

# How to use this guide

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## Introduction

This guide is designed to help social workers to conduct a comprehensive assessment of prospective applicants who want to foster a child or children. It is to be used by assessing social workers to complete a Prospective Foster Carer's report using the BAAF Form F (Fostering) Scotland.

The guide is primarily based on Section B of Form F which pulls together information about the applicant – what has made them into the person they are today and what creates the stability and security in their adult life which will have a bearing on the applicant's ability to become a foster carer. The information covers the applicant as an individual, their family, and wider environmental factors. There is a separate section addressing the specific area of assessing kinship carers.

It is expected that assessing social workers will be familiar with Form F. However, below is a brief overview of Sections A to F of Form F.

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## A brief overview of Sections A to F of the BAAF Form F (Fostering) Scotland

### Section A

Section A comprises factual information of the kind that has been collected for some time as part of a fostering assessment. One point to note is that on page 2, under the subject of type of resource offered, the form makes a distinction between permanent and long-term fostering. In terms of undertaking an assessment, I have included in Appendix 2 some suggestions for how the differences between these may be addressed with the applicants.

## Section B

Section B is covered in detail in this guide.

## Section C

Section C consists of a collection of different reports, references and other supporting materials. An issue for agencies to consider with regard to Section C is how many of the references are included here and whether some or all are to be shared with the applicants. Some may have to be removed in line with individual agency policy.

There is a space at the end for "Other Reports". Here might be included references from other fostering agencies where carers are transferring from one to another.

## Section D

This section collects a lot of personal information and data about the applicants and careful thought needs to be given as to whom this is circulated.

## Section E

Section E comprises the list of BAAF Competencies and the assessor has to include whether there is evidence that these have been either **Fully**, **Partially** or **Not** met. The guide indicates at the end of each heading which of the competencies **could** potentially be evidenced from the areas covered. It is for the judgement of the assessor to conclude how far this has been achieved. The guide can also help identify on which pages or sections of the report the evidence can be found, which also needs to be added to the right hand column of Section E.

## Section F

Section F is a Personal Professional Development Plan. The aim of this document is to provide a blueprint for the supervision and personal development of the successful applicant/s during their first year of fostering.

In the Competency Matrix box, under Areas for Further Development, should be included all the areas that were judged to be either **Partially** or **Not** met in Section E. A plan for how these gaps will be filled should be included in the "How this will be achieved" column.

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## What this guide is

This guide primarily takes Section B of the BAAF Form F (Fostering) Scotland and breaks down each area for exploration with the applicants into four parts:

- a list of questions that can be asked of applicants or can be used to facilitate further discussion in order to collect some of the basic information required for the purposes of the assessment;

- some suggestions for how the information that has been collected can be analysed to see if it may be positive for fostering or could be seen as a potential area of concern or vulnerability by the assessing social worker (referred to as the "assessor");
- some suggestions for which of the BAAF Fostering Competencies listed in Section E of Form F might be evidenced (or found to be a shortfall) from the information collected and also which of the GIRFEC (*Getting it Right for Every Child*) well-being indicators might be developed or supported by the applicants' skills in this area;
- for some of the areas, how the information given could be evidenced from sources both within and outwith the family.

It is hoped that by making use of this guide, assessing social workers will be able to collect the information which will form the basis of a sound assessment. From the questions provided, BAAF Competencies could potentially be evidenced. (Evidence from pre-approval training may fill any gaps.) For new applicants, this is unlikely to be the case, but it will also help to identify those areas where there are gaps and shortfalls. These should then be addressed in the Personal Professional Development Plan which can be found in Section F of Form F.

Local authorities and fostering agencies in Scotland will be conscious of the aspirations of the Scottish Government for all Scottish children as articulated in the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) strategy. For particular groups, such as looked after children, this is especially important to consider. Assessment of foster carers needs to be in the context of the potential of those carers to be mindful of the GIRFEC well-being indicators. Assessors need to consider the link between the skills and potential of applicants and how these might help a vulnerable or underachieving child reach towards the GIRFEC well-being indicators.

**Having collected the information, the guide places an emphasis on the analysis of the information collected, as this is something that is often identified as lacking in assessments presented to fostering panels.**

It is also intended that the guide may help in the planning of sessions with applicants and avoid the need to repeat that planning with each new assessment.

There is a helpful timesheet in Appendix 1, which can be used by the assessor alone or in conjunction with their supervisor, to plan out the course of the assessment process and agree in what order areas will be covered and within what timescale. Some thought should be given to the order in which these subjects are covered with the applicants, as it may be more appropriate to cover more personal and sometimes painful areas of their lives once a relationship between you – the assessor and the applicant – has been established. An alternative for kinship assessments is also provided.

The guide for fostering applications also divides the questions into three parts:

1. individual profile and family and environmental factors;
2. present circumstances;
3. becoming foster carers – assessment of foster carer parenting capacity.

These headings broadly mirror those used to introduce the different parts of Section B of Form F, and the questions fall into these categories. This may help to give some structure to the assessment task and some focus as to the order in which the various topics may be covered by the assessor.

The information in Chapters 4, 6 and the Appendices is intended to complement each agency's own procedures and formats for these areas. These include the following.

- A tool to help identify gaps and shortfalls in Competencies and evidence for developing the GIRFEC well-being indicators.
- A list of the headings of the BAAF Fostering Competencies and GIRFEC well-being indicators which may be helpful to refer to.
- A plan for an interview with a personal referee for an applicant. This contains some general questions as well as a suggestion for the referee to be shown the Fostering Competencies, to which they could be invited to contribute any evidence they have from their knowledge of the applicant.
- Suggestions of areas to cover for a health and safety check of the applicant's home.
- Headings to be covered for a safer caring policy.
- An example of an ecomap showing where applicants get their support from.
- Suggestions for additional areas to cover when considering applications for long-term, permanency or parent and baby placements.

In this guide, the term "applicant" is more commonly used to obviate the necessity of continuously using the terms "applicant/applicants".

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## What this guide is not

This guide is not intended to be a quick and easy way of undertaking an assessment. It offers a way of collecting the basic information needed to complete the process. Although most of the guide is presented in question format, it is not intended that the questions merely be fired at the applicant. Rather, they are designed to help the assessor cover key areas in what should be a dynamic process rather than one which consists merely of answers to questions or the completion of a checklist.

Assessors must be alert to the idiosyncrasies and complexities of each different applicant they assess and be prepared to pursue different lines of questioning and exploration accordingly and analyse that information on the basis of its relevance to the fostering task.

Nor should the guide lead to any standardisation of assessments. It is important for assessors to maintain their individual styles of seeking, analysing and presenting information.

**This guide should be seen as a tool to help in the assessment process and not an end in itself.**