

UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

STATEMENT ON SUPPORTING BABY FRIENDLY ASSESSMENTS IN THE RECOVERY PERIOD OF THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

March 2022

This statement provides an update on previously communicated information related to the carrying out of Baby Friendly assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Background

Prior to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, most Baby Friendly assessments were carried out via an in-person visit by an assessment team to the relevant service or university. The exceptions to this included Stage 1 and Gold assessments which involved a review of documentation and conversations with senior staff and, for some, follow-up assessment telephone interviews with mothers. This process worked well.

At the start of the pandemic, on-site visits became impossible and work was carried out to plan and offer remote assessments. Tools such as Microsoft Teams were used to interview staff and students, with mother interviews continuing by phone. Whilst this has helped us over the peak of the crisis and has enabled services to continue on their Baby Friendly journey, we recognise that there are situations where an in-person visit would provide a more comprehensive picture upon which to form a decision.

As we enter into the recovery stages of the pandemic, our attention is focused on how Baby Friendly can move forwards with assessments. Like so many innovations implemented by services across the UK over the past two years, some of what we have done has proven to work well, whereas in other situations it would be helpful to return to on-site assessments in order to gain a more detailed picture of a service and provide valuable opportunities for in-depth discussions between the assessors and Baby Friendly leads/senior staff.

Rationale

At the time of writing this document, no decision about a potential date for return to on-site assessments has been made. However, reviewing the assessment process enables us to consider the relevant factors with the following aims:

- Enable the assessment process to effectively consider each aspect of the Baby Friendly standards, including the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (the Code) and how these are applied within the service/university
- Review the process for each assessment type, considering what works well remotely and where improvements could be made by a return to on-site visits
- Plan a return to on-site visits in a timely manner in line with Covid-19 guidance and where a face-to-face visit would be of benefit to the service

- Consider the aspects that would make on-site visits possible, both from an internal and external perspective, e.g. to ensure it is possible in relation to visiting restrictions and is in line with local/devolved Government requirements
- Ensure flexibility of assessment timing to enable services to recover effectively
- Create a fair and transparent pathway to assessment for all services/universities.

Assessments

Planning meetings

Planning meetings enable a Baby Friendly assessor to meet with a group of staff to deliver a presentation and facilitate a bespoke planning session. These work well when conducted remotely, as they enable the Baby Friendly assessor to flexibly meet with a variety of staff who may have restricted time. Sessions can also be facilitated with staff who are sat together or separately via different Microsoft Teams meeting invitations.

These will continue to be facilitated remotely.

Stage 1 assessments

Stage 1 assessments have always worked well when conducted remotely. The Baby Friendly assessor reviews paperwork submitted online and discusses any queries and the outcome with the Baby Friendly lead by phone or video call.

These will continue to be facilitated remotely.

Stage 2 assessments

Stage 2 assessments have proven effective when conducted remotely, with staff, university students, managers and lecturers having been satisfactorily interviewed via video call throughout the pandemic. It has proven possible to carry out interviews, observe practical skills and review relevant paperwork and training records online. Staff and students have been able to attend from any venue, saving travel time and expense where relevant.

These will continue to be facilitated remotely.

Stage 3 assessments

Stage 3 assessments conducted remotely have enabled effective review of paperwork and observation of the service (e.g. notice boards, 'welcome to breastfeed' signs, etc.) via photographs. Mother and manager interviews have also been able to be conducted effectively via phone or video call. However, this assessment of care has its limitations, and a broader review of the environment, service culture and observation of activity has not been possible. These are important aspects of a Stage 3 assessment which enable the team to gain a broader understanding of how care is delivered. On-site assessments for Stage 3 also enable more in-depth discussion between the assessment team and key staff.

On-site Stage 3 assessments will resume as soon as this is feasible.

Re-assessments

Re-assessments are, in effect, a combination of Stage 2 and Stage 3 assessments and will therefore involve interviews with staff, managers, mothers and a review of paperwork and the overall environment. This relates to re-assessments of relatively

recently accredited services or repeat re-assessments in which Baby Friendly care is well-established. Depending on when the re-assessment is due, it is possible that the previous assessment was carried out on-site or remotely. This presents a range of different circumstances and therefore different plans for re-assessment are required:

First re-assessment

An **on-site** re-assessment will be required:

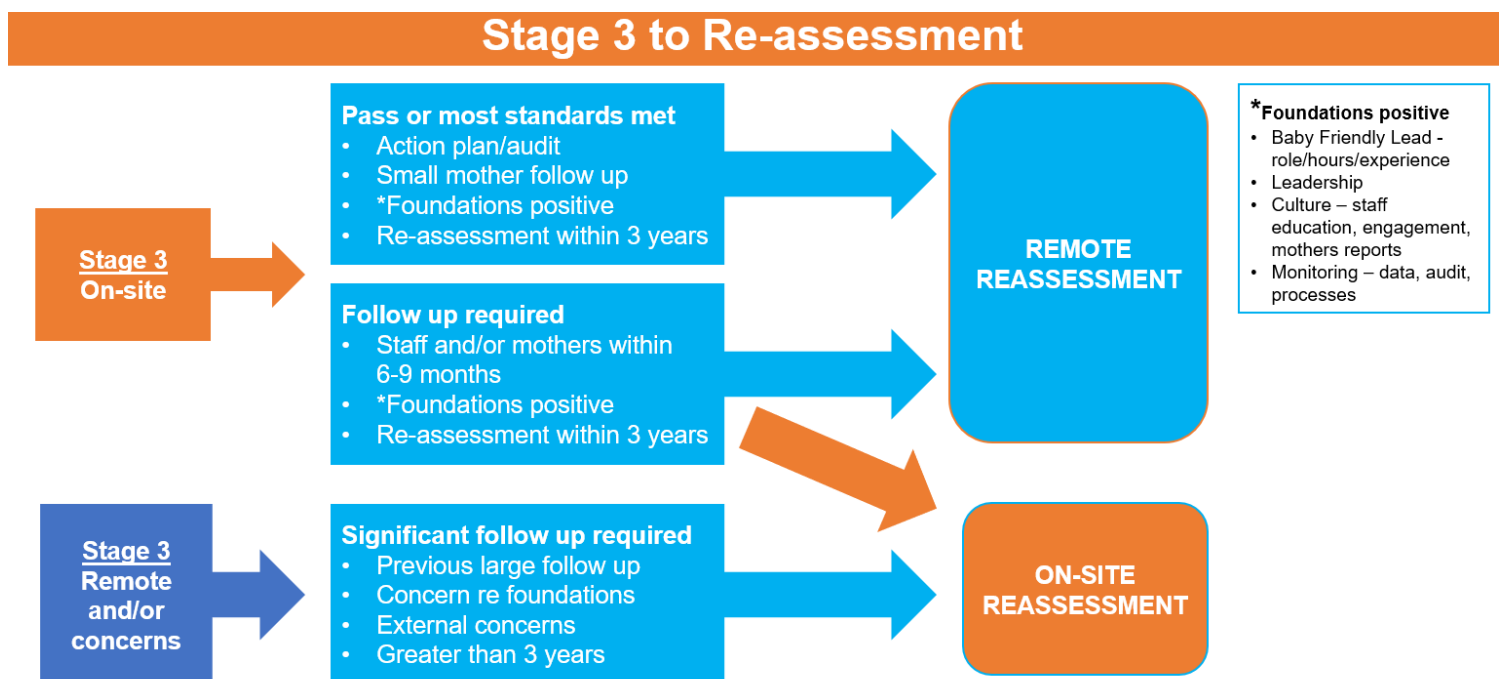
- Following a remote Stage 3 assessment
- When the Stage 3 outcome was not largely positive
- Where concerns regarding the strength of the foundations* have been raised by the Stage 3 assessment team
- Where there are external concerns, such as poor media or poor CQC reports
- When a significant period of time has lapsed since the Stage 3 assessment.

In addition, an **on-site** assessment can be requested by the service if it is felt this will be the better option to suit individual circumstances.

A **remote** re-assessment is possible:

- Following an on-site Stage 3 assessment with a broadly positive outcome
- When the foundations are positive*
- When the re-assessment is due to take place within three years of Stage 3.

See flow chart 1 below



Subsequent re-assessments

An **on-site** re-assessment will be required:

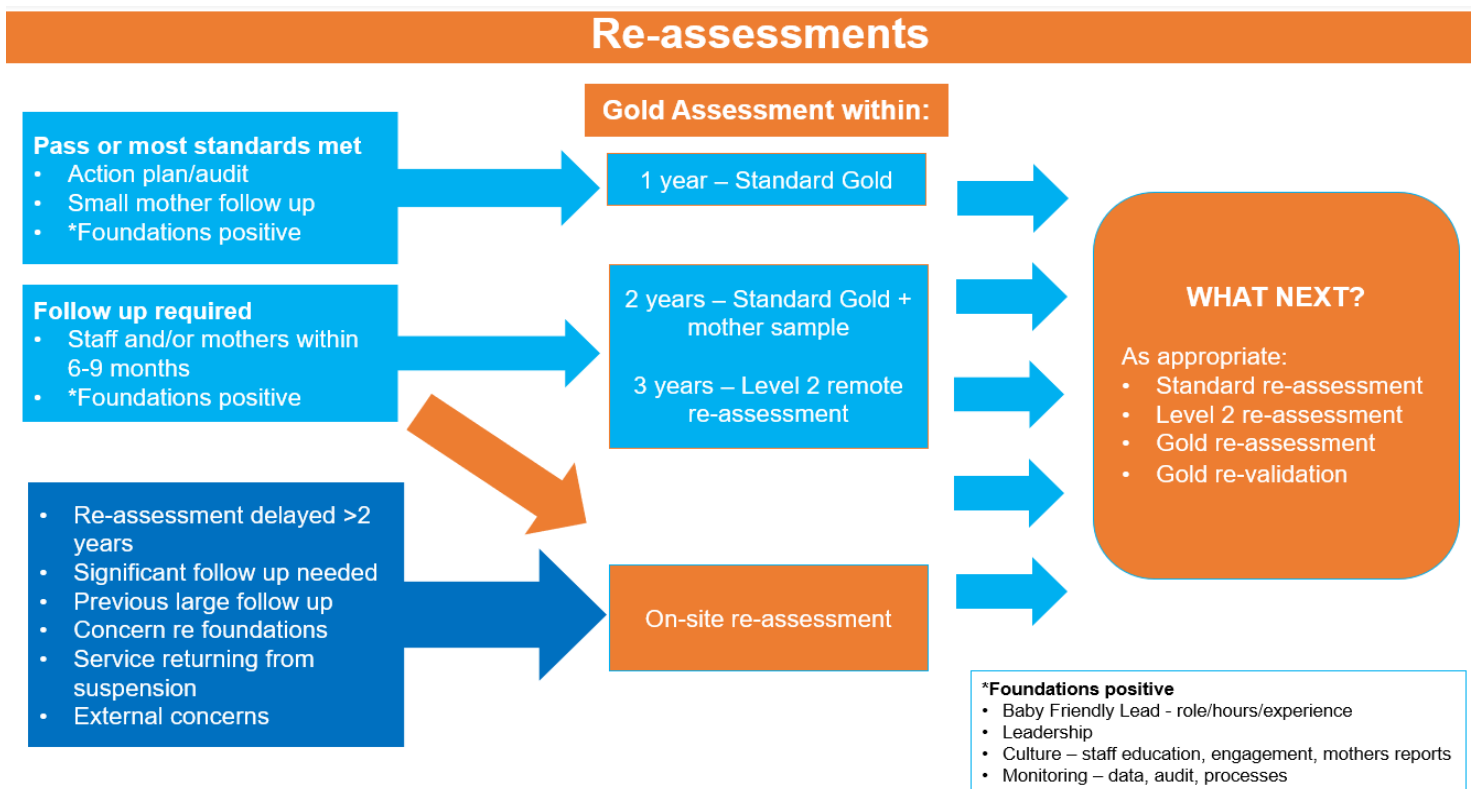
- When the last re-assessment was not largely positive
- Where concerns regarding the strength of the foundations* have been raised by the last assessment team
- Where there are external concerns such as poor media or poor CQC reports
- When the service is returning following suspension
- When a significant time has lapsed since the last re-assessment.

In addition, an **on-site** assessment can be requested by the service if it is felt this will be the better option to suit individual circumstances.

A **remote** re-assessment is possible:

- Following a previous on-site or remote re-assessment with a broadly positive outcome
- When the foundations are positive*
- When the re-assessment is due to take place within four years of the previous re-assessment.

See flow chart 2 below



Gold assessments

Gold assessments have always worked well when conducted remotely. The Baby Friendly assessor reviews paperwork submitted online and interviews with relevant senior staff are carried out by phone or video call, with mothers interviewed by phone if needed. The assessor discusses any queries with the Baby Friendly lead by phone and provides feedback via video call.

Gold assessments will therefore continue to be facilitated remotely. In some circumstances where an on-site assessment has not happened for a significant number of years, an individual decision may be made with the service to carry out an on-site visit.

University assessments

In line with the plans described above, Stage 1, Stage 2, re-assessments and Gold assessments for universities will continue to be carried out remotely.

Contact us

There is a high demand for assessment bookings and requests for dates in 2022. Therefore, if you anticipate that your service will be ready for an assessment this year, we suggest that you consider making a booking, particularly if you are looking to arrange an on-site assessment. As usual, it will be possible to re-schedule without charge with three months' notice.

If you have any queries about planning your next assessment please contact the Baby Friendly office at bfi@unicef.org.uk