

How to use this guide



Introduction

This guide is designed to help social workers conduct a comprehensive assessment of connected persons or prospective family and friends carers as foster carers or special guardians. It is to be used by assessing social workers in England who are using Form C, published by CoramBAAF.

The guide is primarily based on Section C of Form C, which requires information about the applicant/s – historical and current – and how that is relevant to their suitability to be foster carers or special guardians for known children. The form requires a range of descriptive information about the applicant/s, information about their relationships and networks, and consideration of their parenting capacity. Chapter 7 is designed to help assessors complete Section D of Form C.

Form C is designed to be presented to fostering panels in relation to foster carers, and to courts when considering special guardianship. It is expected that assessing social workers reading this guide will be familiar with Form C, and the accompanying guidance notes, but it is worth providing a brief overview.

Structure of Form C

Front sheet

The front sheet provides basic information about the case, including court details (where relevant) and information about the assessing social workers. There is space for a genogram of the family and a brief summary and recommendation.

Section A – The child

Section A provides information about the child or children, including the circumstances of them becoming looked after, their needs including in relation to contact, and their wishes and feelings.

Section B – The birth family

Section B provides information about the birth family and only needs to be completed for special guardianship assessments.

Section C – The applicant/s

Section C considers information about the applicant/s and is set out in sections that address: personal and family details; descriptive information; relationships and network; parenting capacity; and checks and references.

Section D – either:

- Section D – Temporary approval
- Section D – Special guardianship
- Section D – Fostering

Section D consists of three different forms; only one of these should be selected and completed, according to the type of assessment being undertaken and for the recommendation being made.

Section E – Information checklist

Section E is designed to be used as an aid in gathering information and as a checklist for the assessor and their supervisor. Any relevant information that is gathered should have been included in Section C of the report. It is suggested that Section E is included in the paperwork presented to fostering panels, but it is not designed to be presented with special guardianship reports to court.

Additional tools and resources

There are two sets of tools and resources provided to help the assessor with planning, collecting and presenting some of the information required for this report.

Additional tools and resources (Form C):

1. Application form
2. Assessment agreement
3. Applicant report
4. Chronology
5. Second opinion report
6. Panel member notes
7. Decision form

Additional tools and resources (checks and references):

1. Consent to checks and references form
2. Personal reference form
3. Interview record and analysis form

4. Home safety checklist
5. Dog assessment form
6. Pet assessment form
7. Financial statement and checklist
8. Former partner check form
9. Employment and voluntary activity form
10. School and nursery reference form

These additional tools and resources should be used at the discretion of the assessor and in line with local policies and procedures.

Content and purpose of this guide

After setting out some general guidance about assessing connected persons/family and friends carers, this guide takes Section C of the CoramBAAF Form C, considers each sub-section and looks at how these might be explored with the applicant. This includes:

- 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 collected can be analysed to see if it may provide evidence that could be positive for fostering or special guardianship, or could be seen as a potential area of concern or vulnerability by the assessing social worker;
- for some of the areas covered, consideration about how the information given could be verified from sources both within and outside of the family.

Sections from the guidance notes that accompany the CoramBAAF Form C have been repeated in this guide, providing general guidance to accompany 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.

However, having collected the information, the guide places an emphasis on the analysis of the information collected and consideration of how this is relevant in reaching a judgement about suitability as a foster carer or special guardian. It is important to ensure that the analysis is integrated into the assessment and is used to reach a well-informed, evidence-based assessment.

The information in the Appendix is intended to assist the assessor. This consists of advice on how to present a family tree, and an ecomap pictorially setting out the applicant's support networks.

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 to analyse that information in terms of its relevance to fostering or special guardianship.

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.