

Appendix A: Adoption Service Annual Report 2013/14

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Barnet Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, revised February 2011, Adoption Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards. Adoption Services until September 2013 were inspected separately by Ofsted , however, the new inspection framework incorporates judgements on Adoption services into the overall Ofsted Children's Service inspection.
- 1.2. The last Ofsted inspection of the Adoption service took place in December 2009, the service was judged to be **Good**

2 Team Structure

- 2.1 There are currently 10 permanent staff in the Adoption Service, a Team Manager and 5 social workers in the Adoption team, a Deputy Team Manager, manages 2 social workers and a social work assistant in the Adoption Support Team.
- 2.2 A number of temporary posts have been created on a fixed term basis funded from the Adoption Reform Grant. These posts are; an Agency Advisor, social worker for the Adoption North London recruitment team, part time social worker for family finding, a social work assistant.
- 2.3 The team undertake a range of duties to comply with regulatory requirements, these duties include; the assessment and approval of second time adopters, assessment and approval of foster carers wishing to adopt children already placed with them, linking and matching of approved adopters with children, non-agency adoptions, supervision of oversea's adoption cases . Family finding for children who need a permanent alternative family placement outside of their own families, this can be through adoption or long term fostering.
- 2.4 In addition, the adoption support team carry out a wide range of duties in relation to adopters, adopted children and adopted adults.

3 Governance – Adoption Development Group

- 3.1 The Adoption Development Group (ADG) is chaired by the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care who is also the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and forms part of the overall strategy for Children in Care. The purpose of the ADG is to monitor practice and facilitate the continuous improvement and ongoing development of the Adoption Service.

- 3.2. National Minimum Standard 25.6 requires that *“the executive side of the local authority”* Adoption Service have a system in place to *“monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for the children and/or service users”*
- 3.3. Adoption Panel – Adoption Regulations require an Adoption Panel to be established, the panel must be chaired by an independent person. A new chair of panel has recently been appointed and will take up the role in April, other panel members are representatives from within the Children’s Service, elected members and independent members with a range of experience relevant to adoption.
- 3.4. The Adoption Panel performs an important role in assisting the service to reach the best possible decision in respect of:
 - The suitability of prospective adopters
 - Whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter

4 Adoption Reform update

- 4.1. Over the last two years there have been many changes to the adoption system, a programme of reform commenced in April 2012 with the publication of the Governments Action Plan for Adoption; Tackling Delay in April 2012, subsequent guidance, Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes was published in January 2013.
- 4.2. The aim of these reforms is to reduce delay for children, speed up the approval process for adopters, secure early permanence for children and improve the matching process of adopters and children.
- 4.3. A National Adoption Reform Grant was made available to local authorities to support the changes in the whole adoption process that the Government intended. The Adoption Reform Grant was allocated in 2 parts; part A is a £100 million non -ring fenced grant for Local Authority’s to use to drive forward adoption reform, targeting funding at the entire adoption process and the specialist support children need; part B is a one off £50 million ring –fenced grant that LAs are required to spend on adoption services with a clear focus on increasing the number of adopters.
- 4.4. Barnet’s allocation of the reform grant was used in part last year and will extend into next year, funding has been used to support various developments in implementing the reform agenda, including; a Court Proceedings Project, to work with neighbouring boroughs to reduce the length of court proceedings, a specialist adopter recruitment team, a number of posts established specifically to target reducing timescales in achieving permanence for children. In addition, funding has been used for an Education Project for Adopted children delivered by PAC (Post Adoption Centre) in partnership with the North London Adoption Consortium.

5 Reducing Delay

5.1. A Care Planning Panel has been established to ensure robust tracking of all children subject to legal proceedings and or who are newly looked after, its purpose is to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny and challenge to the planning process with an emphasis on achieving early permanence decisions.

5.2. Restructure of the Adoption team

The adoption team has been restructured to enable two social workers to focus on family finding tasks specifically, thus ensuring that a proactive approach is taken as soon as it is identified that a child may require a placement for adoption.

5.3. Specialist Training

Family futures, a specialist children's service was commissioned to deliver training to the Adoption team on the matching of children and prospective adopters, this training provided a particular framework for ensuring that the child's individual needs and in particular their attachment style, are fully considered within the context of the specific strengths and vulnerabilities of any prospective adopters. This is crucial in developing an effective adoption support plan.

5.4. Fostering for Adoption (FFA)

Another significant practice development that can significantly reduce delays for children is Fostering for Adoption, this now allows a Local Authority to temporarily approve approved adopters as foster carers in order to place the child with adopters prior to the making of a Placement Order, the legal authority required to place a child for adoption.

5.5. Fostering for Adoption enables children to be placed at an earlier stage, thus enabling the attachment relationship between the child and their new adoptive parents to begin weeks if not months earlier than it otherwise might.

5.6. Two Fostering for Adoption placements have been made so far in Barnet, this option is now routinely considered when planning for very young babies. However, it must be noted that this approach is not suitable in all cases as there is an inherent level of risk that the court will not make a Placement Order.

6. Legal context

6.1. Barnet, Haringey & Enfield began a tri borough court project in June 2013, the purpose of the project was to establish common systems and practice across the three boroughs all of which use the Barnet Family Proceedings Court. A post of Principal Officer, Court Proceedings has been established using funding from the Adoption Reform Grant to promote improved practice in Care Proceedings and to ensure compliance with new expectations set out following the Family Justice Review, a central aim of which is to conclude Care Proceedings within a 26 week

timeframe. Cases in Barnet were taking on average 58 weeks to conclude, prior to the judicial reform.

- 6.2. There have been two significant court judgements made in the last year that are likely to have far reaching consequences for Local Authorities making permanent plans for children in their care, for whom Adoption would usually be the plan..
- Cases Re:B & Re:BS have redefined practice in relation to the courts determination of the appropriate disposal and final order in care proceedings.
 - A robust balancing exercise must now be undertaken, where the merits of every possible option are considered, the judge must actively evaluate “proportionality” before deciding that adoption is indeed necessary.
- 6.3. A very strong message has emerged from these cases, a care plan of Adoption is considered extreme, only to be considered when there is no other appropriate order or option for the child, that severing the relationship with the child’s parents and family is “draconian” and should be considered only as a last resort when “nothing else will do”
- 6.4. As a consequence, it is likely that the numbers of children being placed for Adoption will decline. It is expected that the numbers of Special Guardianship Orders, (SGO’s) will continue to increase, these orders are being made in most cases to extended family members, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles etc. SGO’s are permanent legal orders where the Special Guardian is granted Parental Responsibility for the child, however, unlike in Adoption, the parent retains their parental responsibility, for this reason SGO’s are seen as a more reasonable and proportionate order by many. On the making of an SGO the child ceases to be a Child in Care and the Local Authority ceases to have parental responsibility. However, a financial allowance is paid to Special Guardians, the level of the allowance is based on the weekly maintenance allowance paid to foster carers. In addition, Special Guardians are entitled to ask for support services throughout the life of the order, until the child is 18.

	SGO’s Granted
2012/13	20
2013/14	27

7. Recruitment - North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium (NLAFC)

- 7.1. Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington have been working together as the North London Adoption Consortium for more than 10 years, 2 years ago the consortium Memorandum of Understanding between the partners was extended to include fostering. In August 2013, Hackney also joined the consortium. NLAFC is widely recognised as being the most successful and well established consortium

arrangement in London. The consortium is chaired by each consortium member in turn and rotates annually, Barnet take up the chair in April 2014.

- 7.2. Each Local Authority is required to offer a range of services to children who require adoption, to those adults who wish to be approved as adopters, adopted adults and to birth family members whose lives have been affected by adoption. By delivering a range of services jointly the consortium partnership offers a range of benefits that include shared practice development, service improvement and cost efficiencies by joint contracting of some services.
- 7.3. A central theme of the Governments Adoption Reform Agenda is to deliver Adoption Services on a regional basis, particularly in relation to the recruitment of adopters and the placement of children. With this in mind, following a scoping exercise to determine its viability, the consortium established a joint recruitment team, each member authority contributed some of the Adoption Reform Grant allocation to fund posts in the team, "Adoption North London" was launched in November 2013, at this stage it is a pilot project for 1 year.
- 7.4. Each stage of the recruitment process for adopters is now clearly defined with prescribed timescales, Adoption North London deals with all aspects of the Stage 1 process, Stage 1 is defined as being "adopter led" prospective adopters are offered an information session within 10 days of their enquiry, they then move on to a stage of self- directed learning with support from the adoption service. Stage 1 lasts for a period of 2 months, if the decision is that applicants proceed to Stage 2, the detailed assessment stage, prospective adopters are then referred back to the individual borough to carry out the assessment.
- 7.5. Stage 2, the detailed assessment stage during which the Prospective Adopters Report is completed, should last no longer than 4 months, therefore the total assessment timescale is now 6 months, the previous overall timescale was 8 months.
- 7.6. Barnet has not generally had a problem recruiting adopters and most children are placed with Barnet approved adopters. If it is not possible to place with adopters approved by Barnet then adopters from within the consortium group, other London consortiums and VAA's (Voluntary Adoption Agencies) are all considered.
- 7.7. If there are no children within Barnet who are a suitable match for any approved adopter, it is likely that the placement with adopter/s will be "sold" to another local authority, payments for these adopters are known as Inter- agency fees, the cost of a placement is £27,000 per child (a fixed price set by the DfE) it is therefore possible to generate some income, although this will vary based on the needs of the cohort of children needing an adoption placement.
- 7.8. In 2013/14, Barnet have made 8 placements of children in other Local Authorities; and one Voluntary Adoption Agency. Barnet adopters have been matched with children from; Camden, Hillingdon, East Riding, Bolton and Luton.

Adoption North London



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Welcome



“ I began my journey to being a mum, and have not looked back since! I can't put a finger on what the trigger was, it just felt like the right time for me. ”

Start your journey and find out more

Your Name:*

Contact number:*

Email Address:*

Got a question for us?:

[Tell me more](#)

Adopting a child is a life-changing experience. Adoption offers children the love, stability and security of family life they may not have experienced before. It's one of the most important decisions you could make, so we are here to support you every step of the way. As a partnership of six north London boroughs we have a wealth of experience and a wide range of children waiting to be matched. So why not begin your journey with us today and discover if adoption is right for you. Last year we placed 100 of our children in loving adoptive families. We can also advise about overseas adoption.

Adoption Consortium Website www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk

8. iMPOWER

- 8.1. In order to optimise continued service improvement, iMPOWER Consulting Ltd have been commissioned to deliver their Family Values programme in Barnet, the Adoption Reform Grant is being used to fund this project.
- 8.2. Family Values is a programme of councils working together supported by iMPOWER Consulting. The specific aim is to combine business analysis with insight from adopters and foster carers, in particular understanding their values, to recruit and retain more adopters and foster carers.
- 8.3. More broadly the project aims to transform Adoption and Fostering by changing the understanding and behaviours of staff in the service. A customer led transformation model is encouraged by iMPOWER, early indications from the iMPOWER analysis to date shows that there is a high level of satisfaction amongst adopters in Barnet and a high level of motivation to help support service improvement.

- 8.4. The findings from the Family Values project are expected by early May, an action plan for improvement will be produced following the findings and recommendations made by iMPOWER.

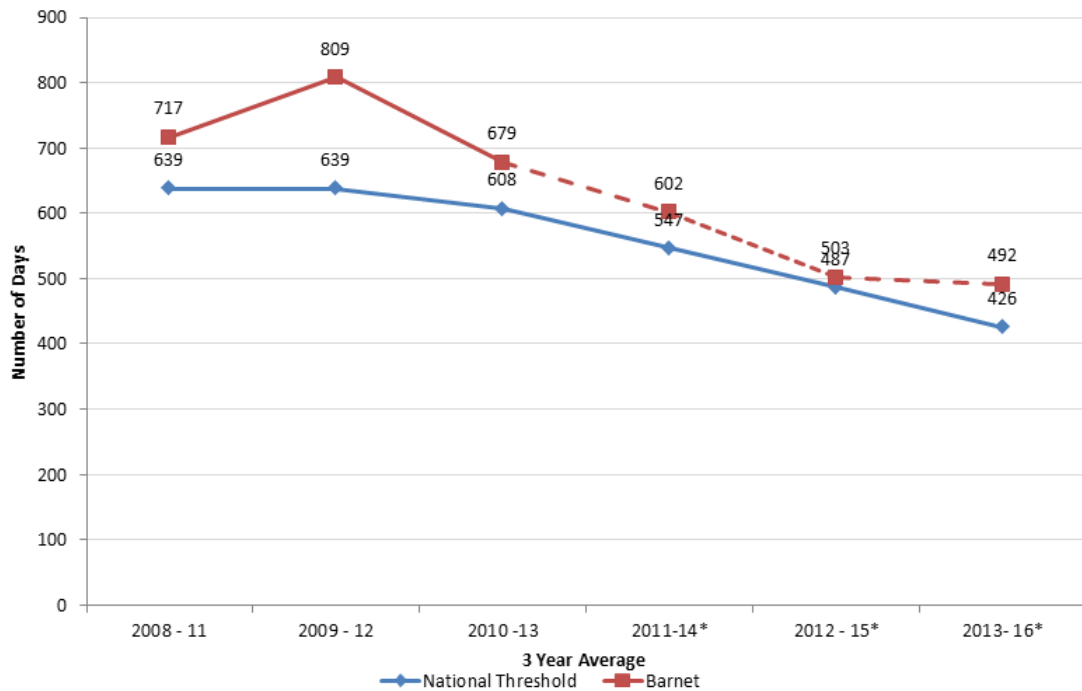
Profile of Children in Care Population

9. Performance Data

- 9.1. The DfE introduced the publication of Adoption Scorecards as a way of monitoring local authority's performance in May 2012, the scorecards are published annually monthly intervals, the November 2013 scorecard is attached at Appendix 1.
- 9.2. There are three key indicators that are measured in the scorecard;
- 1) Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family(days)
 - 2) Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family
 - 3) Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)
- 9.3. Scorecards are based on a 3 year average, performance in relation to the scorecard measures is improving, however, cohorts of children who are adopted are small, in 10/11, 11/12 and 12/13 the cohorts were 9,16 and 12 children respectively, therefore, delays in any individual case can impact in the next scorecard. For example, one case of a child who has yet to be placed for adoption but for whom adoption is the plan, is the subject of protracted, complex proceedings, if and when this child is placed there will be a significant impact on the scorecard data.

Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)

Source: Adoption Scorecard and * Predictions are included using adoption spread sheet



	Adopters Approved	Adoption Orders Granted	Currently placed for Adoption
2012/13	17	14	
2013/14	23	12	12

- 9.4. More adoption orders were expected this year, however, 4 of the children currently placed for adoption have had their final orders delayed as a result of new challenges by their birth parents following the aforementioned cases. (Re; B & Re; BS) However, the combined total of children leaving care as a result of permanent orders being made has increased from 34 in 12/13 to 39 in 13/14

Performance

10. Adoption Support

- 10.1. A priority area for future development as part of the reform agenda is the provision of Adoption Support Services. Further guidance is expected imminently, government are keen to ensure that adopters are given a greater choice to determine what type of adoption support services they need for their child. There has been some discussion and indication that personal budgets may be implemented. An Adoption Passport is to be introduced, this will require local authorities to publish information about available support services and allow adopters to access these services in whichever authority they choose. With this in mind, a comprehensive Adoption Support Handbook has been published with our consortium partners.

11. The Pupil Premium

- 11.1. The Pupil Premium is additional funding given to schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers, from April 2014, the Pupil Premium payments will also be made for adopted children. This will enable adopters to work with schools to consider what individual support will be of benefit for their adopted child.

12. Service Development in 2014/15

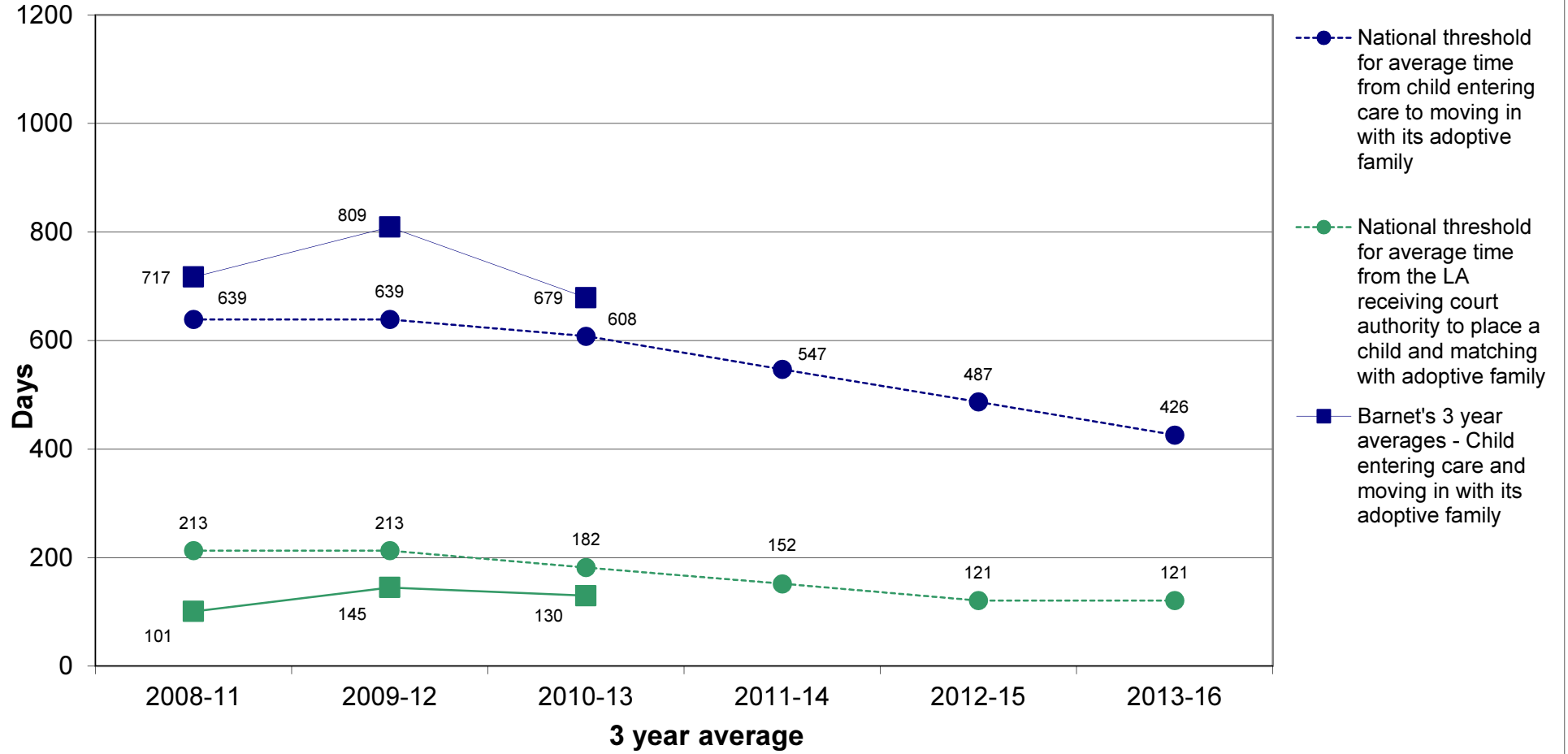
The overall aim is to further reduce the time it takes to place children permanently, minimising any delay for the child and to ensure that there are a sufficient range of suitable prospective adopters to meet the needs of the children who are to be placed.

- A pan London Adoption Board has recently been established to work towards a comprehensive “offer” of Adoption Support Services on a regional basis. Barnet is represented on the board by the Head of Service in Islington as part of the NLAFC partnership
- A scoping exercise is currently taking place to consider the viability of a shared Adoption Support Service within the consortium.
- An evaluation of the pilot joint recruitment team project, Adoption North London, to determine if all or some of the consortium partners wish to make a joint recruitment team a permanent arrangement.
- Consideration of extending Barnet’s Virtual School for Children in Care to include adopted children.

Appendix 1

Children			
	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	Children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)
LA's 3 year average (2010-13)	679	130	50 (57%)
1 year trend - Improvement from 2012 to 2013	Average time in 2013 was shorter than 2012	n/a	n/a
3 year trend - Improvement from 2009-12 to 2010-13	Average time in 2010-13 was shorter than in 2009-12	Average time in 2010-13 was shorter than in 2009-12	n/a
England 3 year average (2010-13)	647	210	11,360 (55%)
Distance from 2010-13 performance threshold	71 days	Threshold met	n/a

Average Time Indicators



Adopters

	Number of approved adoptive families as at 31 March 2013	Proportion of adoptive families who were matched to a child during 2012-13 who waited more than 3 months from approval to being matched to a child	
LA average	15	55	
England	4,195	58	

Related Information

	Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)	Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. Where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of BME children leaving care who are adopted)	Adoptions of children aged five or over (number adopted and % of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)	Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	Number of children awaiting adoption (as at 31 March 2013)	Number of applications for approval as an adopter still being assessed (not yet approved or rejected) as at 31 March 2013
LA's 3 year average (2010-13)	40 (8%)	20 (18%)	513	15 (6%)	10 (3%)	58	40	10
England 3 year average (2010-13)	10,540 (13%)	2,020 (9%)	545	1,600 (7%)	2,580 (4%)	51	6,890	2,506