

How to use this guide



Introduction

The Adoption Reform Programme in England, initiated by the Government in 2012, aimed to reduce delay for children waiting for an adoption placement, simplify the adoption system, and improve the quality of care and stability of placements for looked after children. As part of this, the two-stage adopter assessment process was introduced in England from 1 July 2013, and the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) 2013 was modified and improved in line with the new regulations and guidance. The revised PAR was designed to be a more streamlined reporting tool; it required information to be summarised, and placed a stronger emphasis on the information being analysed by the assessing social worker.

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a new duty on local authorities, under s.22C(9A) of the Children Act 1989, to consider placing a looked after child, for whom the local authority is considering adoption, with foster carers who are also approved prospective adopters following consideration in accordance with s.22C(9B)(c). These Fostering for Adoption (FfA) carers can be dually approved as prospective adopters and as foster carers, or they may be approved potential adopters who have been temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child under Regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (the 2010 Regulations). The PAR (2014 and 2016) was developed with input from Jeanne Kaniuk and her colleagues at Coram, to cover the assessment of adopters as required in the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 Schedule 4, and in Adoption Statutory Guidance (2013), and to include issues relevant to their approval where they have expressed an interest in offering early permanence through FfA or in being dually approved as an FfA or concurrent carer so these can be addressed in the report.

In 2019, a new version of the PAR was published to cover the assessment of foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care as set out in Adoption Agencies Regulations 2013 (Regulation 30F).

Using this guide to complete the PAR 2016 or the PAR 2019

This guide will assist workers in writing their assessments using either the PAR report (2016), which meets the requirements set out in the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 Schedule 4 and in Adoption Statutory Guidance, and considers the additional experience and skills needed by prospective adopters in their role as foster carers when offering early permanence placements – or the PAR (2019), which meets the requirements under Regulation 30F as set out in Schedule 4a of the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, which allows the worker to take account of earlier fostering assessments and to consider how the knowledge, skills and experience of foster carers wishing to adopt provides evidence for their suitability to do so.

Within this guide, there will be references to work likely to be completed in Stage One and Stage Two of the adoption preparation process. Where prospective adopters are considering offering FfA or concurrent planning placements, they should be provided with information about what this would mean for them from early in Stage One; the workbook in Appendix VI will help them to think about the issues and inform the work they need to do on this in Stage Two. The PAR should assist agencies in completing their assessments within the four-month period now expected in Stage Two of the assessment process, if assessment visits can be structured around sections of the PAR and write-ups of visits that include analysis of information gathered can later be used to compile the report.

For foster carers wishing to adopt, there is no requirement for them to complete Stage One of the adopter preparation process. Statutory guidance sets out that they should receive a tailored assessment (that may include elements of Stage One) which takes account of such factors as their previous experience of fostering in general, and experience of the differing needs of the children whom they have previously fostered.

This guide is primarily based on Part 1 of the PAR, which is the descriptive part, and brings 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 would enable them to become an adopter. The information covers the applicant as an individual, their family and wider environmental factors and, in the PAR (2016), the implications of these when they are offering an early permanence placement, with sections that look at the implications of unknown information or health uncertainties where very young babies are being placed in early permanence placements, and the applicant's understanding of the role of a concurrent planning carer/FfA carer. For foster carers wishing to adopt, the PAR (2019) guides the social worker to use previously obtained information from an earlier assessment or other documents such as foster carer reviews, and to consider the implications of the applicant changing their role to become an adopter, in all aspects of their life and on other family members.

Part 2 of the PAR brings together the factual information about the applicant and feedback from the different reports, references and other supporting materials that are gathered during the assessment. There is a section at the end of Part 2 where all third party information is reported on, including the outcome of statutory checks, the medical adviser's comments and referee reports; these should be treated as confidential and not shared with applicants without the express permission of those providing the information. This could include written references provided by their fostering service and/or supervising social worker.

What this guide is

It is hoped that by making use of this guide, assessing social workers will be able to collect the information that will form the basis of a sound assessment. It will also help to identify those areas where there is a need for support or further training.

Having collected the information, the guide assists in highlighting the areas for analysis, which was a key element of the PAR issued in 2013. The PAR is designed to encourage workers to provide key information in a way that gives a clear picture of the applicant and what they are offering as an adoptive parent, but is also succinct and provides an overall picture of significant information rather than full details of applicants' histories and lives.

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Where applicants have been encouraged to write their own accounts relating to sections of the PAR during Stages One or Two of the assessment process, this information will be used to assist the assessing social worker to consider which areas will need further exploration during the Stage Two assessment. There should be sparing use of self-reported information in the PAR report, e.g. using key quotes to illustrate a point, provide evidence of their reflections or to provide clarity of the applicant's views in their own words. The social worker will then need to analyse this information alongside other information in the report.

The Stage Two Plan (Agreement) or Assessment Agreement (Reg 30F) will be used by the social worker to agree with the applicant at the beginning of the assessment the expectations of both parties, e.g. the number of anticipated visits, whether these will be held in the applicant's home or in the social worker's office, how any differences between the assessing social worker and applicant will be managed, and whether there will be a halfway meeting or second opinion visit.

Appendix I includes a checklist that can help in the planning of sessions with applicants and gathering of all the information required. It can be used by the assessor alone or in conjunction with their supervisor, to plan out the course of the assessment process and confirm that all information has been gathered and is available on the applicant's case file. Some thought should be given to the order in which subject areas are covered with the applicant, as it may be more appropriate to cover more personal and sometimes painful areas of their lives once a relationship between assessor and applicant has been established. Where adoption agencies are using Attachment Style Interviews or Adult Attachment Interviews, the information from these interviews will inform the assessment and may highlight other areas needing further exploration during the assessment.

This guide primarily takes Part 1 of the CoramBAAF PAR and breaks down each area into four parts: extracts from the relevant section from the Guidance Notes that accompany the PAR; a list of questions that can be asked of applicants or that 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 will be positive for adoption or could be seen as a potential area of

concern or vulnerability by the assessing social worker; examples of how the information given could be evidenced from sources both within and outside of the family to provide verification of their account.

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The guide follows the format of the PAR and covers:

1. family and environmental factors;
2. becoming adopter/s – the assessment of adoptive parenting capacity. The questions under these headings will help to give structure to the assessment task and some focus as to the order in which various topics may be covered by the assessor.

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

- A plan for an interview with a personal referee for an applicant.
- Suggestions of where to find information for a health and safety check of the applicant's home.
- Suggestions of where to find information for a pet assessment.
- Areas to be covered by a safer caring policy.
- An assessment checklist to be used when completing and signing off the assessment.
- An example of an ecomap showing where applicants get their support from.
- Suggestions for additional areas to cover when considering applications for intercountry adoption and second-time (or subsequent) adopters.
- Information to be covered in brief reports.
- Information to be covered in second opinion visits.
- Worksheets for adopters that are linked to sections of the PAR, and a new workbook addressing the issues in early permanence.

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

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. It is hoped they will also stimulate ideas for the assessing social worker for questions that are pertinent to each individual assessment.

Assessors must be alert to the understanding and learning styles and complexities of each different applicant whom 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 role of an adoptive parent.

The guide is also not designed to 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.