

## Guidance notes for Connected Person/Family and Friends Report (Form C)

### Introduction

These notes provide guidance about completing the Connected Person/Family and Friends Report (Form C) England. This form has been designed for use in England as it is specifically related to the legislative framework in that country.

The first version of Form C was published in 2011 by BAAF and was designed as a flexible format that could be used for temporary assessments, fostering assessments and special guardianship assessments with prospective family and friends carers. It could also be used to present reports to court. The form attempted to focus on the particular child in question, and the ability of the prospective carer/s to meet the needs of that child or children. Additionally, there was an emphasis on providing support to the prospective carer/s, and one section of the report was designed to be completed by the applicant/s themselves.

The updated 2016 edition (now published by CoramBAAF) can be used in all of these ways, but is restructured and revised to recognise a number of recent changes. Changes in practice mean that timescales for completing assessments are often shorter than previously, so the form is streamlined as much as possible while still ensuring compliance with the demanding legislative requirements. This edition also recognises that it is easier to have a shorter core document and to add to this as necessary, rather than a longer core document and to remove or edit sections for another purpose. A number of additional tools and resources have been added, and the guidance notes are more comprehensive. It also reflects the need to now consider special guardianship both in relation to a child's future needs until they reach the age of eighteen, to any risk posed by birth parents or others.

The guidance notes provide information about the structure of Form C, and how it works with the different legal frameworks, before a short section highlights some key research findings. This is followed by discussion of the context of family and friends assessments and the need for collaborative working, before a list of useful and relevant texts. The remaining pages provide specific advice in relation to completing the forms.

It should be noted that Form C is not designed for use in undertaking viability or preliminary assessments, but consideration is being given to producing a separate format for this purpose.

Form C and the accompanying guidance will be kept under review and updated and revised as appropriate. Please send any comments about your experience of using this form to [paul.adams@corambaaf.org.uk](mailto:paul.adams@corambaaf.org.uk).

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## STRUCTURE OF THE FORM

- **Front sheet**
- **Section A – Child**
- **Section B – Birth family**
- **Section C – The applicant/s**
- **Section D – either:**
  - **Section D – Temporary approval**
  - **Section D – Special guardianship**
  - **Section D – Fostering**
- **Section E – Information checklist**
- **Additional tools and resources**
  - **Chronology**
  - **Applicant’s report**
  - **Second opinion report**
  - **Panel member notes**
- **Guidance notes**

The front sheet provides some very basic information and a genogram of the family. The form then consists of five main sections.

- Section A provides information about the child or children and needs completing – at least in part – for all types of assessment.
- Section B provides information about the birth family and is only needed for special guardianship assessments.
- Section C is about the applicant/s themselves and is relevant for all of the assessment types.
- Section D is composed of three different forms; one of these should be selected according to the type of assessment being undertaken.
- Section E is an information checklist.

Within sections A, B and C, guidance is provided around what needs to be included to meet the requirements of the regulations and statutory guidance for each different type of assessment (where applicable). This provides clarification for assessing social workers and others reading the reports.

The following grid sets out which sections are applicable to each type of assessment:

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<b>Form C</b>	<b>Temporary approval</b>	<b>Special guardianship</b>	<b>Fostering</b>
Front sheet	Yes (partly)	Yes	Yes
Section A	Yes (partly)	Yes	Yes
Section B	No	Yes	No
Section C	Yes (partly)	Yes	Yes
Section D	Yes (temporary approval form)	Yes (special guardianship form)	Yes (fostering form)
Section E	No	See below	See below

As noted above, section E (the information checklist) 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 be included in section C of the report. While it is suggested that section E is included in the paperwork presented to fostering panels, it is not designed to be presented with special guardianship reports.

Additional tools and resources are provided to help the assessor with collecting and presenting some of the information required for this report. It will sometimes be appropriate to attach these completed tools to the main report, but this will be a matter of judgement for the assessing social worker, and at least in part determined by local policies and procedures.

This guidance does not specifically indicate who should undertake the assessment, but it is common practice in many agencies for the child's social worker to complete aspects relating to the child and family (sections A and B), and for a fostering or other assessor to complete the parts about the applicant (sections C and E). Section D can be completed by either or both of these individuals.

By structuring the forms in this way, it should be relatively easy to move from one assessment to another, making use of work that has already been completed and building on this. Usually a temporary approval assessment is completed first, before moving on to a special guardianship or fostering assessment. Using Form C, it is intended that in either case, the earlier assessment is used as a starting point for subsequent assessments, and that the form is updated and expanded to serve the new purpose. It is important to be clear that updating in this context means rewriting any out-of-date sections (rather than simply adding new material chronologically), but nevertheless much of the information, especially the factual aspects, will remain the same.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

### Temporary approval

Under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, the local authority may approve a connected person as a temporary foster carer for up to 16 weeks, subject to an assessment taking place before the child is placed. Statutory guidance makes clear that temporary approval is intended to be used exceptionally, where the connected person is already known to the child, to avoid an unnecessary move to a stranger foster carer, and in 'circumstances which could not easily have been foreseen'.

Schedule 4 clearly sets out a number of aspects that need to be considered prior to any such placement, and in order to comply with these regulations using Form C, it is necessary to complete parts of sections A and C and all of section D (temporary approval). The local authority is required to make immediate arrangements for the suitability of the connected person as a local authority foster carer to be assessed before the temporary approval expires.

A temporary assessment is often undertaken in the context of a family crisis and when an immediate placement is required that day. It is generally recognised that the legislative requirements are therefore very demanding, and the statutory guidance on family and friends care (paragraph 5.5) requires the local authority to 'ascertain as much information set out in Schedule 4 to the 2010 Regulations *as is possible in the circumstances of the case*'. It must be accepted, therefore, that some of the information gathered prior to placement will be relatively superficial, although there will clearly need to be arrangements in place for completing any gaps as soon as this is practicable.

### Special guardianship

The areas that need to be covered in an assessment of a prospective special guardian are detailed in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (as amended). To comply with these regulations using Form C, it is necessary to complete sections A, B, C and D (special guardianship).

The form, with the front sheet, is designed to be presented to the court, and use of Form C as a court report required by s.14A(11) Children Act 1989 accords with the pragmatic approach to such reports in avoiding delay and duplication recommended by Wall LJ in [Re S \(A Child\) No. 2 \[2007\] EWCA Civ 90](#). The following grid sets out how each element of the schedule is addressed in Form C, where the top line refers to the schedule of matters in the Special Guardianship Regulations, and the bottom line to sections in Form C:

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1	a	B	c	d	e	f	g	ga	gb	h	i	j	k	l	m	n
	A1	A4	A1,4	A4	A4	B4	A5	A2	A2	A3	A3	A4	A4	A4	A4	A4
	o	P														
	A4	A4														
2	A	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k					
	B1,2,4	B1,2	B1,2	B1,2	B3	B3	B3	B2	B3	B1,2	B4					
3	a	b	c													
	A6	B1,2	B4,5													
4	a	B	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n		
	C1	C2	C1,2	C1,2	C3	C2	C3	C3	C1	C4	C6	C2,5	C4	C4		
	o	P	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	aa	bb		
	C5	C6	C6	C1	C2	C2	C6	C6	C2	C4	C4	C4,D2	C4	C4		
5	a	B	c	d	e	6	7	8	9	10						
	*	C6	C6	D3	D3	A4,C6	D2	D2	D1	D1						

\* covered in front sheet

In completing a special guardianship report, it should be remembered that reports submitted to court may be seen by all parties, including birth parents, and it may therefore be necessary to consider the implications of revealing certain personal information, or adversely impacting on what might already be a strained relationship between the applicant and birth parents.

## Fostering

The requirements for assessing and approving a foster carer are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, as amended by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. Schedule 3 of those regulations details the information that must be collected as part of that assessment. Additional information about assessment is provided within the Fostering Services Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards 2011, and there is additional specific Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Family and Friends Care.

Completing Form C thoroughly and carefully will mean that these regulatory requirements are met. Best practice requires that applicants are actively encouraged and supported to complete the Applicant's Report, and fostering services will need a policy setting out how the information gathered using the additional tools and resources will be presented to the fostering panel.

## Other legal contexts

Although Form C was not specifically designed for this purpose, there is no reason that it cannot usefully be used for the assessment of either adopters or foster carers for specific children. This could be in a number of different contexts, for example, where new or existing foster carers are being considered to foster a particular named child, or where approved adopters are being considered to foster a sibling of a child whom they have already adopted. In such cases, it will be for the assessor to ensure that their agency considers Form C to be a suitable tool, and that all of the statutory requirements are met. Where the applicants are being considered as permanent carers, it is essential that issues of permanency are addressed fully throughout the report.

## Viability assessments

In developing this form, careful consideration was given as to whether it could usefully be configured in a way that made it suitable for viability or preliminary assessment. In the end, it was decided not to do this, for a number of reasons. Viability assessments are not defined in regulations or guidance and in practice are completed very differently, often determined by the requirements of local courts. Some assessments are quite superficial, while others are very thorough. Given the variations in practice, it was not felt possible or helpful to cover viability within Form C, but if local authorities wish to use any part of Form C for this purpose, they are welcome to do so (subject to holding a licence for the form). As of August 2015, CoramBAAF is in discussion with various stakeholders about the wider issue of viability assessments, identifying what courts should require, and considering whether it would be helpful to produce a standard template for this work.

## RESEARCH EVIDENCE

While it is not the purpose of this guidance to look in any detail at the research evidence (see references and resources below for key texts), it is worth highlighting a few salient points that are essential for assessing social workers to understand. Most crucially, the broad findings from the research are that where children cannot live with parents, they do best across a range of measures if they can live with family and friends carers. Research also shows that these carers are often older, poorer and less healthy than unrelated foster carers, but this has no adverse impact on outcomes for the children they look after. This is not to say that support is unnecessary; on the contrary, the research suggests a number of areas where better support could contribute to better outcomes for children, including financial support, help with contact, and provision of therapeutic services for both the child and their carers.

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It is also important to know that issues such as quality of accommodation and early life experiences of the carer are not a good predictor of subsequent outcomes, and the only reliable predictor of the success or otherwise of a placement is the assessment of parenting capacity. It is crucial, therefore, that the assessment recognises this as the key aspect, and does not over-emphasise other aspects. It is also important that the assessment should focus on the applicant's ability to parent that particular child – not children generally – and this will need to be seen in the context of that child's known and likely future developmental needs, and the carer's existing relationship with that child.

## THE CONTEXT OF ASSESSMENT

Good practice in assessing family and friends carers involves recognising that the issues for them are not the same as they are for strangers being assessed to foster and adopt. There are a number of key points to consider when assessing this group of carers.

### Timing, process and motivation

Family and friends usually find themselves in a situation of being considered to foster or otherwise care for a relative or friend, rather than having actively sought to do this at a time of their choosing. This means that they will not have had time to consider the situation in depth, will often not have received much information about local authority assessment processes, and see themselves as stepping in to help a known child, rather than wanting to become part of a professional child care network. For assessors, it is therefore important to ensure that applicants are provided with good quality information and advice, and alerted to the existence of the various groups and organisations that might assist them. It also means taking the time to explain how an assessment takes place, and encouraging full participation in this process.

### Relationships with the child's network

Family and friends will also often, by definition, be looking after a child who is a relative or friend, and as such will be a member of this child's network that often includes their birth parents. The majority of family and friends carers are grandparents, and that means that a birth parent will be their son or daughter. While this can be seen as a positive factor in an application, it can also create some challenging dynamics, and assessors need to be mindful of this. A good assessment will need to explore this aspect in detail, being sensitive to the feelings involved, but also ensuring that the safety of the child is paramount. It should not be assumed that potential carers are best placed to manage any existing or proposed contact arrangements – sometimes they are, but sometimes they are not – and this will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It will also be necessary to look at whether a family group conference has been held, and whether this might be of value.

## Power dynamics

Family and friends can be seen as disadvantaged and disempowered when compared to potential stranger foster carers. They can only be considered by the one local authority that is involved with the child in question, and cannot decide to approach another local authority or independent fostering provider if they are not deemed suitable. Furthermore, some social workers may be tempted to see them as potentially unsuitable carers or parents because they come from the same “problematic” network as the child’s birth parents, and in the case of grandparents, having raised those birth parents. This creates a power dynamic in the relationship between assessor and applicant/s that needs to be acknowledged and worked with throughout the assessment.

## Support needs

The law requires that the local authority must give priority to family and friends carers, and in practice this means that the assessment should include a consideration of the support needs of an applicant, in order that they can effectively care for a child. This may relate to the fact that these carers have usually not planned for this new caring role, with the financial and other implications this brings. Additionally, we know that family and friends carers are often older and have poorer health, and have the additional issue of being a part of the child’s family network. All of these things might contribute to support needs – financial, practical and emotional.

Factors which may mean that a stranger is not suitable to foster might not mean that someone is unsuitable to look after a relative or friend, as any negative factors will need to be weighed against the benefits of the child remaining within their existing network or family. In this context, the assessment will need to consider what additional support might reasonably be provided to make the placement work.

## COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Simmonds (2011) suggests that all assessments, including those of family and friends, need to combine four elements:

- they need to be conducted in a spirit of enquiry;
- they need to be conducted in a spirit of partnership;
- they need to remain focused on the child and their needs and development;
- they need to be written with authority, be evidence-based, and include analysis of the evidence.

All of these elements are necessary in completing Form C, and the need to work collaboratively with applicants is worth highlighting. Good practice suggests that the social worker should discuss with the carers how they would feel most comfortable providing the information requested of them; this could include providing written evidence as well as having discussions with the social worker. However it is



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achieved, it is essential that the applicant's views and feelings are clearly set out within the report.

One of the tools provided with Form C is an Applicant's Report that allows carers and prospective carers to provide information in their own words. It is strongly recommended that assessing social workers encourage the use of these forms, and provide support to family and friends carers in completing them. For fostering, in particular, it can be hugely helpful to panel members and others if they can see the actual words of the applicant/s, as part of the paperwork submitted. However, use of this form does not in any way negate the need for the social worker to ensure that the views of the family and friends carer/s are represented, assessed and analysed throughout the assessment.

A good assessment will be one that is completed in a partnership between the assessor and the person or persons being assessed, and will fully involve others, including children, living in that household. While Form C is designed in a way that aims to help assessors remain focused on the key areas that are relevant, and tries to emphasise the importance of partnership, no format can ensure a collaborative working relationship – this is for the individual worker to achieve, with a shared commitment from the person being assessed.

Form C has been designed as a social work assessment, and – as with all social work assessments – there is an expectation that it does more than simply record factual information and set out the views of relevant persons. While this is important, social workers are additionally expected to help the applicant/s to reflect on and explore their position, and the report should include assessment and analysis rather than simply stating what others have said. There are a number of resources that can be used to assist social workers in undertaking assessments of this nature (see references and resources below), and the principles of good assessment apply whatever the nature of the assessment.

## References and resources

Adams P (2012) *Planning for Contact in Permanent Placements*, London: BAAF

Adams P (2015) *Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption*, London: BAAF

BAAF (2007) *Reducing the Risks of Environmental Tobacco Smoke for Looked After Children and their Carers*, Practice Note 51, London: BAAF

BAAF (2011) *Using the Internet in Fostering and Adoption Assessments*, Practice Note 55, London: BAAF

Beesley P (2015) *Making Good Assessments*, London: CoramBAAF

Betts B (2007) *A Marginalised Resource? Recruiting, assessing and supporting single carers*, London: BAAF

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Chapman R (2014) *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment*, London: BAAF

Cousins J (2010) *Pushing the Boundaries of Assessment: New techniques for preparing applicants and evidencing "suitability"*, London: BAAF

De Jong A and Donnelly S (2015) *Recruiting, Assessing and Supporting Lesbian and Gay Adopters*, London: BAAF

Department for Education (2011) *Family and Friends Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities*, London: DfE

Family Rights Group (2010) *Family and Friends Care: A guide to good practice for local authorities in England*, London: Family Rights Group

Farmer E and Moyers S (2008) *Kinship Care: Fostering effective family and friends placements*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Hunt J, Waterhouse S and Lutman E (2008) *Keeping them in the Family: Outcomes for children placed in kinship care through care proceedings*, London: BAAF

Hunt J and Waterhouse S (2012) 'Parental contact for children placed in kinship care through care proceedings', *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 22:1, pp 71–92

Mather M and Lehner K (2010) *Evaluating Obesity in Substitute Carers*, London: BAAF

Roth D, Aziz R, Lindley B and Ashley C (eds) (2012) *Understanding Family and Friends Care: Local authority policies – the good, the bad and the non-existent*, London: Family Rights Group

Roth D, Lindley B and Ashley C (2011) *Big Bruv, Little Sis*, London: Family Rights Group

Roth D, Tunnard J, Lindley B, De Gaye A and Ashley C (2011) *Managing Contact*, London: Family Rights Group

Selwyn J, Farmer E, Meakings S and Vaisey P (2013) *The Poor Relations? Children and informal kinship carers speak out*, Bristol: University of Bristol

Simmonds J (2011) *The Role of Special Guardianship: Best practice in permanency planning for children (England and Wales)*, London: BAAF

Sinclair I, Wilson K, and Gibbs I (2005) *Foster Placements: Why they succeed and why they fail*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

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Talbot C and Calder M (eds) (2006) *Assessment in Kinship Care*, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

Wade J, Dixon J and Richards A (2010) *Special Guardianship in Practice*, London: BAAF

Wade J, Sinclair I, Stuttard L and Simmonds J (2014), *Investigating Special Guardianship: Experiences, outcomes and challenges*, London: DfE

Wellard S (2011) *Too Old to Care? The experiences of older grandparents raising their grandchildren*, London: Grandparents Plus

Wellard S and Wheatley B (2010) *Family and Friends Care: 'What if we said no?'* London, Grandparents Plus

## Acknowledgements

In revising Form C, a number of local authority fostering services have kindly shared the formats that they use for assessing connected persons and family and friends carers, and others have provided very helpful feedback about their experiences using the original Form C. Practitioners and other stakeholders have also taken the time to consider and comment on this revised edition, and this has been much appreciated.

## NOTES

FRONT SHEET	
1	<b>Subject children.</b> "Subject children" refers to children who are being considered in court or for placement with the applicants. Other children in the household should not be included.
2	<b>Court details.</b> In this section, the social worker/s will need to provide details of the court that directed the report be written and the relevant dates. It is important to be clear about activity undertaken in producing it, and to include lists of documents that have been read and people who have been interviewed.
3	<b>Qualifications and experience of author.</b> The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 (23.6) require that any person 'involved in assessing the suitability of persons to be foster carers are social workers, have experience of foster care and family placement work and are trained in assessment. Social work students and social workers who do not have relevant experience only carry out assessments under the supervision of an appropriately experienced social worker, who takes responsibility for the

	<p>assessment.'</p> <p>Before beginning a fostering assessment using Form C, it should be established that the assessing social worker is suitably qualified, trained and experienced, and Chapman (2014) provides essential guidance for less experienced practitioners. Although not stated as a requirement for special guardianship assessments, there is no reason to think that it is appropriate for a less experienced or less competent social worker to be responsible for these assessments.</p>
4	<p><b>Genogram.</b> Genograms or family trees provide a readily accessible picture of the individuals who make up a family, and their relationships with each other. It is suggested that this is provided at the beginning of the form so that the reader can refer to this when reading the detailed information about the children and their extended family. Genograms can also be useful to an assessor in working with prospective carers, and as a tool for exploring family patterns and dynamics. For more information about constructing a family tree, with information about symbols to use and an exemplar, please see Chapman (2014) or <a href="http://www.baaf.org.uk/webfm_send/3548">www.baaf.org.uk/webfm_send/3548</a>.</p>
4	<p><b>Summary and recommendation.</b> The purpose of this section is to help the court or fostering panel to understand what is being proposed in the main body of the report so that they can begin reading with an idea of what will follow. This section should not include unnecessary detail, and in most circumstances should not exceed half a side of A4 paper.</p> <p>If the report relates to prospective foster carers, then the assessor should make a recommendation regarding terms of approval, and in most cases this will be for a named child or children. (If the applicant is being assessed more widely as a foster carer for related and unrelated children, then Form C is not an appropriate format and Form F should be used.)</p>

**SECTION A – THE CHILD**

1	<p><b>The child.</b> In some parts of the form, it is necessary to provide information about children individually. In other parts, the same information will apply to all children. The assessor is expected to use judgement about when the information needs to be child-specific, but efforts should be made to avoid or minimise repetition. It is also the responsibility of the assessor to set out the information so that it is clear, reads well, and is presented appropriately. If more than one child is being considered, then the assessing social worker will need to copy and paste text as required. Section A should only be completed in relation to children for whom the applicant/s are being assessed to care; it does not include birth children of the applicant/s or other existing household members. These children are considered elsewhere in the form.</p>
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2	<p><b>Ethnicity.</b> The Office for National Statistics provides a framework to standardise the identification of an individual's ethnic background. It is recommended that this framework is used as a starting point for identifying ethnicity, with more detailed information and discussion of this given in section A4.</p> <p><b>White</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British</li> <li>2. Irish</li> <li>3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller</li> <li>4. Any other White background, please describe</li> </ol> <p><b>Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. White and Black Caribbean</li> <li>6. White and Black African</li> <li>7. White and Asian</li> <li>8. Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe</li> </ol> <p><b>Asian/Asian British</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Indian</li> <li>10. Pakistani</li> <li>11. Bangladeshi</li> <li>12. Chinese</li> <li>13. Any other Asian background, please describe</li> </ol> <p><b>Black/African/Caribbean/Black British</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. African</li> <li>15. Caribbean</li> <li>16. Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe</li> </ol> <p><b>Other ethnic group</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Arab</li> <li>18. Any other ethnic group, please describe</li> </ol> <p>For further details, see: <a href="http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/ethnic-national-identity-religion/ethnic-group/index.html#8">www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/ethnic-national-identity-religion/ethnic-group/index.html#8</a></p>
3	<p><b>Family Group Conference.</b> For more information on family group conferences, see Family Rights Group (2010). Statutory guidance on family and friends care (Department for Education, 2011) sets out the benefits of family group conferences, particularly at an early stage of concerns about a child who may not be able to live with their birth parents.</p>
4	<p><b>Placement history.</b> This section should include any periods where the child was looked after by the local authority, with dates and details. If the child has</p>

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	spent any other periods not living with their birth parents, this section should provide a full chronology of the child's care since birth.
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<b>SECTION B – BIRTH FAMILY</b>	
1	<b>Section B.</b> Section B can be disregarded in its entirety for temporary approval and fostering assessments. It is only required for special guardianship assessments. However, the views of birth parents are important and are required in section D for temporary approval and fostering.
2	<b>Ethnicity.</b> See note A2 above. There is space for further details about ethnicity within section B1 under identity.
3	<b>Health.</b> Particularly where birth parents have no contact with their children, it is important to have as much medical information as possible as this information might be relevant to the child in terms of their own health. CoramBAAF publishes Form PH (Report on Health of Birth Parent) that may be appropriate to use in these circumstances.
4	<b>Contact.</b> In setting out contact plans, it is essential to justify the plans in the particulars of each case. Adams (2012) is a useful resource for social workers planning contact, and considers the purpose of contact, types of contact and issues to consider in assessing this.

<b>SECTION C – APPLICANTS</b>	
1	<b>Chronology.</b> In gathering personal and family details, it may be helpful for assessors to ask applicants to complete a chronology that covers key events in their lives, such as births or deaths of family members, major health events, divorce and separations, starts of new relationships, address moves, school changes and changes of employment. This can provide information that is pertinent to a number of areas in the assessment, including family history, relationship history, and education and employment. Chronologies should be in date order, starting with birth until the present day, and there should be no gaps or periods of time that are unaccounted for. A separate chronology should be completed for each applicant if they are a couple, and a format is provided for collecting this information (see additional tools and resources). Where a local authority prefers to have separate chronologies for addresses, education, and employment, they are welcome to amend the form accordingly.
2	<b>Sex.</b> Sex and gender are different. In section A, assessors are asked to enter the applicant's biological or legal sex; that which is stated on their passport or other legal documents. Gender is the category to which an individual is

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	assigned by self or others, on the basis of sex, and is socially and culturally determined. This should be considered, as appropriate, in section C2 under the heading of identity.
3	<b>Ethnicity.</b> See note A2 above. There is space for further details about ethnicity within section C2 under identity.
4	<b>Address.</b> If the applicant's address is not their permanent place of residence, provide details about this and explain how this is relevant to the fostering task. Also provide information about how checks have been undertaken if the applicant/s have more than one address.
5	<b>Children not living in the household.</b> If an applicant has had a child who died during childhood, they should be included in this section with the word "deceased" being added after describing their relationship to the applicant/s. This will need further discussion in sections C2 and/or C4.
6	<b>Adult children not living in the household.</b> If an applicant has had had a child who died during adulthood, they should be included in this section with the word "deceased" being added after describing their relationship to the applicant/s. This will need further discussion in sections C2 and/or C4.
7	<b>Description and personality.</b> Although required by regulations, this should not be a lengthy section in the report. Comments about the applicant's personality should be included based on their self-reporting, views of their partner if they have one, views of birth children where the applicant/s have children, and from the range of references and other information available. It will be important to check that a consistent picture is emerging from all these sources and to explore matters further if this is not the case.
8	<p><b>Identity.</b> In considering identity, the assessor should start with the applicant/s and consider how they define themselves in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and sexuality, amongst other areas. The implications of this can then be considered in relation to the caring role that is being proposed. Assessors of lesbian and gay applicants may wish to read de Jong and Donnelly (2015).</p> <p>Although this section relates to the identity of the applicants, it will also be appropriate to consider the relevance of this to their ability to meet the identity needs of the child or children for whom they wish to care. Statutory guidance requires that foster carers 'should ensure that full attention is paid to the individual child's gender, faith, ethnic origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and any disability they might have'. This is no less important for prospective special guardians.</p> <p>However, it is important to recognise that not all applicants will have a sophisticated understanding of these issues, but if they are being considered to care for a child from a different ethnicity or culture, then it will be important to know that they at least demonstrate a willingness to learn about other</p>

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	<p>cultures or issues as appropriate to the needs of that child.</p> <p>If the child is disabled, then the assessment will need to consider these aspects when looking at the prospective carer/s and identity. It is hoped that the applicant/s will be able to demonstrate that they have given proper consideration to the importance of advocacy, promoting rights and challenging discrimination, but if not they will need to be supported to develop this knowledge and ultimately implement a social model of disability.</p> <p>Where applicants display inflexible, judgemental or discriminatory thinking, this will need careful consideration in relation to how this might impact on the care of that particular child.</p>
9	<p><b>Family history.</b> Consideration of family history will entail looking at relationships with parents, siblings and other significant family members. In considering family history, social workers should consider the coherence, economy and specificity of the applicant's account, and the extent to which they continue to be preoccupied with the past, dismiss its significance or are confused or significantly uncertain about its meaning to them.</p> <p>In thinking about these issues, the assessor needs to be careful not to over-simplify the issues, and must be mindful that having a happy childhood is not in itself a good indicator of subsequent parenting ability. Prospective kinship carers will often have had difficult pasts, and the assessing social worker will need to come to a view about the extent to which the applicant/s has resolved past traumas or losses; shown the capacity to make and sustain close relationships; is able to empathise and understand other people's feelings; and is able to reflect on emotive matters.</p> <p>It is important to remember that family history is only important insofar as it links to how the applicant/s manages relationships in the present, and how this impacts on capacity to meet the needs of the particular child under consideration.</p>
10	<p><b>Education and employment.</b> This section asks about the applicant's education, but information about ability to meet the educational needs of a child is covered in section C4. In relation to employment, the regulations require both historical and current information. Although historical information can usually be provided quite succinctly, possibly referring to a chronology (see note C1 above), current information will need to focus on the implications of work for the caring role. It is important not to assume that working is incompatible with child care, but to carefully consider the issues in each individual case. It is not in a child's best interest to be living in a poverty-stricken household, and local authorities should consider whether they can provide appropriate support to allow potential carers to continue to work outside the home.</p>
11	<p><b>Previous relationships.</b> At the most basic level, it will be possible to complete this section by setting out factual information as provided by the applicant/s. The legal information can be verified by looking at documents</p>



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	<p>(see E1) and it would be helpful to ascertain the applicant's perspective on the nature of the relationship. Most thorough information will be obtained by undertaking an ex-partner check to go alongside other information (see E10). In deciding how far to go in considering previous relationships, the assessing social worker will need to consider their local authority policy, as well as the particular circumstances of the case.</p>
12	<p><b>Couple relationship.</b> In this section, it will be necessary to provide various factual details and these may be verified by looking at the relevant documents (see E1). The assessment of the stability and permanence of a couple's relationship should include the history of that relationship, how well it works, and the couple's commitment to it. It should explore what has tested the relationship, and how the partners support each other and meet each other's emotional needs.</p> <p>It will be necessary to consider how well the relationship works for both parties, to look at vulnerabilities, and to reflect with the applicant/s about the potential impact of caring for the child on their relationship. As a part of this discussion, the assessor should be thinking with the applicant/s about how caring for this child might impact on their current lifestyle; what might need to change, and how any changes will need to be managed. It is about trying to make sure that the applicant/s is as prepared as they can be, is realistic, and has a full understanding of the likely impact on them.</p> <p>In assessing a couple, it will be necessary to consider their approach to parenting, as it will be important that they have a shared understanding and an ability to work effectively together. If there has been any domestic violence in the relationship, this will need detailed and careful consideration.</p> <p>It is important to recognise that single applicants can make excellent carers, and not being in a relationship can bring advantages as well as disadvantages. More information is provided in Betts (2007).</p>
13	<p><b>Household.</b> This section asks the assessor to provide information about all other household members, adults and children, and their relationship with the child under consideration. It is helpful for the assessor to provide a brief pen picture of all household members, describing personality, ethnicity, and the current education or employment of each person. Everyone in the household should be interviewed as part of the assessment, and information from these interviews should usually be set out in this section. It is the relationship that these individuals have with each other and with the child that needs to be considered. In providing information about lifestyle, the assessor has the opportunity to provide a good picture of the family in day-to-day life, describing how a child does, or potentially might, experience living in the home.</p>
14	<p><b>Wider family and support network.</b> This section should include information about all other children (including adult children) and relevant family members who are not living in the household. For each of them, the assessor</p>

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	<p>should consider providing a brief pen picture describing personality, ethnicity, and their current education or employment. It is important to provide information about the relationship between wider family and the applicant/s, and also with the child under consideration. Where relationships are tense, difficult or non-existent, this will need careful analysis. Children living outside of the home should normally be interviewed as part of the assessment.</p> <p>The stresses of caring for children are well recognised, and the need for structured formal support is recognised in the legislative framework. However, in practice carers often feel the benefits of support from family and friends. In this section, the assessor is required to set out the supportive relationships that exist within the applicant's network, and provide information about the type and quality of support that might be available. This needs to be specific and cover practical situations that are likely to emerge.</p> <p>An ecomap might be a useful tool in this context, and is used to represent in a picture format the applicant/s, their immediate family and the connections that they have with others in their community. Ecomaps are drawn by placing the family household at the centre of the drawing and then enclosing this in a circle. Individuals then identify the people with whom they have relationships outside of the household, and this should include groups or organisations in the community that are of significance. Assessors need to be clear that although an ecomap might be included as evidence, it is primarily a tool to aid discussion and reflection, and is not an end in itself. For more information about constructing an ecomap, see Chapman (2014) or <a href="http://www.baaf.org.uk/webfm_send/3548">www.baaf.org.uk/webfm_send/3548</a>.</p>
15	<p><b>Experience of caring for children.</b> In this section, the assessor is asked to provide information about the applicant's experience of, and capacity for, caring for children. This may relate to birth children, children of friends or relatives, or children known in professional or other work capacities.</p> <p>Evidence in relation to foster carers (Sinclair <i>et al</i>, 2005) identifies positive outcomes for those who were caring, accepting, encouraging, and able to see things from the child's perspective. These carers were good at listening to and talking to children and young people, and made time to undertake activities with the child, including teaching life skills. Where foster carers were apathetic, rejecting or intolerant, this was associated with poor outcomes. It is likely that this is also true of parenting more generally, and so will be a good indicator of strengths in family and friends carers. The same research also suggests that successful outcomes are most likely where foster carers are able to effectively offer routine and structure, have clear expectations, set boundaries and manage behaviour.</p> <p>However, it is important to understand that in family and friends assessments the applicant/s is not being considered to foster a range of different children, but rather to foster, or otherwise care for, a particular child or children, who is usually related to them. This means that while the assessment can and must</p>

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	take account of parenting capacity more generally, what really matters is their ability to care for the child under consideration, in the present and future, until the child reaches the age of eighteen.
16	<b>Applicant's relationship with the child.</b> Family and friends assessments differ from assessments of other foster carers in that they are intended to assess suitability to care for one or more particular child or children, with whom the applicant/s already has a connection. In many cases they will know that child well, and it is the existing relationship with the child that is the main strength of the application.
17	<b>Ability to meet the needs of the child.</b> This is arguably the most crucial section of the form in that it asks about an ability to meet the needs of the particular child under consideration. These needs have been set out in section A. The research evidence is clear in that there are no links between outcomes for children and factors like the age, health, accommodation, or personal family history of the carer. What matters is parenting capacity, and an associated willingness and ability to meet the child's identified needs. In many cases it is relatively straightforward to show that the child's needs are being met in the present by the applicant/s, but it is also necessary to show that the applicant is likely to be able to meet their needs until the child reaches the age of eighteen.
18	<b>Contact and family relationships.</b> Although the research literature tends to conclude that, on balance, family and friends care tends to achieve more frequent and consistent contact than arrangements with stranger foster carers (Hunt <i>et al</i> , 2008), this is not without difficulty. Alongside the challenges that would accompany any sort of contact planning, for family and friends carers additional complexities arise because of the carer's existing relationships with birth parents, often as parents or siblings. Assessment in this area will need to consider the applicant's attitude to the birth parents and relevant others, and their ability to promote appropriate and beneficial contact while at the same time protecting the child from any identified risk. It should not, however, be assumed that contact should always be managed by family and friends carers, as this is an area where local authority support is often required, not least in some cases to protect carers from physical assault (see Wellard, 2011). This requirement for support around contact is set out in statutory guidance. Adams (2012, Chapter 7) sets out the issues for consideration in planning contact in kinship care, and may be of assistance to assessors.
19	<b>DBS check/criminal offences.</b> Where an applicant or member of their household is found to have committed an offence, the assessor should discuss this with the applicant/s, taking into account the nature of the offence, the effect on others, the penalty applied, the date of the offence, and the extent to which the offence might raise doubts about the safety and welfare of children who might be fostered. The assessor will also need to take account of the applicant's attitude to the offence now, and their honesty

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	<p>or otherwise in informing the fostering service provider. It is important to be aware that DBS checks will not cover any periods of living abroad.</p>
20	<p><b>Local authority check/previous applications to foster or adopt.</b> Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended) and Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 require that a check be undertaken with the applicant's home local authority. Good practice requires that in circumstances where the applicants have only lived in that local authority for a short period, a check should be undertaken with previous local authorities. It may also be appropriate for local authority checks to be undertaken with local authorities where an applicant has lived and jointly parented with a previous partner. It has further been suggested that local authority checks should be undertaken in respect of all previous addresses, including childhood. This would potentially reveal information about referrals relating to the applicant/s as a parent, or in relation to domestic violence, or reveal significant issues from the applicant's childhood if these had come to the attention of the local authority. Each local authority will need a policy setting out what local authority checks will be undertaken.</p> <p>It should be noted that under Regulation 26(1A)(c) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended), where an applicant has been a foster carer in the previous 12 months, and a written reference from their previous fostering service is obtained, there is no requirement to also interview personal referees.</p>
21	<p><b>Health.</b> For special guardianship and fostering assessments, a report is required from a health practitioner. Good practice requires that this report is provided by a fostering service medical adviser or an equivalent health professional with a good understanding of the demands of providing family-based care in this context. The medical adviser comments can be set out in this section, or alternately as a letter or report that is attached to the form. The assessor should ensure that the medical adviser's comments are provided in full, and they should not be summarised (except by that medical adviser) or interpreted.</p> <p>It is recognised that caring for family and friends children is challenging and demanding, and that this can have an adverse impact on foster carers' health. For example, we know that family and friends carers are older and have generally poorer health than unrelated foster carers. It is also the case that, like others in the population, they may, through lifestyle choices, smoke (BAAF, 2007), be overweight (Mather and Lehner, 2010), or consume alcohol above recommended levels.</p> <p>It is important that information about an applicant's health and lifestyle is carefully considered, and that assessors avoid being unfairly judgemental. Neither should too much weight be given to the health of applicants, as there is no research evidence to link the health of kinship carers with the outcomes for the children for whom they care (Hunt <i>et al</i>, 2008). However, health</p>

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	<p>issues may impact on an individual's ability to provide good care, and local authorities should consider what support might helpfully be provided in these circumstances. This might include providing information and advice to assist carers in taking good care of their own health, using health services appropriately and promoting a healthy lifestyle for the children in their care.</p>
22	<p><b>Home and neighbourhood.</b> Special guardianship and fostering regulations require a description of the applicant's accommodation, and this should be relevant to the fostering task. This will include information about the general condition of the home that for fostering must be 'adequately furnished and decorated [and] maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene throughout' (NMS 10.2), and able to 'comfortably accommodate all who live there' (NMS 10.1).</p> <p>Fostering standards require that in most circumstances, 'each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom' (NMS10.6), although there is scope for some bedroom sharing if this is in line with the child's wishes and is agreed by their social worker. Statutory guidance on family and friends care makes clear that requirements for accommodation should be interpreted more flexibly for family and friends foster carers and, even if not ideal, should be seen in the context of the holistic assessment, and balanced against other factors. For information about home safety checks, see note E6, and for information about assessing dogs and pets, see note E7.</p> <p>In most circumstances, descriptions of the neighbourhood and community will be brief, although more detailed information may be necessary if, for example, the area has a known gang presence, is known for racial intolerance, or is very rural. The assessor will need to use their judgement in this respect.</p>
23	<p><b>Income and expenditure.</b> This section requires brief information about income and expenditure/standard of living, to the extent that it is relevant to an application to become a special guardian or foster carer.</p>
24	<p><b>Personal references.</b> Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the assessor interviews at least two persons nominated by the prospective foster carers, and prepares a written report based on the information gathered (unless the applicant has been a foster carer within the previous 12 months and a reference has been provided).</p> <p>Good practice has led to most fostering services requiring at least one additional reference and many fostering services require more than that. It is common practice that referees are now asked to provide a written statement prior to being interviewed, and often local policies require one reference from a family member, and two from unrelated persons. Special guardianship regulations require three personal references.</p> <p>Personal references can provide hugely important information, coming as they do from people who usually know the applicant/s extremely well. Adult children are a rich source of evidence about parenting skills and it is good</p>

	<p>practice to interview them all if this is possible. Ideally, referees will have known the applicant/s for some time, and will be in a position to talk about their interaction with children and maybe even the child under consideration. Where a couple is applying, it is helpful if some of the referees know them as a couple, and are able to comment on their relationship.</p> <p>These are factors that need to be considered in deciding the most suitable referees, and the assessor should work closely with the applicant/s in deciding who should fulfil this role. Each fostering service should have their own policy in regard to undertaking personal references, and this should cover the issues of confidentiality and access to third party information.</p>
25	<p><b>Other checks and references.</b> These might include ex-partner checks (see note E10), employer or former employer checks (see notes E11 and E12), school, college or nursery checks (see note E13), or social media checks (see note E14).</p>

## SECTION D – TEMPORARY APPROVAL

1	<p><b>Decision.</b> As set out in the statutory guidance for family and friends care, local authorities will need to nominate an officer with authority to grant temporary approval of foster carers under regulation 24. Although this is not a regulatory requirement, the guidance suggests that it will usually be appropriate for the fostering service decision-maker to reserve this authority.</p>
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## SECTION D – SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

1	<p><b>Contact.</b> In this section, it is necessary to clearly set out the recommendations, but not to provide justification for these. The discussion and evidence to justify the plans should already be set out in detail in section B (see note B4).</p>
2	<p><b>Support services.</b> Special guardianship regulations set out the local authority duty to arrange support services, to assess, plan, monitor and evaluate these (Simmonds, 2011). The range of services available must include financial support, assistance with contact, therapeutic services and support groups, alongside counselling, advice and information. Where children are being looked after immediately prior to the making of a special guardianship order, their prospective special guardian is entitled to an assessment, and regulations require a process that is evidence-based, balanced, fair and transparent (Simmonds, 2011, p.60). Regulations also require that, following an assessment, the local authority must provide a written report, and where services will be offered, must produce a written plan.</p>

	<p>It is well recognised that children living with family and friends carers where the local authority is involved have similar needs to children in foster care and adoption. Support is needed for carers and parents in all of these contexts. In this section of Form C, the assessor might wish to provide the relevant detail of the plan, or alternatively attach a copy of the support plan. It is of course important that this section does not simply include what the assessor thinks might be helpful, but instead sets out what the local authority has agreed to provide. The plan as set out also needs to be specific to the individual applicant/s and child, and to the local area in which they live. For example, if a support group is offered it should be stated where and when this takes place, and should include relevant contact details for the organiser.</p>
3	<p><b>Applicant observations.</b> In the spirit of openness and partnership working, Form C includes a section for the applicant(s) to make corrections, comments and observations about the special guardianship report. It is a matter for individual local authorities to consider whether to present these views as part of their court report, but to do so will give a clear message about working openly and transparently with prospective carers, recognising the power imbalance in the relationship between the local authority assessor and the individual family and friend carer.</p>

**SECTION D – FOSTERING**

1	<p><b>Temporary approval information.</b> This section sets out the dates and details in relation to temporary approval where the child or children are already placed. This will allow the fostering panel and decision-maker to undertake a quality assurance role in terms of considering compliance with the regulations. Where timescales of 16 weeks are exceeded without a decision to extend, or where the 24 week timescale is exceeded, the placement becomes unlawful or unregulated. The fostering panel should note any failure to comply with regulations, and the local authority will have the opportunity to learn from practice in this regard.</p>
2	<p><b>Preparation, training and expectations.</b> In this section, the assessor will need to set out what formal training or preparation has been provided to the prospective family and friends foster carer/s, being clear if that was specific to kinship care, or was general foster carer preparation. Where prospective foster carers have attended a formal preparation group, then this section should set out the content of that training, and include feedback from the trainer about their experience of working with the applicant/s.</p> <p>It will also be necessary to explore the applicant's understanding of what is entailed in fostering. Are they clear about the role of the different professionals, including the child's social worker, supervising social worker and IRO, and do they understand that they will be expected to comply with the training requirements set out in legislation and local authority</p>

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	<p>procedures? It is important that this is all made clear at the outset so that disagreements do not occur at a later stage and so that the most effective legal context in which to look after the child can be determined. It is also important that local authority expectations of family and friends foster carers, as set out in their policies, are realistic, proportionate and helpful. For example, a grandparent who has always had contact with their grandchild and is their permanent carer should not be required to keep written records in exactly the same way that might be required for a child in a short-term placement with unrelated carers. Similarly, training requirements need to relate to the specific circumstances of that family and friends carer.</p>
3	<p><b>Support, training and development.</b> Although support to be made available for foster carers is to some extent determined by regulations and guidance, it is important to be clear about what will be available to this specific family and friends foster carer/s. The assessor can detail levels of social work support to the carer, any agreed respite provision, and any specific arrangements to assist with managing contact, depending on their particular requirements. It is also necessary to know what training and support groups will be available and whether these are generic for all foster carers, or specific to family and friends carers. Where the child under consideration has specific needs, then it would also be appropriate to describe services that will be available to them such as CAMHS, education support or other practical assistance.</p>
4	<p><b>Recommendation.</b> In making their recommendation, the assessor is required to have considered whether there should be any terms imposed on the applicant's approval. Where an assessment has been completed using Form C, this is because the applicant/s is being considered to care for a specific child, not as a foster carer who might be looking after a range of different children. It is therefore appropriate that where the assessor makes a recommendation that the applicant/s is suitable to foster, they should specifically state that this is in relation to a specific named child or children. If the applicant/s wishes to foster children other than those named in section A, then Form F is a more suitable assessment format.</p>
5	<p><b>Applicant observations.</b> In the spirit of openness and partnership working, Form C includes a section for the applicant/s to make corrections, comments and observations about the fostering report. Best practice will mean that the applicant/s has also completed the Applicant's Report (see tools and resources) and this will be attached to the assessment when the case is presented to the fostering panel.</p>

## SECTION E – INFORMATION CHECKLIST

1	<p><b>Verification.</b> When checking documents in this section, it is expected that the assessor is able to see the original documents rather than photocopies.</p>
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	With driving licences, this should include both parts where applicable.
2	<b>DBS.</b> See note C19.
3	<b>Local authority checks.</b> See note C20.
4	<b>Applications to foster, adopt or register as a childcare provider.</b> See note C20.
5	<b>Health.</b> See note C21
6	<p><b>Home safety check.</b> Local authorities will have their own formats or checklists for health and safety assessments of the home and should have their own policy about their use. In this section, the assessor is expected to state the date on which the form was completed and to confirm that the relevant information has been included in section C or attached to the report.</p> <p>Some local authorities may want the whole checklist to be attached to the report, while others will want a summary or final page, and others will not require any information other than what is set out in section C. This should be clearly set out in the local authority policy. Good practice requires that any health and safety checklist includes consideration of what to do in the event of a fire.</p>
7	<p><b>Dogs and pets.</b> The issue of pets and animals is not straightforward and needs to be considered both in relation to the safety of children placed, but also in terms of what the animal might offer to a child living with the family. Each fostering service should have a policy about undertaking questionnaires or assessments in relation to pets and animals, and CoramBAAF provide an assessment tool (see tools and resources) with detailed guidance and advice (Adams, 2015).</p>
8	<b>Household finance.</b> The local authority should have a format for undertaking financial assessments and a policy setting out the circumstances in which this should be used.
9	<b>Personal references.</b> If more than three references are undertaken, copy and paste text accordingly.
10	<b>Ex-partner checks.</b> Undertaking checks with ex-partners is now established as routine good practice in the context of fostering, especially where an applicant has jointly parented or cared for a child with a former partner. In these circumstances, ex-partners will be well placed to verify information provided by the applicant/s, or to provide further information about the applicant's parenting capacity. Where former partners have not jointly parented or cared for a child, but have been in a significant relationship, they may still be well placed to provide important information about the applicant/s.

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	<p>It is less common to undertake such checks in relation to special guardianship, although arguably the benefits in a fostering context apply equally to this legal order. Each local authority should have a policy setting out the requirement for ex-partner checks, for both fostering and special guardianship, and applicants should be informed of this at an early stage in the assessment.</p> <p>This policy should also cover circumstances in which it is deemed inappropriate to approach a former partner, for example, where domestic violence has been an issue. If the local authority decides against contacting any particular ex-partner who has jointly parented or cared for a child, then the reasons for this should be clearly recorded in this section, and consideration given to other ways of obtaining information about that particular period in time, and about the relationship itself.</p> <p>Any information obtained from former partners which raises concerns about an applicant's suitability to care for a child should always be considered in the context of how that relationship ended, and wherever possible should be checked against other sources.</p>
11	<p><b>Employer checks.</b> It is now routine practice in fostering to undertake employer checks and good practice suggests that all current employers should be contacted to confirm the information given by the applicant/s about their employment, and to gather evidence regarding their suitability to care for a family member or friend. Where applicants are involved in voluntary work, this should be considered in the same way as paid employment. The same arguments in favour of this can be equally applied to special guardianship assessments, although for all family and friend carers there may be sensitivities about sharing information that reveals problems in their own family. Each local authority should have a policy about requirements in relation to undertaking employer checks in relation to both fostering and special guardianship.</p>
12	<p><b>Former employer checks.</b> Good practice in fostering recognises that any previous employers should be contacted if an applicant was working with children or vulnerable adults to ensure that there were no safety or protection concerns, and to gather evidence regarding their suitability. Where applicants were involved in voluntary work with children or vulnerable adults, this should be considered in the same way as paid employment, and can provide valuable evidence about child care skills. Each local authority should have a policy about requirements in relation to undertaking previous employer, volunteering or student checks for both fostering and special guardianship assessments.</p>
13	<p><b>School, college and nursery.</b> Good practice in fostering routinely requires checks to be undertaken if the children of applicant/s are attending school, college or nursery. These checks should not focus on the achievements or otherwise of the particular children, but should attempt to gather information about how well the applicant/s supports the child in these settings, and how</p>

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	well they work with professionals in this context. This provides good evidence about an important aspect of caring for a child, but can be quite sensitive for special guardians who may have actively chosen not to pursue fostering in favour of a private law order. Each local authority will require a policy setting out requirements in this area.
14	<b>Social media check.</b> Fostering and adoption services are increasingly making checks using social networking websites and internet search engines and each local authority should have a policy in this regard, covering assessments of special guardians. For discussion of this issue, see BAAF (2011). In providing details under this section, the assessor should note which particular websites were checked.
15	<b>Other checks.</b> Other checks in this section might include overseas police checks when applicants have spent long periods living abroad, Protection of Children checks for applicants who have lived in Northern Ireland, or Disclosure checks for applicants who have lived in Scotland. Local authorities should have a policy about the checks they undertake in relation to applicants who have lived abroad that sets out how they will seek information regarding that period.

## ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

**Chronology.** See note C1.

**Dog and pet assessment forms.** These forms are held by your agency as common add-ons to all assessment forms, and should be used by assessors who are familiar with the guidance set out in Adams (2015). In considering individual dogs and pets, it is important in family and friends assessments to consider any particular circumstances relating to the child under consideration; what matters is in relation to that child, not children in general.

**Applicant's report.** As noted elsewhere, family and friends carers are disadvantaged in comparison to other foster carers in that they come into their caring role at a time not of their own choosing, and in relation to a specific child who is the responsibility of one local authority. This means that if they are deemed unsuitable to care for their family and friends member, there is no option to approach another local authority as someone might do if they wished to become a stranger foster carer. Furthermore, some assessing workers have attitudes towards family members that mean they consider them less suitable as carers than stranger foster carers. With all this in mind, Form C includes an Applicant Report that allows the prospective family and friends carer/s to set out issues in their own words. The form emphasises the need to identify support, and can be a valuable tool for panel members and others considering a social work report. It is strongly recommended that these reports are completed and attached to fostering assessments, and may also be attached to

# Connected Person/Family and Friends Report (Form C) England

special guardianship assessments.

**Second opinion report.** Second opinion visits are increasingly common in a fostering context, in circumstances where there are issues of concern identified by the assessor, where there is some doubt about whether to recommend the applicant/s as suitable, or where there have been difficulties in the working relationship between the assessor and applicant/s. This visit can be undertaken by another social worker in the team, an independent social worker, the supervisor, or the team manager. This report should not duplicate information that is already in the main assessment, but should focus on particular areas of contention or difficulty, and should set out the position of the second assessor on these matters. Where they support or contradict the views of the original assessor, the reasons for this should be clearly set out. It is important that the views of the different professionals are set out clearly and distinctly, and can be done using this form.

**Panel member notes.** This form is for use by fostering panel members when considering family and friend applications.