

Introduction

This guide is designed to help social workers to conduct a comprehensive assessment of a child for adoption and permanence in Scotland, using the CoramBAAF Child's Adoption and Permanence Report (CAPR). This form was launched in 2015, to replace the previous Form E, which had been used for this purpose until this point, and now forms part of the range of forms available on licence to agencies in Scotland.

Overview of current situation in Scotland

In 2005, the Scottish Government published the Phase 2 report of the Adoption Policy Review Group, *Adoption: Better choices for our children*. This set out to look at the adoption structure in Scotland, recognising that few children were now voluntarily relinquished but that increasingly some looked after children were caught in protracted, contentious situations in which local authorities considered adoption was in the child's best interests against the wishes of their parents. The main conclusion was that adoption remained a valuable option for some of these children. For others, together with those who had remained in indeterminate long-term care, if return to the care of their parents was contra-indicated, alternative options, such as secure permanent fostering or kinship care, were considered to be preferable. This provides the basis for understanding the approach that has developed since then in Scotland and can be seen in both legislation and strategy.

Legally, the approach has progressed firstly through the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) and then the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (the 2014 Act). A key change of the 2007 Act, which is now well established, is the Permanence Order with or without authority for adoption (POs and POAs), although there remain debates around aspects of their usage. The aim of the increased use of both POs and POAs is to achieve certainty and security without ongoing recourse to the Children's Hearings System (the hearing) for looked after children who cannot return home. This applies both to the route to adoption and clarity around permanent fostering. Also included in the 2007 Act is the right to request an assessment for adoption support services for those affected by adoption. This has been progressed through the Adoption Support Services and Adoption Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (ASupSS

Regulations). It is intended to increase the likelihood of the adoption benefitting the child throughout their life, although much remains to be achieved in practice – especially in ensuring the availability of a full range of resources across Scotland.

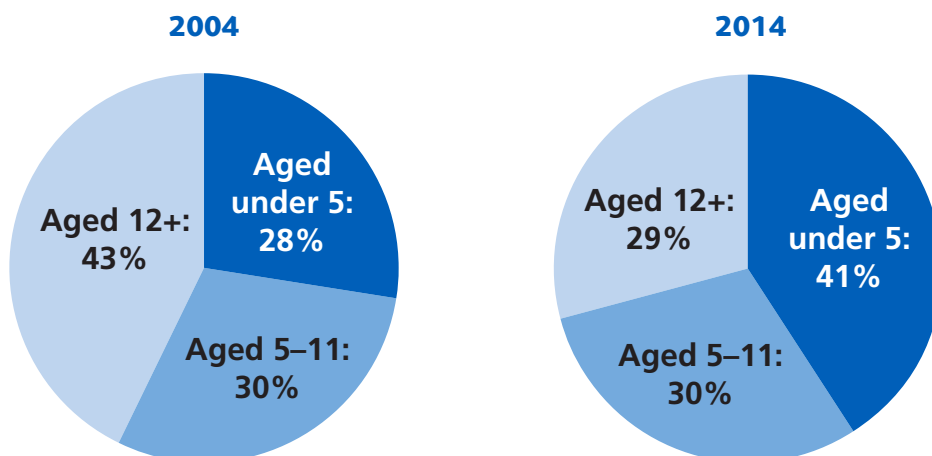
Work continues around implementation of the 2014 Act and its impact on practice. The policy intent is to place an increased emphasis on achieving best outcomes for children by ensuring early and effective intervention. This requires identifying quickly those children whose circumstances demand the involvement of various agencies, with a cornerstone being the extension of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child). A significant element of the 2014 Act is the increased requirement for collaborative working when the completion of a Child's Plan is necessary. The Child's Adoption and Permanence Report (CAPR) will inevitably refer to the Child's Plan and demonstrate how the plans for permanence best serve the interests of the child in promoting his or her well-being.

It is recognised that children who have experienced trauma and disruption require support during their transition to adulthood. Accordingly, the "continuing care" policy enables young people who are settled with their carers to remain in their current placements up to their 22nd birthday. The entitlement of looked after children to request support and guidance for after-care is extended so that they can do so up until their 26th birthday.

The provisions in relation to the kinship care order and allowances being paid to kinship carers place children within such care settings on an equal footing to those children being cared for by foster carers or in residential care. It recognises that these children will often have had similar experiences, resulting in enhanced needs requiring to be met, principally by these carers.

Although not specifically about adoption, the 2014 Act has also placed a mandatory duty on adoption agencies – which includes all local authorities – to refer to the Scottish Adoption Register those children and adopters for whom no local link has been identified and actively pursued after a period of three months following an adoption decision.

The **strategy** for permanence is developing under the umbrella of GIRFEC. The Strategy for Looked After Children and Young People, launched in November 2015, summarised progress in addressing the needs of this group. It lays emphasis firstly on the reduction in the number of children needing to be looked after for the second year, after a peak in 2012, and then focuses on ensuring that when intervention is necessary, there is an early plan for permanence that will provide the child with 'a secure stable nurturing home' – either with their birth family or an alternative. Within the overall number of children who become looked after, there are interesting trends both around the number at home on supervision and where the rest are accommodated and, particularly relevant to permanence planning, the changing pattern with regards to age. In the decade from 2004 to 2014, the biggest percentage rise was in children aged under one year, which rose from eight per cent to 16 per cent. During the same period, the number of 12–15-year-olds who became looked after dropped from 37 per cent to 28 per cent. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of when children became looked after in 2004 and 2014.

Figure 1**Percentage of children starting to be looked after by age in 2004 and 2014**

(Scottish Government, 2015)

Inevitably, this is "work in progress". Practice will continue to develop. Sometimes legal, structural or strategic changes will be indicated. At the same time, plans continue to need to be made for individual children if the prospect of a return home is bleak.

Scottish local authorities will already be familiar with the National Risk Framework (NRF) to support the assessment of children and young people. The various tools provided to complete the risk assessment, analysis and management should help social workers to identify families where there is a high risk to children combined with low skills in parents. This needs to be followed by planned interventions that can be monitored to inform the permanence decision. Central here is the assumption that accommodating a child is only the beginning of a new journey for the child. It must be followed by clarity around where the future lies for an individual child to give them security and enhance their long-term prospects. Given the significance of these decisions, all aspects of the process need to be very robust – particularly if "permanence" means that the child will grow up separated from their birth parents.

Where adoption is suggested as being in the child's best interests, there are clearly laid out steps that the local authority must take. These are triggered by a LAAC review, followed by presentation of the case to an adoption panel. Tight timescales follow on from this – and some local authorities also have their own internal timescales before this for the period between review and panel.

Many Scottish local authorities have "adoption and permanence" panels to which they bring both adoption and other permanence plans. These can include both formal plans for permanent foster care – sometimes restricted to plans for children up to age 12 – and in some authorities, permanent kinship arrangements. The completion of the CAPR is the means of gathering together the information for this next significant step, whichever option is recommended.

Social workers often find it a challenging task. There can be anxiety about scrutiny at a panel and later if the case is actively contested in court. Equally, workers may be sensitive about the impact on children and families reading the report, either now or far into the

future. A report supporting a permanence decision will be an important part of the case records for both looked after and adopted children for 100 years and will be the basis of how the child understands their history during their childhood and throughout their adult life.

The purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist children and families (C&F) social workers in completing the CAPR by:

- placing the assessment of the child's needs in the context of the principles, theoretical framework and concepts underpinning best practice;
- offering a structure for completing each section;
- suggesting how each element helps to inform the overall picture;
- indicating points of cross referencing between sections to help weave together the picture while avoiding unnecessary repetition;
- highlighting compatibility with GIRFEC.

Scope of the guide

Chapter 1 places the report in context. The vast majority of situations will be ones where there is a very complex history, often dating back many years. The examples given throughout have been developed to illustrate the wide range of circumstances where permanence planning is relevant.

Chapters 2 and 3 explore completing each section of the CAPR in assessing the needs of these children, virtually all of whom will already be subject to a supervision order; between them, they cover all aspects of the child and their world. Chapter 2 covers Sections 1–14 of the main narrative report about the need for the permanence plan looking at the child's world, especially their parents, wider family and their environment; Chapter 3 then focuses on Sections 15–23 on the child's needs and how the local authority plans to meet those needs.

Chapter 4 looks briefly at the other elements that form the whole CAPR package.

Chapter 5 looks at applying the sections in the CAPR to the small number of relinquished infants placed for adoption.

Following this, a range of helpful appendices is provided, as listed on the contents page.