



Department
for Education

Fostering Innovation Fund

**Application Guidance for Regional Care
Co-operatives and End-to-End Fostering
Hubs**

May 2026

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Background

The Department for Education is launching a competitive bidding process to support new and existing Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) and End-to-End Fostering Hubs to test innovative and new fostering models and to expand existing innovative fostering models to expand and enhance their fostering offer to better meet the needs of children in care. This document provides guidance to inform your application.

The number of foster carers in England has been steadily decreasing since 2021, which is reducing the number of loving homes available for children and young people who need foster care. The government is committed to ensuring every child who needs care has the warmth, stability and belonging of a home where they have loving care. The government has pledged to deliver 10,000 additional foster places by April 2029, supporting children who in care to grow up in loving, safe and stable homes.

The Fostering Innovation Fund sits within the wider reforms to foster care outlined in the government's action plan available on gov.uk and titled "Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children". [Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children - GOV.UK](#).

Across the country local authorities (LAs) and partners are already breaking new ground developing approaches to foster care to better meet the demands of modern life. We want to encourage more innovation and support LAs and other relevant organisations to test new approaches, learn what works and scale up those with strong evidence of impact. To support this, we are inviting applications for an innovation programme supported by a minimum of £12.4m investment over the next two financial years (inclusive of evaluation costs).

All LAs within an RCC or End-to-End Fostering Hub are strongly advised to work together to develop a common understanding of regional challenges, including through engagement with IFAs and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSE) drawing on any relevant international models, before applying for a programme to meet those needs. RCCs and End-to-End Fostering Hubs can apply for more than one programme but must submit one application form per programme.

In deciding which programme(s) to submit pay close attention to the Innovation Fund outcomes outlined on page 5.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for Regional Care Co-operatives and End-to-End Fostering hubs.

Innovation Fund objectives

Through this programme we want to test different models of foster care that push the boundaries of how we do things now to achieve better results for children. We want to better understand what models will improve outcomes for children through ensuring the right approach for a child depending on their circumstances and needs.

The Fostering Innovation Fund is a programme that will support new and existing innovative initiatives to set-up and/or scale over the financial years 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028. £12.4 million of funding is available with a maximum £6.2 million in both financial years. The total investment includes funding for programme specific evaluations run by the Department. All programmes are expected to engage fully with any evaluation activity. More details can be found in the evaluation section.

The overarching aim of the Fostering Innovation Fund is to invest in innovative or promising innovative foster care models to develop evidence based best practice across England. With an improved understanding of best practice, promising models can be scaled to allow innovation to be adopted into the mainstream and we can strengthen the evidence base to develop improved practical guidance for the sector. Funding decisions will be based on outcomes that address some of the most critical issues facing the fostering system.

The government is expanding the rollout of RCCs and End-to- End Fostering Hubs across England. This marks an important step in realising our ambition to meet children's needs through a stronger, more integrated regional care model. The Innovation Fund aligns with the move to further regionalisation and will build evidence on how interventions perform within RCC and Hub environments. The delivery of programmes through these regional structures will allow applicants to benefit from economies of scale, shared expertise and to gather learning from testing programmes in different areas.

Innovation Fund outcomes

The Fostering Innovation Fund sits among a wider suite of reforms to the fostering system. We are seeking applications for programmes working to achieve one or more of the following outcomes which align with key issues facing the fostering system:

- Increased number and diversity of foster carers, particularly from under-represented age groups
- More children moving from residential care into foster care where this is in their best interests
- Reduction and prevention of placement breakdown
- Speeding up the process of foster carer approvals without lowering standards

We invite applications for funding seeking to achieve one or more of the four outcomes. As part of the application process applicants will be required to demonstrate how they will monitor and report progress and impact to enable the programme to demonstrate how it will achieve the outcome(s). Annex A provides an illustrative example of the short, medium and long-term outcomes you may be able to monitor for your proposed programme.

Funding is available for a variety of programmes that can support the achievement of the specified outcomes. Design should reflect local and regional needs. Funding will be awarded on the overall quality of the bid against set weighted criteria.

In scope – illustrative list:

- Foster care recruitment (for example, targeted recruitment efforts)
- Foster carer retention (i.e. peer mentoring, respite care arrangements, embedding evidence-based practice models to improve support and training for foster carers)
- Placement stability (wraparound support, helping carers and children manage difficult emotions and behaviour, multi-disciplinary teams, respite and crisis prevention)
- Specialist models (adolescents, sibling groups, parent & child, complex needs, remand/resettlement)
- Strategic data improvement work or improving the matching process
- Workforce & practice (reflective practice, training on adolescents, neurodiversity, exploitation, mental health)
- Therapeutic support to improve placement stability
- Co-design & lived experience (structured involvement of children, young people, and carers)
- Well evidenced models from other countries: examples of evidence-based interventions from Foundations' guidebook include:
 - Treatment Foster Care Oregon for Adolescents (TFCO-A)
 - Treatment Foster Care Oregon Prevention (TFCO-P)
 - Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported (KEEP)
 - Fostering Healthy Futures for Preteens (FHF-P)

Evidence base

Innovation programmes need to be delivered via the RCC or End-to-End Fostering Hubs and not by an individual LA or a partner organisation working with the RCC or hub. Regional delivery provides greater reach, economies of scale, access to specialist provision, more robust evidence on scalability, alignment with wider reforms, and reduced delivery risk. We will also support bids for new, innovative practice, that may be smaller scale initially but can be tested for scalability.

Programmes will be expected to meet the same criteria, with existing programmes expected to set out any previous delivery history and new programmes expected to explain how they will mitigate any set-up challenges.

We invite bids for programmes at different stages of development:

- **Interventions with an established evidence base.** These can draw on UK or international studies, or your own insight and evaluation work. Examples of evidence-based interventions can be found in Foundations online guidebook,¹ and Foster Care Practice Guide available on the Foundations website here: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/foster-care>.² For these programmes, Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) or Quasi-Experimental Design (QED) evaluations may have been undertaken elsewhere, for example in another country. Applications are welcome to draw on other evidence, such as peer reviewed journal articles, internal research and evaluation and research from elsewhere in the sector.
- **Interventions that have no or a limited existing evidence base, but which use evidence-based elements or principles.** These include those identified in the Fostering Practice Guide published by Foundations, which found that training on positive child behaviour support, consistent foster carer-child interactions, relationship enhancement and carer child interactions, relationship enhancement and carer self-care skills, as well as multi-level approaches and support networks models produced positive outcomes. Applications may draw on internal evidence, evaluations of interventions or peer reviewed journal articles. Alternatively, a programmes evaluation may have been conducted, involving a range of evidence such as qualitative interviews, surveys and administrative data analysis.

¹ The Foundations guidebook can be accessed online: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/guidebook/>. Some examples of promising interventions from the guidebook include the Treatment Foster Care Oregon Prevention (TFCO-P), Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported (KEEP) and Fostering Healthy Futures for Preteens programmes.

² Some examples of promising interventions from the Foster Care Practice Guide include Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Fostering Changes, KEEP, KEEP SAFE, Generation Parent Management Training Oregon (PMTO). This can be accessed online here: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/foster-care>.

- **Open innovation** – new programmes or interventions already happening but have no or limited existing evidence, or entirely new approaches where we require a theory of change.

What kinds of programmes are eligible?

Both existing and new programmes are eligible. Applications for funding of existing programmes will need to demonstrate their existing evidence base and that the programme is being scaled beyond current delivery activity.

Applications for new programmes will need to demonstrate the underpinning recognised theory and a strong theory of change.

- Existing programmes: to build on existing innovative practice, funding will be available for programmes already being delivered, where applicants can demonstrate a promising evidence base and scalability.
- New programmes: funding will be available to support the delivery of innovation programmes, where applicants can demonstrate that their proposal is underpinned by recognised theory and a strong theory of change.

Evaluation

All Innovation Fund funded programmes will be required to engage with monitoring, learning and evaluation activity, including the provision of regular management information to the Department.

In addition, the Department expects to select a smaller subset of successful programmes to participate in an enhanced evaluation activity, where programmes are sufficiently delivery and evaluation ready. For these programmes, the Department (working with independent evaluators) may commission a pilot impact or impact evaluation designed to generate robust evidence of outcomes and impact within the available timeframe.

Impact evaluation approaches may include quasi-experimental or comparison-group designs, or other appropriate evaluation models, selected based on feasibility of robust evaluation, data readiness and delivery scale. Participation in the enhanced evaluation layer would involve closer engagement with evaluators, additional data collection, and support for agreed evaluation requirements.

Inclusion in the enhanced evaluation activity will be determined by the Department. Applicants are invited to indicate their appetite for enhanced evaluation in the Innovation Fund application form. Selection will be made by the Department based on assessment of evaluation readiness and feasibility, and therefore not all willing programmes will necessarily be selected.

We recommend being mindful of the resource requirements needed to engage with evaluation and monitoring data when providing your programme costs. As a guide, dependant on the scope and scale of the successful programmes we would anticipate roughly one FTE spending one day a month to engage with core evaluation activity and two days for programmes engaging in enhanced activity. This will be reviewed during the programme.

Eligibility

RCCs and End-to-End Fostering Hubs – both existing and those who, at the time of fund launch, have applied to become an RCC³ or End-to-End Fostering Hub⁴. The application process for both programmes commenced on 26 March 2026 and closes at midday 22 May 2026. Only those who have been successful in their applications to become a RCC or Hub will be awarded funding.

Local authorities (LAs) within an RCC and/or End-to-End Fostering Hub are strongly advised to work closely together to develop an understanding of the challenges in their region before applying.

In all instances bids must be led by RCCs or Hubs, with an LA who is a member of the RCC or hub as the lead bidder. We encourage applications from End-to-End Fostering Hubs and RCCs working in partnership with other organisations. We know there are already great examples of innovation in fostering in both the public and private sector and would encourage applications delivered in consortium. For these bids, bidders must demonstrate how their RCC or Hub will lead the programme and add significant value. We are not looking for bids from RCCs and Hubs who will pass funding to a third party with limited involvement or value add on their part.

Whilst we encourage applications to be submitted by Hub's Lead LA, the application form can be submitted by any LA within a End-to-End Fostering Hub on behalf of the Hub. The application must be on behalf of the Hub and agreed via the hub's governance structures.

Innovation programmes do not have to be delivered across the entirety of the Hub however we expect programmes to demonstrate a regional footprint and if necessary, form groups where it makes sense operationally, where members have not been included, we ask bids to explain why this is the case.

For applications submitted by an RCC we require the lead or proposed lead local authority will apply on behalf of the RCC.

RCCs and End-to-End Fostering Hubs may apply for funding for more than one programme. A separate application form should be submitted per programme.

External organisations can be part of multiple applications.

We require all Innovation programme bids to run for a minimum of twelve months. No shorter bids will be accepted.

³ [Apply to set up a regional care cooperative - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme: new hubs application guide](#)

Funding

A total of £12.4m (inclusive of DfE evaluation costs) is available in total – £6.2m in Financial Year 2026 to 2027 and £6.2m in Financial Year 2027 to 2028. The level of funding provided will depend on the funding needs of the programme and scale. There is no minimum or upper limit for grant awards and programmes will not be assessed on the amount they bid for. However, we do not anticipate awarding a single application more than £500,000 to £750,000 per year in funding, inclusive of any costs associated with engaging with evaluation. We anticipate funding between 8 and 12 programmes in total.

The Department for Education will only fund the amount specified on your bid application form. We will not provide further grant funding for any additional unforeseen costs incurred. However, you may use additional funding sources alongside your grant to complete your programme. You must ensure there is no conflict using other funding sources against this grant.

Funding distribution

Funding will be distributed by Section 14 of the Education Act 2002, these are ringfenced grants, paid in arrears to the lead applicant for the programmes. The Department for Education can at any time withhold payment if funded activities haven't been carried out as outlined in your delivery plans.

Payment will be made on a quarterly basis on receipt of proof of spend. Grant Recipients will be required to comply with the standard Terms and Conditions in a Section 14 Grant. These can be found here: [Terms and conditions for DfE grant funding agreements from 1 April 2024](#)

As part of the approach to governance, we will be clear to recipients through grant conditions that beyond initial set-up costs, payments are conditional on programme performance and engagement with evaluation activities. We want to work closely with you during the set-up stage, working together and sharing lessons across programmes.

Where a Hub is submitting a bid for a joint programme with an external organisation, the RCC or End-to-End Fostering Hub must be the lead applicant. External organisations can be part of multiple Hub partnerships/applications however when assessing bids, capacity and delivery planning will be assessed.

Scope of funding

Funding will not be given to programmes for activities which are funded as part of the prescribed RCC's and Hub's existing activity. Funding will not be granted for activity for which the RCC and Hub has or is due to receive funding for, nor for staffing already funded for assigned activity.

The End-to-End Fostering Hub programme booklet has more information and is available on gov.uk⁵.

The Fostering Innovation Fund is programme funding and as a result would not cover capital costs. Guidance on cost classification for government can be found in the “Government Financial Reporting Manual 2024 to 2025” on the gov.uk website⁶.

The following is an illustrative list of activities we anticipate providing funding for. This list is not exhaustive.

Expected costs (not exhaustive):

- Staffing costs
- Training costs
- New programme set-up costs
- Costs associated with scaling an existing programme
- Equipment and resources
- Direct support schemes and or initiatives for foster families
- Digital systems and data improvement costs where they do not meet the criteria for creation of a capital asset. For example: short-term or time-limited solutions, cloud based or SaaS services, licences or access arrangements without ownership or control of an underlying asset, configuration, data, or service costs that do not result in a new or enhanced asset.

Out of scope:

- Delivery of activity due to be funded through RCC, hub end-to-end and hub sustainability funding
- Day-to-day operational costs for an RCC or End-to-End Fostering Hub
- Costs associated with programmes that are actively receiving funding from UK government
- Costs associated with the delivery of any programme outside of what is bid for
- Costs for existing programmes which are already in receipt of secured funding for Financial Year 2026 to 2027
- Capital programmes: Capital includes money spent creating new assets or enhancing existing assets, such as buildings or equipment, for either the department or recipients of our funding. This funding is programme funding and cannot be provided for capital programmes.
- Increasing foster carer fees and allowances

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c407bdb66ff902f45441d9/Fostering_Recruitment_and_Retention_Programme_end-to-end_programme_booklet.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-financial-reporting-manual-2024-25>

Timelines

The bid round will be open from **14 May** and will close on **11 June**. We will accept applications up until **23:59** on this date.

Programmes should be operational in 2026. We anticipate the set-up period will take a maximum of 3 months from the signing of your grant agreement. If you anticipate needing longer you should provide justification for this in your application.

The delivery timeline provided in your application form should allow enough time for factors such as consulting on the programme proposal and getting necessary internal approvals to proceed.

Key dates and deadlines for the application process are set out in the table below.

Milestones	Dates
Bid round opens	14 May
Clarification window	14 May to 4 June 12pm New End-to-End Fostering Hubs and RCC application closes midday 22 nd May
Assessment of applications	Mid June to July 2026
Anticipated decisions on applications announced	July 2026
Grant letters sent and signed	July 2026
Programme delivery/ set up begins	August 2026
First section 14 grant payment claim period	October 2026
Evaluation activity to commence	September 2026
Evaluation activity <i>may</i> conclude after the Innovation funding period	-

Application assessment process

Applications will be evaluated via the following process:

Stage 1 – Receipt and Eligibility

All applications must be received by **11 June 23:59**. No extensions will be granted, and late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

All sections are mandatory and must be completed for your application to be accepted.

Stage 2 – Evaluation of Bids

The assessment panel will evaluate each application against the Department's set requirements. The headings included within this section are listed below.

Each question and section has been allocated a weighting to indicate its relative importance to the subject of the application round.

Applicants will be scored between 0-5 using the scoring methodology set out below.

Applicants must gain a score of 3 or higher for each question to be a passing bid. Applications scoring a 2 or less on any question will be disqualified from the process and will not be eligible for consideration of funding.

The apportioned weightings for each of the sections are outlined below:

The table below provides a high-level overview of the questions and information required, for the specific questions and guidance please refer to the application form.

Question No.	Focus	Question weighting
Section 1 – contact details and context This section is designed to gather contact information as well as information to understand the contextual information and reach behind your application.	Part A: Applicant details Part B: Contextual information Part C: Number of children and/or young people your programme aims to support Part D: Evidence base Part E: Evaluation Part F: Outcomes	N/A – not assessed

Section 2 – Programme Model - - - - - -	Question 1: Proposed programme model Describe your proposed model, including its aims, objectives, and key activities, and explain how it will achieve the intended outcomes.	30%
	Question 2: Delivery model Explain how the programme will be delivered, including the roles of delivery partners and how children and young people and strategic partners will be involved. Attachments permitted – limited to two A4 pages.	20%
	Question 3: Governance and resource plan Set out the programme’s governance arrangements and how it will be resourced and managed. Attachments permitted – limited to two A4 pages.	10%
	Question 4: Delivery plan Provide a delivery plan outlining key milestones, timescales, risks, and mitigations. Attachments permitted -limited to up to three A4	20%
	Question 5: Progress monitoring and data collection Provide baseline evidence of local need, expected numerical outcomes, and details of how progress and impact will be monitored and reported, including a completed Theory of Change using the government template. Attachments permitted – two A4 pages maximum.	10%
	Question 6: Financial monitoring and assurance	10%
Combined Total	-	100%

Section 3 – Costings	High level breakdown of costs required A costings template should be returned with your application. We expect all successful programmes to demonstrate value for money and provide evidence of cost certainty. Programme costs should be within an appropriate cost range for the types of activities proposed.	Not assessed
Section 4	Declaration	Not assessed

Scoring scale:

Responses to the questions set out within the criteria above will be evaluated on a scale of zero to five, as set out below:

Excellent assessment score

Question score: 5

Scoring rational:

- The response demonstrates that the Bidder has a thorough understanding of the question and the relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements.
- The response demonstrates that the Bidder can meet the relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements in full and to a high standard with evidence of how this will be done.
- The Bidder has addressed the question criteria in full and has robust, comprehensive plans, processes and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity and there are no omissions or concerns.
- The response provides a high degree of confidence in the Bidder's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity.
- The Bidder's response also exceeds the requirements in some areas and/or introduces innovation which should bring added value / benefit to the Department/ Services/ Sector.

Good assessment score

Question score: 4

Scoring rational:

- The response demonstrates that the Bidder has a good understanding of the question and relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements.
- The response demonstrates that the Bidder can meet the relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements in full, with supporting evidence of how this will be done.
- The Bidder has addressed the question criteria and has clear plans, processes, and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity, and any omissions or concerns are very minor.
- The response provides confidence in the Bidder's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity.

Acceptable assessment score

Question score: 3

Scoring rationale:

- The response demonstrates that the Bidder has general understanding of the question and relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements.
- The response addresses most of the question criteria and demonstrates the Bidder should meet the relevant Statement of Outcome requirements and any omissions and / or lack of evidence are not significant.
- Any omissions in the Tenderer's response and plans, processes, and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity are not significant.
- The response provides adequate confidence in the Bidder's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity.

Minor reservations assessment score

Question score 2

Scoring rationale:

- The response demonstrates that there are omissions in the Bidder's understanding of the question and /or relevant Statement of Outcomes requirements.
- The response does not address some of the question criteria and omissions or lack of evidence in the response raises doubts about Bidder's ability to meet the relevant Statement of Outcome requirements.
- There are some material concerns/omissions in relation to the Bidder's plans, processes, and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity.
- The response provides a limited amount of confidence in the Bidder's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity to a satisfactory standard.

Serious reservations – major concerns assessment score

Question score: 1

Scoring rationale:

- The response demonstrates that there are omissions in the Bidder's understanding of the question and /or relevant Statement of Outcome requirements.
- The response does not address some of the question criteria and omissions or lack of evidence in the response raises doubts about Bidder's ability to meet the relevant Statement of Outcome requirements.
- There are some material concerns/omissions in relation to the Bidder's plans, processes, and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity.
- The response provides a limited amount of confidence in the Bidder's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity to a satisfactory standard.

Unacceptable assessment score

Question score: 0

Scoring rationale:

- The response does not meet the requirement for the question and/or relevant Statement of Outcome requirements and/or the Bidder has not answered the question and/or the response fails to meet the relevant Statement of Outcome requirements.
- The response does not comply or there is insufficient evidence in relation to the Bidder's plans, processes, and resources to deliver the relevant Grant activity.
- The response provides no confidence in the Tenderer's ability to deliver the relevant Grant activity.

The score awarded for each question/section will be multiplied by the weighting to arrive at a weighted score for that question. The weighted scores will then be added together to give a total weighted score. Final scores will be worked to one decimal place as show in the example below.

Section	Question No.	Question weighting	Score received	Weighted contribution against overall total
1	All	N/A - Not Assessed	N/A - Not Assessed	N/A - Not Assessed
2	1	30%	3	18%
2	2	20%	4	16%
2	3	10%	5	10%

2	4	20%	3	12%
2	5	10%	3	6%
2	6	10%	4	8%
3 - Costings	1	N/A - Not Assessed	N/A - Not Assessed	N/A - Not Assessed
Total	-	100%	22	70%

Stage 3 – Moderation and Priority Scoring

To determine the final selection of successful applicants, the assessment panel will convene for a moderation meeting(s) chaired by commercial colleagues. The individual scores of each assessor will be reviewed and the panel will come to an agreed single consensus score and consensus feedback for each application, which will form the basis of the final outcome.

We anticipate between eight to twelve of the highest applicants will be awarded.

Where the number of applications scoring 3s and above for every question exceeds the total amount of funding available, funding will be prioritised to the highest scoring bidders, working from the top scorer downwards.

This means a bidder will not automatically receive funding, even if they score higher than a 3 in all questions.

In the event that the Department does not have the budget remaining to fund the next highest scoring bid, the amount awarded to that RCC and/or End-to-End Fostering Hub may be less than the total value applied for. DfE reserves the right to negotiate the final grant amount awarded. Where this cannot be agreed between bidder and Department, the Department reserves the right to not fund this bid and either a) move to the next highest scoring bid or b) fund no additional bids.

The Department is not obligated to use its budget in its entirety and with reference to the allocation process above, can choose not to award the full amount of budget even where there are affordable bids that have passed the criteria remaining.

Tie-break

In the event of a tie, the Department reserves the right to prioritise applications firstly based on the distribution of programmes at different stages of development as outlined in the evidence section of this guidance and secondly, based on the distribution of programmes between the four prescribed outcomes to ensure that at least one

programme is funded in each. Should this not create a separation, the Department will fund to the lowest cost programme first, followed by the next lowest cost until either a) no funding is available or b) until the Department chooses to fund no further bids.

Stage 4 – Issue Outcome Letters

Successful and unsuccessful letters will be issued to each bidder by the end of July. The named lead LA contact from each application will be notified of the outcome.

In the event of an unsuccessful bid the Department will not accept requests to re-evaluate bids.

Stage 5 – Grant Award

Section 14 Grant determination letters will be drafted by the Department following HM Treasury approval.

RCC or LA programme teams must prioritise the completion and return of all annexes required for the grant offer letter(s). RCC and LA programme teams must also sign and return the Department for Education (DfE) grant offer letter(s) promptly and within 10 working days to ensure timely programme setup and progress.

Completing your application

A limit on the number of words is stated for each section in the text box provided, any text that exceeds the stated limit will not be assessed. Please include the total number of words for each section at the bottom of each text box.

Further information on what is expected in each section of the form has been provided to support you in completing your application. Please make sure you refer to these prompts throughout to ensure you have addressed the questions fully.

RCCs and End-to-End Fostering Hubs may apply for funding for more than one programme. A separate application form should be submitted per programme.

Annexes can be submitted where indicated in the application form (e.g. diagrams or data spreadsheets) – the length of each annex is also marked in the application form. We will use the content included in the application form as the basis for your assessment, with any additional documents acting as supplement information.

All applications should be countersigned by the Director of Children’s Services.

Clarification Process

To receive clarification question answers you **must** email fostering.programme@education.gov.uk with the subject heading “Fostering Innovation Fund: Clarification log registration”. Both lead bidders and any organisations who are interested in working in partnership to deliver a programme can register to receive the answers and can submit clarification questions.

Bidders may seek clarification about any aspect of the application process, documentation or requirements that have been asked of them. You can do this by sending your clarification question, clearly marked to fostering.programme@education.gov.uk up until the clarification deadline of **12pm on Thursday 4 June**.

All questions will be anonymised and shared, along with an answer, to all parties who have registered an interest as above. The Department aims to respond to all questions within 5 working days.

If you feel a clarification question should remain private, please indicate this in your email. The Department will review your question and if we are in agreement, a response to the question will be shared with you privately. If not, an opportunity will be provided to reframe your clarification so that it can be anonymised or for the clarification to be withdrawn.

During the EOI Bid window, the Department will not enter directly into conversations with bidders about their bids outside of this Clarification Process.

Annex A

Exact delivery milestones and outputs will depend on the programmes funded. Examples include:

Long-term outcome	Short-term outcomes (0–12 months after set-up)	Medium-term outcomes (12–24 months after set-up)
<p>Increased number and diversity of foster carers, particularly from under-represented age groups (e.g., young carers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased enquiries from target groups (e.g., younger adults) • Improved digital engagement (click-throughs, registrations, completed “expression of interest” forms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of potential carers progressing to assessment • Improved conversion rate from enquiry to initial visit/assessment and approval • Reduced drop-out rate during application stages
<p>More children stepped down from residential care into foster care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of specialist step down training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of children receiving step-down interventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of children stepping down from residential care • Improved placement stability in first 6 months post-step-down
<p>Reduction and prevention of placement breakdown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of early-intervention or support services • Reduced unplanned placement disruptions in the first 3–6 months of a placement • Improved matching processes (e.g., suitability of placements) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in unplanned endings year-on-year • Improved wellbeing indicators for children (school attendance, SDQ scores, reported satisfaction, CANS scores, foster carer/child reports) • Increased length of placement without disruption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased foster carer retention

<p>Speeding up the process of foster carer approvals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced average time between enquiry to initial screening • Reduction in time taken to complete mandatory checks (DBS, medicals, references) • Improved efficiency of assessment steps (digital forms, scheduling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced total approval timeline (e.g., average days from enquiry → approval - specific targets TBC) • Increased proportion of cases completed within statutory or internal target timelines (specific timeline target TBC)
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Department
for Education

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