

## **Foster Carer Payment for Skills**

### **Scope**

This procedure details the payment for skills scheme which aims to ensure that children and young people are looked after by foster carers who have the experience, skills and training necessary to meet their needs. The main objectives of this procedure are:

- To provide clarity of criteria and process for the payment for skills for foster carers approved by Guernsey Children and Family Community Services (CFCS)
- To provide clarity to all relevant parties about the specific tasks, roles and requirements that are expected for each level of skill payment
- To ensure fairness and transparency when determining and reviewing levels

### **Relevant guidance**

Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, Standard 28

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers

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## 1. Introduction

The payment for skills scheme aims to ensure that children and young people are looked after by foster carers who have the experience, skills, and training necessary to meet their needs. We believe in ensuring that all our foster carers develop their skills on an on-going basis, so they are well equipped to perform the complex tasks that are required of them day to day in providing care. We strive for the highest standards and foster carers are rewarded for their skills through a system of having different payment levels. The personal and professional development of foster carers through their ongoing learning underpins the competences needed to offer the best possible care to children and young people.

The scheme provides a simple and equitable structure for making skill payments to foster carers. Foster carers will be paid a skill level payment if they are able to demonstrate they have the required skills and knowledge to foster and that they are committed to developing these through training, learning and development.

In addition to the payment of fostering allowance the Service employs a four level payment for skills model and, for specialist foster placements, a specialist foster care fee - see **Specialist Foster Placement Procedure**. The model underpins the Service's commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for fostered children and young people supported by skilled, motivated and rewarded foster carers. The model provides clear entry requirements and post approval expectations for each level including expectations regarding carer's ongoing learning and development and attendance at Support Group.

This scheme should encourage and incentivize all foster carers to become fully involved with the service, to keep abreast of changes and developments and to build confidence and knowledge, resulting in good outcomes for children and young people in our care.

## 2. Principles

The Service operates a payment system based on skill levels for newly approved and experienced carers. This scheme is applicable to carers who foster a child unknown/unrelated to them.

Specific roles and responsibilities are applicable to foster carers on levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 and progression through the levels is through set criteria. Fees are

payable per household and both carers will be required to meet the eligibility criteria to increase or maintain their fee level approval.

A carer will receive a skills payment, linked to their level of approval, whenever a child or young person is placed with them. Carers are provided with details of skill level payments and allowances on approval and thereafter on an annual basis.

The key principles underpinning the scheme are to:

- Recognise and reward carers for their skills and experience
- Ensure children and young people are not 'labelled' in order that increased payments will be made
- Ensure that specific tasks to be undertaken by the foster carer are identified
- Identify necessary resources and placement supports at an early stage
- Provide carers with the training and learning opportunities to help them develop their skills

One of the scheme's central principles is that the skills, experience, and training of foster carers are recognised and properly regarded. The scheme provides a clear pathway for foster carers to progress through the levels if they wish to do so. The foster carer review of approval provides the opportunity to assess the carer's performance against their current skill level and will provide evidence of whether the level remains appropriate.

Except in emergency placements the matching process should be used as part of placement planning. The social worker requesting the placement will identify the needs of the child and those tasks to be undertaken by the foster carer to support the implementation of the child's Care Plan. The supervising social worker will then aim to match those tasks with the skills required and link these with the different skills levels of the scheme wherever possible.

### **3. Progression**

Not all carers will wish to move to the higher levels as there are different expectations of foster carers at each level. There is a need for foster carers at all levels and the number of foster carers required at each level is determined by the Service. Progression through the higher levels of the scheme will be decided following an assessment against the skills expected of carers at those levels (see 4. Level Requirements).

Skills payments will be made whilst children are in placement and for the duration of placements. Payment will be initiated by the Finance Department following receipt of the Agency Decision Maker's decision regarding the applicant's suitability to foster. The Finance Department will be notified of any changes to skill levels to ensure that the carer receives the correct financial support. The foster carer's skill level will be held on the carer's record. The foster carer will be notified in writing about their skill level on approval and whenever the level changes.

All newly approved carers will receive level 1 skills payment and following approval applicants will be expected to complete the Training Support and Development Standards for foster care (TSDS) (see 5 Learning and Development) and to demonstrate their ability to meet the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (2011).

Progression to level 2 is set out below and will follow certification of completion of the Training, Support and Development Standards and induction training. The decision about approval at level 2 is made by the Family Placement Service Team Manager. The supervising social worker will sign off and present a completed Training, Development and Support Standards workbook for consideration by the Manager and the carer will provide evidence of having undertaken the necessary requirements for level 2 skills payment.

Progression to level 3 and 4 is dependent upon an assessment of the carer's current level of skill and competence. Carers will be expected to demonstrate their ability to meet the requirements at the new level. The supervising social worker will help carers plan how they will offer evidence of the skills required. The assessment is considered through the process of the annual foster carer review. However, to ensure that carers are not disadvantaged, applications to change carer skill level can also be considered outside of the review process. The decision about progression to level 3 and 4 is made by the Family Placement Service Team Manager.

An experienced foster carer moving to Guernsey from another agency may be considered for higher level status upon approval. Where carers have previously fostered and moved to Guernsey, CFCS will accept evidence of completion of the TSDS and of their training record from another Local Authority or Independent Fostering Agency. In addition, the carer will need to become familiar with the procedures of Guernsey Family Placement Service. Evidence

of further skills and experience must be submitted by both the carer and supervising social worker as part of the assessment or, subsequently through this process. The supervising social worker's recommendation will consider existing evidence in relation to the carer's skill, experience, and development together with feedback through previous review and fostering history.

A specialist foster carer providing a mainstream placement may be paid at level 4 skills payment if they are meeting all the requirements of that level.

In order to promote carer's continuing professional development, to ensure expectations are adhered to, for example with regard to recordkeeping for children in care and other expectations as specified and to guard against complacency (as an identified risk in a number of Serious Case Reviews) a carer's skill/fee level will be at risk if they fail to meet the level requirements due to their lack of commitment to their own training/development or due to their not meeting the requirements. In general, where foster carers do not meet skill/fee level requirements, they will move down one level. This also applies to specialist foster carers. Where the recommendation is that the foster carer has not maintained their level/fee status and there are no extenuating circumstances this should be presented to the Team Manager for a decision on the appropriate level of payment. Where there are extenuating circumstances, these can be presented to the Family Placement Service Team Manager and an Action Plan set out to address any shortfall. Any Action Plan will include a date for review.

An approved foster carer who is not satisfied with the Family Placement Service Team Manager's decision regarding their progression through the scheme has the right of representation. The carer should submit representation in writing within 14 days of the date of receipt of the decision. The Team Manager will arrange for a second opinion review of the decision by the Service Manager, Care Services. The Service Manager will make their decision about the carer's representation within 14 days from the date of receipt. If the Service Manager accepts the reasons for the disagreement an Action Plan will be developed. The foster carer will then receive a letter about the outcome.

All foster carers are reviewed annually, and the review includes information regarding attendance at training and recommendations regarding areas for further learning and development. The review will also highlight the need for any core or refresher training or updated mandatory training required. The

information provided for the foster carer review should provide sufficient evidence about the carer's skills, training and abilities for the period being reviewed.

#### **4. Level Requirements**

Levels are paid on an escalating scale from 1 to 4. There are requirements at each level which include the need for foster carers to attend training and to be able to evidence their learning on an ongoing basis. Evidence provided should illustrate how the foster carer has assimilated knowledge and shown good practice. Evidence will be gathered through a variety of means including the TSDS portfolio, Mosaic Carer Training Record, Personal Development Plan, Additional Evidence Record - Skill Progression, foster care review and supervisory visits. To progress to a higher level carers will need to provide evidence of meeting the requirements of that level. Foster care reviews will also provide a means for the Review Chair to review and comment on the Personal Development Plan and Safe Care Plan together with recommendations for any actions required. The Additional Evidence Record - Skill Progression should be used to evidence further learning/ development activity (Appendix I).

##### *Level 1 Carers*

New foster carers will be considered level 1 carers for at least the first year following approval. Prior to approval the carer will have undertaken the Skills to Foster foundation training in preparation for fostering. It is mandatory that all applicants, including joint applicants, will attend this training, which forms part of the fostering assessment. Following approval carers will participate in their induction and the formulation with their supervising social worker of their Personal Development Plan. This will specify the training they will attend which will include core and mandatory training as identified in the Family Placement Service and Reparative Care Team Learning and Development Calendar. If a two-partner household, each foster carer must evidence that the required training has been completed. Newly approved carers will be provided with the Guernsey Guide to the TSDS and a TSDS Workbook which will assist them in completing their TSDS within the first 18 months of approval. All carers are expected to evidence the TSDS. Following approval foster carers will be expected to demonstrate their ability to meet the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (2011) and evidence of their commitment to training and development through completion of core and mandatory training.

## *Level 2 Carers*

Approval at level 2 is achieved by the successful completion of induction training and the award of a Training Support and Development Standards Certificate on successful completion of the TSDS.

Approval at Level 2 can be achieved by foster carers meeting the following criteria:

- To be approved as a foster carer for a minimum of one year
- To have completed the Training Support and Development Standards in line with procedure
- To participate with their supervising social worker in the formulation of their Personal Development Plan and to evidence that the carer has undertaken the required training and engaged with the expectations of their Personal Development Plan according to their needs. If a two-partner household, each foster carer must evidence that they have met the requirements of the Personal Development Plan
- To be available for placements as agreed through their approval
- To maintain a high standard of care to children placed
- To attend all meetings and requirements of the fostering role
- To have completed and submitted Foster Care Recordings in accordance with procedure regarding the child in their care
- To have had a foster carer review with a positive recommendation for ongoing approval

The carer has responsibility to submit evidence that they have met the criteria, and this must be supported by the supervising social worker. The Family Placement Service Team Manager must endorse the recommendation. The level will be reviewed annually at the foster carer review with the carer continuing to evidence that they meet the requirements of the level.

## *Level 3 Carers*

Level 3 carers would be experienced foster carers who are able to evidence that they have the skills and experience to care for children and young people who may be difficult to place with less experienced or skilled foster carers due to the level of trauma they have experienced or the level of distress they present. Level 3 carers will have progressed through the foster carer level structure, having achieved level 2 and demonstrated the appropriate skills

including an ongoing commitment to undertake training and personal development. They will also be required to support the development of foster carers through a range of activities. A level 3 carer may decide to revert to level 2 at any time

Approval at level 3 can be achieved by foster carers meeting the following criteria:

- To have maintained the expectations of a level 2 carer for at least 2 years with a minimum of 3 years' experience as a foster carer

OR

- The foster carer has achieved NVQ3 or above equivalent in a health/social care/childcare/education discipline
- To participate with their supervising social worker in the formulation of their Personal Development Plan and to evidence that the carer has undertaken the required training and engaged with the expectations of their Personal Development Plan according to their needs. If a two-partner household, each foster carer must evidence that they have met the requirements of the Personal Development Plan
- To be available for placements as agreed through their approval
- To maintain a high standard of care to children placed
- To attend all meetings and requirements of the fostering role
- To have completed and submitted Foster Care Recordings in accordance with procedure regarding the child in their care
- To provide input to specialised/ therapeutic parenting strategies and direct work with children and young people with professional support and guidance
- To have had foster care reviews with positive recommendations for ongoing approval
- To have had positive placement feedback from children and placing social workers
- To participate in the recruitment of further foster carers at events and Skills to Foster preparation training if requested
- To participate in mentoring and buddying other less experienced foster carers if requested



### *Level 4 Carers*

Level 4 carers receive the highest fee because it is recognised that they have evidenced the ability to manage more challenging and distressed behaviours and support more demanding placement commitments. Level 4 carers would have significant formal childcare experience e.g. previous fostering minimum of 5 years' experience including children with complex needs OR employment in childcare or related experience e.g. childcare, youth work, teaching. An experienced foster carer moving to Guernsey from another agency may be considered for Level 4 status upon approval. The evidence must be provided, within the assessment, training history and portfolio, that Level 4 competence is apparent or projected. Carers may revert to a previous level at any time.

Approval at Level 4 can be achieved by foster carers meeting the following criteria:

- The carer has had a further two years of fostering experience since approval at Level 3

OR

- The foster carer has achieved NVQ3 or above equivalent in a health/social care/childcare/education discipline
- To adhere to the expectations of a level 3 carer **plus**
- To participate in the delivery of training to other foster carers and in facilitating Support Group if requested
- To be able and willing to care for children who present more challenging distressed behaviours and support more intensive placement commitments such as Parent and Child placements and long-term placements of older children who have experienced significant trauma
- To be able and willing to go the extra mile for children and young people regardless of challenges
- To be available to care for a child at any time e.g. should they be excluded from school
- To be able to evidence the carers' continued use of reflective skills for their own and their family's development, and to work with other carers/applicants to assist their understanding and development in this area

- To be able to manage sensitively a range of overt and persistently challenging behaviour
- To be able to work closely with Social Work intervention to help facilitate a return home and/or work to move a child on to independence as appropriate to the young person's needs and to be able to provide support for at least the first month where a child returns home or moves to independence
- To provide input to specialised/ therapeutic parenting strategies and to implement these during direct work with children and to work in close partnership with therapists, education and other professionals as identified
- To support and assist the Service in promoting a positive fostering profile including involvement in foster carer recruitment initiatives if requested

## **5. Learning and Development**

The Family Placement Service and Reparative Care Team Learning Calendar details training events and support groups for carers and signposts carers to online training and other resources. There is an expectation that foster carers will participate in ongoing learning and development to enhance their skills and ability to care for children and that they will satisfy the requirements of this scheme. All foster carers are expected to discuss their training needs with their supervising social worker as part of their Personal Development Plan and to attend core and mandatory training.

Each carer is required to undertake the requirements of the level in terms of their learning and development as set out in section 4 of this procedure. Training can take a variety of forms including attending events, e-learning, self-learning, and home learning. Learning outcomes must be evidenced for consideration of progression through the levels.

All foster carers are required to complete the Training Support and Development Standards for foster care. The TSDS are a national minimum benchmark that set out what all foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 18 months of approval. They are designed to ensure that all foster carers receive relevant induction, training, support and continuing professional development. Completion of the TSDS is a requirement for all approved foster carers in England and is referenced within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. Completion is also a

requirement in Guernsey. Carers will be supported to complete the Standards with a Guide and Workbook. Completion of the TSDS is a joint responsibility in households where carers are dually approved but one workbook can be completed per fostering household

## Appendix I

### FAMILY PLACEMENT SERVICE

#### **ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE RECORD - SKILL PROGRESSION**

**Section A** – to be completed by foster carer(s) – please attach any supporting evidence

Name(s) of foster carer(s):

Current Skill Level

Application for

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

Level 4

Please specify, date and briefly describe the learning and/or development activity you have undertaken (for example, learning event, facilitating support group, research, mentoring, facilitating training, involvement in recruitment etc.).

Please describe the way in which this activity has contributed to your learning or development as a foster carer. (i.e. what have you learned that enhances your knowledge as a foster carer/in what way has this experience/activity enabled you to develop your skills?)

Signature:

(Foster carer)

Signature:

(Foster carer)

Date:

**Section B** – to be completed by supervising social worker

Name of supervising social worker

Please set out how the requirements for the skill level have been met using the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011 (Child Focussed Standards 1-12) and the 5 Domains of the Secure Base Model

Areas for development:

Assessment regarding level and recommendation regarding whether the carer(s) meet the requirement:

Signature:

(Supervising social worker)

Date:

**Section C** – to be completed by Team Manager

Decision – Agreed/ Not Agreed

Reason

Comments (if applicable)

Signature:

Name of Team Manager

Date: