

How to use this guide



Introduction

This guide is designed to help social workers 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 report Form F (Wales)**, published by CoramBAAF in 2019.

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 that will have a bearing on their ability to become a foster carer. The information covers the applicant as an individual, their family and wider environmental factors before moving on to consider their capacity to undertake the task of fostering.

All assessing social workers should ensure that the collection, storage and use of information about the fostering applicants complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information, see Adams and Jordan (2019).

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

A brief overview of the structure of Prospective Foster Carer report Form F (Wales)

Front sheet

The front sheet provides very basic information about the prospective foster carer(s) and the fostering service. It includes the social work recommendation about their approval and contains a pen picture of the prospective foster carer(s).

Section A – Factual information

Section A records primarily factual information about the applicant and their household. Part 1 reflects the information that is required to be collected under Stage 1 of the assessment process as laid down in the Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018. Part 2 includes verification of documents and other checks and factual information, as required for Stage 2 of the assessment process.

Section B – Description and analysis

Section B covers more detailed description and analysis and is set out in three subsections. The first is about the applicant's history, family and lifestyle; the second is an assessment of their fostering capacity; and the third looks at the applicant's preparation for the fostering task. It is Section B that this guide is primarily aimed at.

Section C – Supporting information

This section collates supporting information including material that is legally required (such as personal references) and other documents such as family trees, ecomaps, chronologies and checklists (depending on the policy of the fostering service).

Section D – Specialist reports

Where relevant, the assessor may include additional reports relating to parent and child fostering, permanent fostering, short-break fostering for disabled children, remand fostering or other specialist fostering schemes. Some suggestions for areas to cover when considering recommending applicants for approval for such schemes are included in this guide.

Section E – Summary and recommendation

Section E consists of the summary and recommendation of the assessing social worker and is signed by them and the responsible manager. It also includes the applicant's observations on the report.

Additional item 11 – the CoramBAAF competencies

Additional item 11 (of the group of documents that accompany the main Form F) contains the CoramBAAF competencies table. This summarises at a glance the competencies that the prospective carers will have met in their application, and highlights areas for future development. At the end of the assessment report, there is an opportunity to collate these entries and identify gaps in the applicant's experience and training, which will in turn inform their development for the coming year.

This guide indicates at the end of each heading which of the competencies could potentially be evidenced from the areas covered (with the entire table reproduced in Chapter 6). It is for the assessor to conclude how far this has been achieved. This 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 the competencies table.

This task of analysing and evaluating the application is the primary responsibility of the assessing social worker. It is not sufficient to lay information in front of the panel; rather, a judgement must be made as to the applicant's suitability to foster. This will be easier if the assessor has noted what competencies and/or standards have been evidenced throughout the descriptive report in Section B.

Additional tools and resources

Some tools and resources are provided to help the assessor with collecting and presenting some of the information required for this report. Additionally, there are tools that the fostering service might utilise as part of the assessment process.

What this guide is

This guide primarily takes Section B of the CoramBAAF Form F and breaks down each area into three parts for exploration with the applicant:

- a list of questions that can be asked of the applicant 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 provide evidence that 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 as to which of the CoramBAAF competencies found in Additional item 11 that accompanies the Form F might be evidenced (or found to be lacking) from the information collected;
- for some of the areas covered, how the information given could be verified from sources both within and outside of the family.

Where appropriate, relevant sections from the guidance notes that accompany the CoramBAAF Form F (Wales) have also been included before the suggested list of questions for that area.

It is hoped that, by making use of this guide, the assessor will be able to collect the information that will form the basis of a sound assessment. From the questions provided, most of the CoramBAAF 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. Post-approval, these should then be addressed in individual support and development plans.

Having collected the information, the guide places an emphasis on the **analysis** of the information collected and there is a designated space for this analysis to be presented in Form F after each area covered in Section B. It is important to ensure that the analysis section does contain a detailed examination and interpretation of the information collected and is not a re-stating of that, or new, information.

It is also intended that the guide may help the assessor in the planning of sessions with their supervisor and with the applicant themselves. There is a helpful timesheet in Appendix 2 that can be used, in conjunction with CoramBAAF's Assessment Agreement, to plan out the course of the assessment and agree in what order areas will be covered and within what timescale. Personal style may dictate in what order the areas are covered but some thought should be given to this as it may be more appropriate to cover the more personal, and perhaps painful, areas of people's lives once a relationship has been established between the assessor and the applicant.

The information in the appendices is intended to complement each agency's own procedures and formats for these areas. These include the following.

- An example of how to present an ecomap detailing where the applicant gets their support from and an example of a family tree.
- The aforementioned timesheet to assist in the overall planning of the assessment.
- A plan for an interview with a personal referee for the applicant.
- Issues to consider in respect of an ex-partner reference.
- Suggestions of areas to cover in a health and safety check of the applicant's home.
- Suggestions of areas to be covered in a family safer caring policy.

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 that consists merely of answers to questions or the completion of a checklist.

The assessor must be alert to the idiosyncrasies and complexities of each 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.

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