is discretionary and means-tested to ensure that resources are targeted at those adopters who need it most, as part of a package of post-adoption support.”³⁰
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, March 2022

However, support has been growing both amongst parliamentarians and the general public for Government to take decisive action to achieve parity for self-employed individuals. Since 2016, the Petitions Committee has received five petitions about this issue. The most recent petition in 2022, spearheaded by *Notafictionalmum*, an adoptive Mum, blogger and campaigner,³¹ calls on Government to make self-employed people eligible for statutory adoption pay and has received over 16,000 signatures to date.³² As a result, the topic was debated in parliament on 21 March 2022. Despite this growing agreement that change is needed, the response from Government has remained the same.

In 2022, Home for Good sent Freedom of Information requests to all 150 local authorities across England to ascertain previous and current practice regarding the provision of discretionary payments to self-employed adopters. 77% (n=115) of local authorities responded and of these:

34% (n=39) stated that they did not have any kind of policy in place for providing financial support to self-employed adopters. The remaining 66% referred to using a means-tested approach to assessing the need for financial help.

Only 3 were able to provide any data on both the number of adoptive parents in their area who were self-employed at the time of adoption (including instances where one partner from a couple had been self-employed) and the number of occasions where the council has provided financial support to adopters on the basis of them being self-employed. All other local authorities responded that they either do not hold the data or that the data is contained within Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs). To gather this data would therefore be burdensome both financially and administratively.

20 local authorities referred us on to their Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for this data. Our requests to RAAs are still ongoing.

30. UK Parliament. 2022. *Adoption Leave: Self-employed*. Available [online](#).

31. See <https://notafictionalmum.com/>.

32. UK Government and Parliament. 2022. *Petition: Make Self-Employed People Eligible for Statutory Adoption Pay*. Available [online](#).

Parliamentary Action and the Government's Response (continued)

These findings suggest that the Government has not taken active steps to ascertain the impact of their guidance on practice. The lack of data available or recorded by the majority of local authorities makes it difficult to assess the representation of self-employed individuals among approved adopters and, therefore, the extent to which the discrepancy in financial provision is discouraging this cohort from stepping forward. In addition, it is also impossible to assess how often discretionary payments are being made or considered and, therefore, how often the Government's advice is being followed. It is unacceptable that one third of local authorities do not have a policy in place to financially support adopters who are self-employed. Of the two thirds that do have policies in place, we are unable to ascertain how often this has resulted in a payment. Besides, these discretionary payments are based on an assessment of means, which is not the case for employed adopters.

Home for Good has heard anecdotally through our national enquiry line that many self-employed individuals or households who have enquired about financial provision are frequently informed that no financial payment would be available to them. Furthermore, many families have shared with us that they were reluctant to ask their local authority about the possibility of an allowance being provided as they did not want this to count against them as prospective adoptive parents. In the intensive process of ongoing assessment, these families deemed it too great a risk to enquire about the possibility of financial support, in case it lessened the likelihood of being approved or matched with a child.



“We'd been matched, we felt a connection – we didn't want to jeopardise that. We didn't push hard because we didn't feel like we had the power to push.”

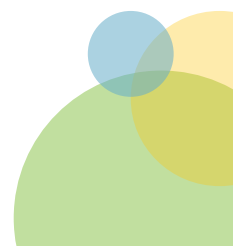
Adoptive parents

Where discretionary payments are not offered, individuals and families report that little – if any – support is offered in sourcing alternative financial support. Many social workers themselves are unaware of this loophole for self-employed individuals; the responsibility to find a solution is often placed squarely on the shoulders of those seeking to adopt.



“It was during Stage One of the assessment process that we found out that my being self-employed wasn't going to be treated the same when we were working through the paperwork around leave and shared parental leave. Our social worker didn't even know this was the case. We were told that one of us needed to take a year off work. The local authority told us, “It's your choice, if you want to adopt” and left us to figure out by ourselves whether we could make this work.”

Adoptive parents



Our data, and the stories we hear every day, demonstrate that the current Government response to this barrier is insufficient. Self-employed adopters are continuing to face unnecessary financial disadvantage compared to their employed peers. The lack of data around the number of self-employed enquirers and any discretionary payments made to approved self-employed adopters by their local authority or agency means that we cannot have any confidence about how many self-employed adopters are receiving the support that they need and, crucially, how many may be withdrawing from considering adoption because of the lack of financial support.

TO MOVE FORWARD, ACTION IS NEEDED TO ENSURE INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES ARE NOT BEING PUT OFF FROM ADOPTING BECAUSE OF UNNECESSARY FINANCIAL BARRIERS.

Employed birth parents can access statutory maternity leave and pay.

Self-employed birth parents can access Maternity Allowance, which is equivalent to maternity pay.

Employed adopters can access statutory adoption leave and pay.

Self-employed adopters cannot access any form of statutory adoption leave or pay.

The Solution

The solution is not a big investment; it is a small sum that could make a significant difference for many, not least children who are waiting for an adoptive home.

The Federation of Small Businesses estimates that it would cost the Government just £5 million per year to enable self-employed individuals to access paid adoption leave.³³ Given the long-term costs incurred when a child is unable to find an adoptive family and thus remains in the care system on a long-term basis (with an annual social cost estimated at £72,500 per child in care³⁴), this provision would enable vital savings for the Government over the long term.

Providing statutory adoption pay for self-employed individuals could not only attract new families and individuals who are interested in adopting, but established adoptive families who are self-employed told us that it would enable them to consider adopting again in future:

33. Bowlzer, Amelia. 2019. *Government Overlooks Self-Employed Once Again, Says FSB*. Available [online](#).

34. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care. 2021. *Paying the Price: The Social and Financial Costs of Children's Social Care*. Available [online](#).

The Solution (continued)



“We are seriously considering adopting again, but in all honesty, the aspect that would make the biggest difference to us being able to do that would be being able to access shared parental leave... adopting again is on our radar but this is probably one of the biggest reasons why we’re not pursuing it right now. I [Emma] don’t want to take a year off work but we can’t afford for me not to.”

Ben (self-employed) and Emma, adoptive parents

“It shouldn’t be the case that because someone is self-employed, they are treated differently. We had to live within my husband’s means... For us, we ended up adopting a sibling group of two. Our local authority told us that if we had not adopted them, they probably would have been separated.”

Adoptive parents



RECOMMENDATION 1:

There is no justifiable basis for denying self-employed adopters access to statutory adoption pay, which their employed counterparts can access as a ‘day one’ right. The consideration of discretionary payments is inconsistent and rare, meaning that self-employed individuals are financially disadvantaged when considering welcoming a child into their home through adoption. This can, and must, be addressed by Government.

The Government should enable parity of access to adoption leave and pay by providing an Adoption Allowance to self-employed individuals. They should also extend shared parental leave to couples where at least one individual is self-employed.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

It is impossible to gauge how many individuals and families are being impacted by the disparity outlined in this report, as the Government does not centrally record reasons why enquiring families choose to step back from the process.

The Government should require local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies to record a reason for withdrawal for all individuals and families who enter the adoption process and subsequently withdraw.

Conclusion

One ambition of the Government's 2021 National Adoption Strategy is that *“unnecessary barriers and bureaucracy placed in the way of those seeking to adopt are removed, systematically, across the country.”*³⁵

IN THE FOREWORD TO THE STRATEGY, THE FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES JOINTLY STATED:



“We must attract people from all communities to come forward to adopt. The only qualification that people need to worry about is whether or not they can love and care for a child. The adoption system should not expect adoptive families to be middle class, have a certain income, own their own home or have a spare room. These are all irrelevant to the ability of adoptive parents to provide a safe, loving family for a child who needs one...We need the system to step up and embrace this challenge, which will require us all to work harder and more creatively, tackling old ways of thinking that can get in the way of adoption placements.”³⁶

Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE MP and Vicky Ford MP

The significant financial disadvantage and disparity experienced by self-employed individuals seeking to adopt is surely one such example of an unnecessary and discriminatory barrier for particular individuals within society. It is an *“old way of thinking”*. Requiring self-employed individuals to generate their own funding to be able to take adoption leave perpetuates a system whereby only more affluent self-employed individuals can consider adoption.

If the Government is committed to creating an adoption system where unnecessary barriers are removed, it must address this disparity for those who are self-employed. By doing so, the Government would also uphold another and even more important commitment; namely that *“Children are supported to build strong attachments and to bond with their adopted parents from the first introductory meeting.”*³⁷ This cannot happen if adoptive parents are unable to take an extended period of leave from work.

We stand with the Government in their commitment to finding homes for all children who are waiting. As such, we urge Government to take the necessary steps, as outlined within this report, to address the unfounded and arbitrary discrepancy facing self-employed adopters. This crucial change will be a significant step forward in finding a home for every child who needs one.

35. Department of Education. 2021. *Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere*. Available [online](#). Page 3.

36. Ibid. Page 6-7.

37. Ibid. Page 8.



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