

User guide

For agency staff involved in
adoption

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Link Maker Systems

support@linkmaker.co.uk

www.linkmaker.co.uk

0800 368 8549



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Practice tips – family-finding for children	4
Practice tips – working with families	5
Questions about access.....	6
The Link Maker process.....	6
Registering for a Link Maker account.....	9
About your homepage	9
Adding a child/sibling group adoption profile.....	10
Inviting an adopter to join Link Maker.....	10
Adding an adopter profile	11
Accessing cases.....	11
Managing a case.....	12
Managing a child profile	13
Managing a family profile.....	13
Searching, bookmarking and showing interest in adopter profiles	14
Searching, bookmarking and showing interest in child profiles.....	15
Using the ‘Interest & discussions’ page.....	16
Managing incoming expressions of interest.....	17
Indicating that a case is progressing to panel.....	17
Indicating a match has been made	18
Creating and managing agency groups.....	18
Generating reports.....	19
Deleting a child profile.....	20
Deleting a family profile.....	20
Managing your alert settings and receiving new profile alerts.....	21
Managing account settings	21
Using the Q&A boards	22
Finding further help	22

Introduction

Link Maker increases placement choice for children awaiting adoption, creates a UK-wide pool of available adopters, and improves the use of data and collaboration between local authorities and independent adoption agencies.

This user guide is aimed at practitioners involved in adoption. It gives a quick overview of the features Link Maker provides, and offers some suggestions for how it might support your placement practice.

As a practitioner, depending on the nature of your organisation, you can use Link Maker to create and manage adoption cases for both children and families. Link Maker provides a safe and secure environment to search child and family profiles, show interest in potential placements, start discussions and send documents.

Link Maker provides new profile alerts which detail any new profiles that have been made available to you and your families. You can connect your account to a family case and work in tandem with adopters to identify possible matches.

The features discussed within this user guide are the full family finding features of Link Maker and as such might not be available to you if your agency does not have a full license. To find out more about getting Link Maker's full features, or to arrange a free trial, please [contact us](#).

For further help and support, view contact us via our [contact page](#), or call our support team on 0800 368 8549.

Please note that all names or images shown in this user guide are purely fictional and are used for training purposes only. Any resemblance to actual persons, is purely coincidental.

Practice tips – family-finding for children

Link Maker is designed to help you find a suitable number of appropriate families who are interested in each child. With too little interest you may struggle to find a good enough match, and with too much interest you create unnecessary work for yourself, and emotional stress for many waiting families. The suggestions below should help you to consider a successful strategy from the outset.

Controlling interest

The key here is to make a profile available only to families you may want to consider. If you know that initially you only want to hear from families in a certain area, or who can meet certain needs, or who do, or do not, already have children (for example), make sure this is reflected in the profile availability setting. Use the 'compatible families' figures on this page as a guide to the most appropriate start point.

Avoiding delay

Once a profile is listed on Link Maker, most of the response is likely to come within hours. Therefore, leaving a profile with no response for days or weeks will cause unnecessary delay. Quickly change the availability setting to widen the area of your search, or to remove restrictions on the families that can see it. Use an automatic schedule from the outset to make this happen automatically, avoiding drift.

Approaching families – be proactive!

As a prospective adopter, there is a difference between seeing a child profile in a list, and being approached by a social worker for that child because they feel you could be a good match. 'Exchange days' are valuable for this reason, and Link Maker gives family-finders the ability to proactively approach families anywhere, anytime, on behalf of children. Around a quarter of matches made through Link Maker are identified by social workers showing interest in families in this way, and this strategy finds matches for proportionally more children who might typically wait longer.

When viewing families for a specific child, the first few pages of results should include the families of most interest, and interest can be shown in dozens of families if appropriate. There are no limits – you could approach hundreds of prospective families if this is what it takes to find a suitable match, and you have the tools to make this a practical option.

Practice tips – working with families

Do talk to each of your families about how you plan to use Link Maker together – all adopters are different. Make sure you understand each other's expectations, to avoid any frustration and misunderstanding. We suggest covering the following topics:

The profile

Review the adopter's profile together - is it a good representation of them? You have the advantage of seeing other families' profiles, and can help make sure your families cover all of their strengths in theirs.

Showing interest

Are you happy for your adopters to show interest in profiles themselves, or will you do this on their behalf? Do you expect them to inform you before they show interest? How many expressions of interest do you feel it is appropriate for them to have at one time (up to the limit of 5 on Link Maker)? There is no 'one-size-fits-all' with any of these questions, and the 'right' answer might change over time... keep talking.

Contacting children's social workers

Make sure that your adopters know your agency's preference – you may be happy for them to have direct contact, but will most likely prefer to have a discussion yourself first. Children's social workers will have their own views - some will be glad to talk directly to adopters, while others will only want to talk to you. Link Maker encourages adopters to make sure the right people are in touch, but to only discuss a child if they know that both practitioners are comfortable with this.

Chasing for updates

Once a discussion is underway, weeks or even months can go by before updates are received. There can be a lot of complex issues holding things up; medical assessments, legal processes, ongoing discussions with other families. It is reasonable that adopters should be kept in the loop, and they may seek your advice on how soon and how often to ask for an update, and whether you or they should do this.

Questions about access

Why can't adopters see more children?

Adopters do not see all children on Link Maker. Family-finders carefully decide which adopters should see each profile for two main reasons:

- a. To prevent a large number of adopters hoping for a match with the same child, when all but one family will be disappointed. The matching process is difficult enough, and the more often hopes are raised and dashed, the harder it is for adopters.
- b. To ensure they can properly consider the adopters who show interest and respond to them in a considerate way. There are only so many adopter profiles a family-finder can, or needs to, consider in order to move towards an appropriate match.

Doesn't this limit choice for children?

No, family-finders can always search all adopters based on anything in their profiles, according to what they think is important for the child. They may approach any number of adopters of their choice, regardless of whether the child's profile is advertised.

Doesn't this cause delay for children?

There is no reason that profiling a child cautiously at first should cause delay. Adopters typically show interest quickly when a profile is made available, and if enough potential links have not been found then the search can be widened instantly.

What determines which adopters can see a child profile?

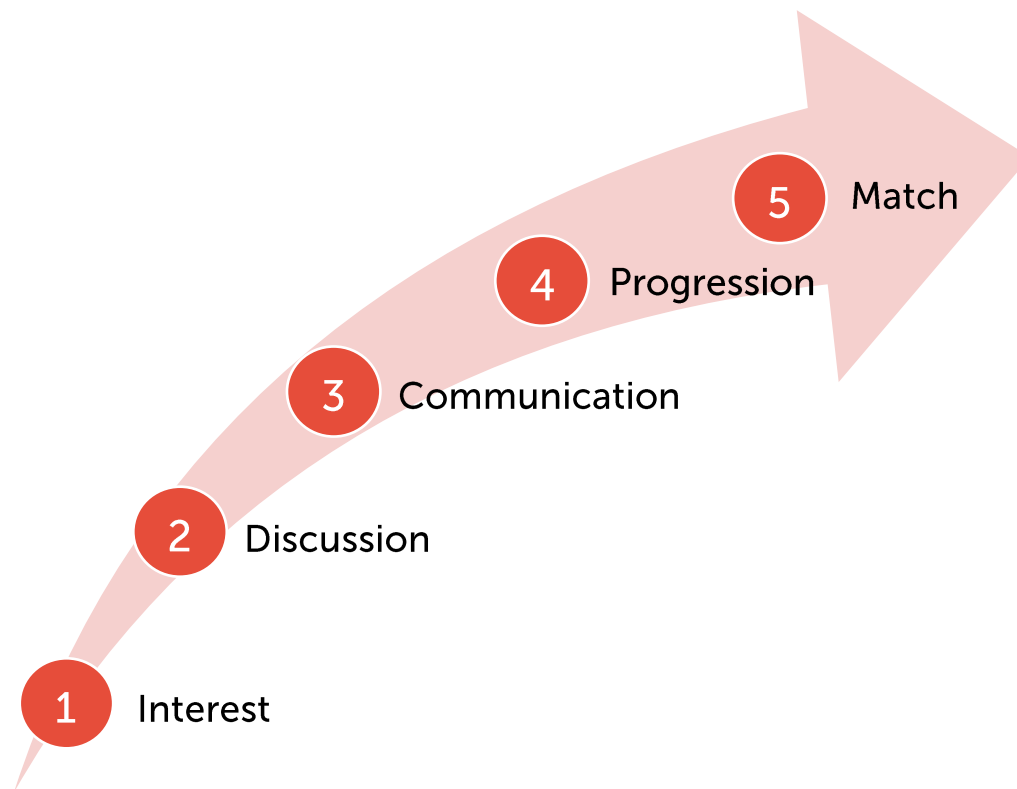
This depends on what a child's social worker thinks is most important for the child. Family finders avoid making profiles available to adopters that they are not yet ready to consider, as it creates unnecessary work and upset.

With this in mind, there are several ways to choose which adopters can see a profile:

- Where a child might attract a great deal of interest, their profile may be kept completely hidden. The family-finder would make their own selection of adopters they would like to consider.
- In the first few days of a search, a family-finder may make a profile available only to adopters that meet certain criteria. They may want to initially consider families that can meet certain needs, or that reflect a child's ethnicity for example.
- Profiles can be shown to adopters based on where they live. For example, a match might ideally be sought within a 50 miles radius for support reasons, or avoided in certain areas where a security risk may exist. These boundaries can be adjusted quickly where appropriate to avoid delays in finding a match.
- A child might initially be profiled to adopters within their own agency, where applicable.
- Some agencies work in collaborative groups, and a profile may be made available to adopters from certain agencies as a step towards a wider search.

The Link Maker process

The diagram below shows the Link Maker process.



The first step in the process is an expression of interest. Interest can be expressed in profiles by a family, a family's social worker, or a child's social worker. The recipient of the enquiry can then choose whether to start a discussion. Starting a discussion shares contact details between the parties involved. If the recipient does not respond within two weeks, a discussion will be opened automatically.

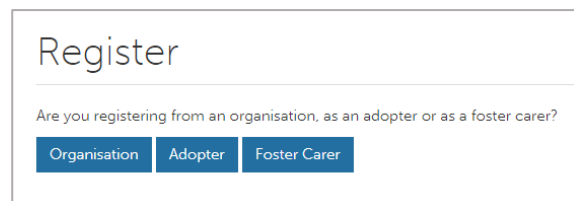
Both parties can then communicate about the potential match by sending messages and documents securely. Discussions can be closed by either party if they believe a match is not possible. When closing a discussion, you will be asked to provide some feedback. You can later choose to re-open discussions you have previously closed.

At a suitable point, the discussion can be marked as 'progressing to panel', and keeps this status until the match has been formally agreed. If a match has been made, one of the parties involved will indicate this on the site by using the 'Match made' button. The other party should then confirm this match, this closes the matching profiles involved and ends the matching process on Link Maker. If a match has not been made, the discussion can be closed by either party.

Registering for a Link Maker account

To create your own user account, click the 'Register' button on the Link Maker homepage. Next, click the 'Organisation' button and enter the required details.

You will receive an email containing an activation link that will activate your account. Your account will then need to be verified by your organisation before you can begin using Link Maker's adoption features.

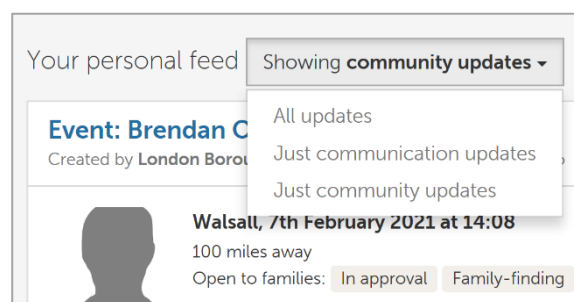


All staff who are involving in placement finding should create their own individual user account on Link Maker. This improves security, allows an open flow of communication and provides a record of activity.

About your homepage

You have access to a number of features and quick links from your homepage. A prominent aspect, at the top of your homepage, is the 'Featured children' section. Certain hard to place children are 'featured' here by Link Maker admins. Below the 'Featured children' section, you can find two tabs, one for your 'Personal feed' and the other for 'Adoption sufficiency' data.

Your personal feed provides up-to-date information on community and communication updates, as well as any Link Maker announcements that may concern you. Use the feed filter to determine what information you would like to see. Communication updates show recent activity for your cases. You can also find recent news and updates from Link Maker here.



The 'Adoption sufficiency' tab provides you with an adoption sufficiency data dashboard. Here, you can see and export adoption data collected on Link Maker, such as the number of children matched from a certain region.

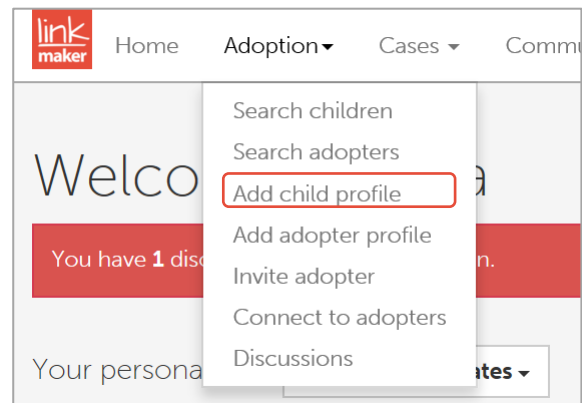
Adding a child/sibling group adoption profile

Child adoption profiles are concise for the purpose of identifying possible matches. You may find it helpful to look at other profiles existing on Link Maker to make sure you have the right information at hand. We may edit details that we feel are inappropriate, or that reveal a child's location or placing LA/agency. We will inform you if we do this.

To create a child or sibling group adoption profile, go to the 'Adoption' menu and select 'Add child profile'. Choose between creating a profile for an existing case or creating a new case.

As you complete each of the following steps, the information you provide will be saved, allowing you to complete the profile later if needed. Fill in basic details for the child(ren).

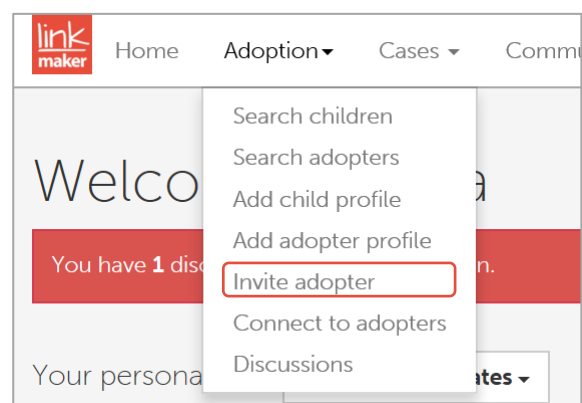
As you create the profile, you will be able to enter the needs of the child(ren), the family sought criteria, add any excluded areas, add any photos or videos and choose the profile availability. Profile availability determines who, on Link Maker, will be able to see the child profile. Once a child profile has been created, you can begin searching adopters for potential matches ([see later section](#)).



Inviting an adopter to join Link Maker

If you are currently working with an adopter who does not have a Link Maker account, you can invite them to join.

To invite families to use Link Maker, go to the 'Adoption' menu and choose 'Invite adopter'. Enter the details required and your family will receive a link via email to register.

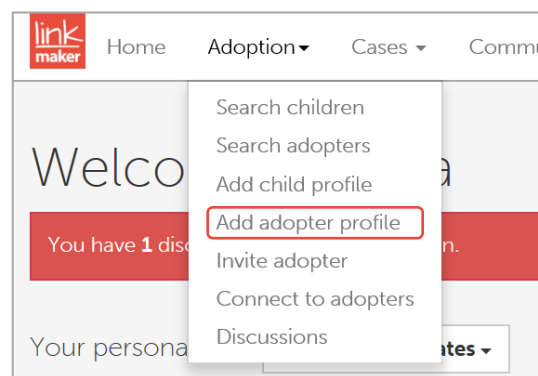


Adding an adopter profile

To create an adopter profile, go to the 'Adoption' menu and choose 'Add adopter profile'. Choose between creating a profile for an existing case or creating a new case. You will then be asked to fill in basic details for the family. Designate your main contact for the case and enter their details first. The main contact will receive email notifications and alerts for their account.

As you follow the steps in creating a profile, you will be able to enter the child needs that your family can meet, specify the type of child(ren) sought, add any photos or videos, and set the profile availability. Profile availability determines who, on Link Maker, will be able to see the family profile.

Once a family profile has been created, you can begin searching child profiles for potential matches ([see later section](#)).



Accessing cases

To access your cases, go to the 'Cases' menu and select the type of cases you wish to see. The 'Cases' page will, by default, be filtered to cases that you are connected to. You can, however, filter for any case from your organisation, including cases managed by specific practitioners.



On the 'Cases' page, you'll find an overview of cases, including any profiles, the number of active discussions, the number of incoming and outgoing interest, the last activity recorded against the case and the availability of any profiles.

Click on a case name to navigate to the 'Case management' page for that case. You can connect yourself to any case from your organisation, by clicking on the case name and choosing 'Connect account' from the 'Case management' page. Or, click on a profile name to navigate to the 'Profile settings' page for a specific profile.

Managing a case

To manage a child or family case, go to the 'Cases' page ([see previous section](#)) and click on the name of the case you wish to manage. This will bring you to the 'Case management' page for the case.

Case actions are shown as buttons at the top of the page, which includes:

- 'Add new activity' – Add a case note or document for your team
- 'Add new profile' – Add a new family or child profile
- 'View discussions' – View any active or past discussions for the case
- 'Set case as inactive' – Inactive cases are not subject to activity chasing and will not appear in your active case listing on the 'Cases' page
- 'Delete case' – If you intend to delete the case, you must first delete all profiles, this is an irreversible action

To connect to a case, click the blue 'Assign myself' button at the top of the 'Case management' page. You will then be assigned to the case, meaning you can edit profiles and participate in family finding for the child(ren) or adopters. To disconnect yourself from the case, click the 'Unassign myself' button, your permissions will then be removed. Connecting to an adopter means creating a direct link between you and their case. You will both be able to notify one another of child profiles and will have the ability to communicate more effectively.

To manage which team members are assigned to the case, click the 'View/edit' button. On the next page you can see who is assigned to the case and choose to unassign existing team members or assign new team members to the case. Team members are emailed when they have been connected or disconnected from a case.

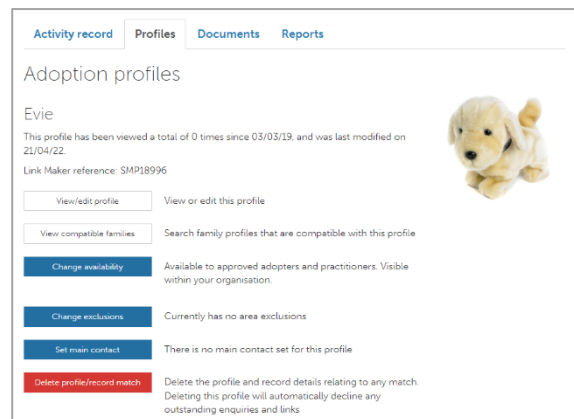
On the 'Case management' page, you have an 'Activity record' tab, which contains a record of all actions that have taken place for the case, including profile creation, profile edits, incoming/outgoing discussions and reports. You also have a 'Profiles' tab, which contains all the settings relating to any child/adopter profiles, a 'Reports' tab which contains any case reports, and a 'Documents' tab which contains any case documents. Family cases have an additional 'Contact information' tab, which houses all the collected contact information for the family.

Managing a child profile

All settings relating to a child profile can be found in one place, in the 'Profiles' tab of the 'Case management' page ([see previous section](#)).

Here, you can view and edit the child profile, view compatible families, change the availability settings, set a main contact and delete the profile ([see later section](#)).

You can review the record of activity taken place for the profile in the 'Activity record' tab. This record includes when the profile was created, any profile field/availability changes and any discussions for the profile.

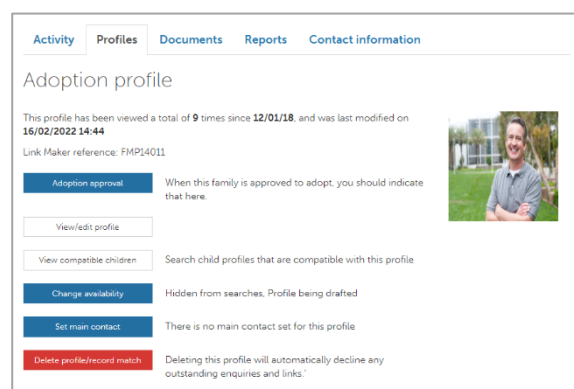


Managing a family profile

All settings relating to a family profile can be found in one place, in the 'Profiles' tab of the 'Case management' page ([see previous section](#)).

Here, you can indicate when the family is approved to adopt (if not already stated), view/edit the profile, view compatible children, set a main contact and delete the profile ([see later section](#)).

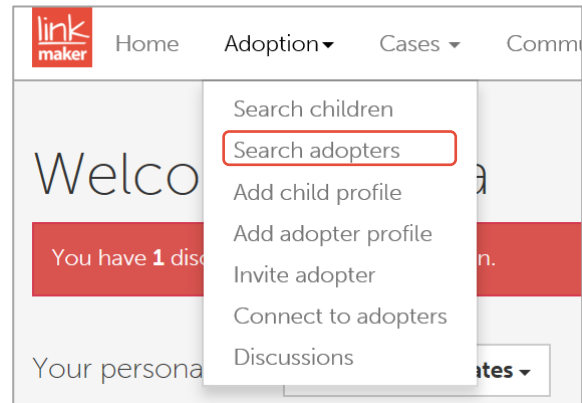
You can review the record of activity taken place for the profile in the 'Activity record' tab. This record includes when the profile was created, any profile field/availability changes and any discussions for the profile.



Searching, bookmarking and showing interest in adopter profiles

Once you have created a child adoption profile ([see previous section](#)), you can begin searching for potential placements.

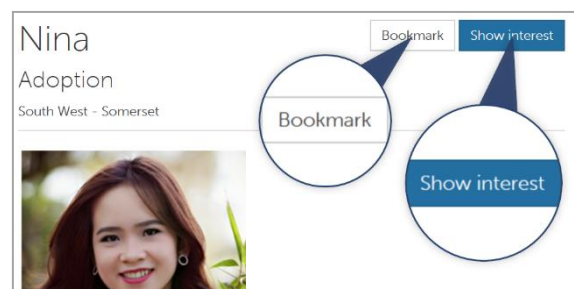
To search adopter profiles, go to the 'Adoption' menu and choose 'Search adopters'. Here you can filter your search results to find potential matches by using the filters on the right-hand side of the page. Please note that your search results will update automatically.



To find suitable profiles for a specific child profile, you can use the 'Order by compatibility for' filter. Simply, select the child(ren) from the drop-down and your search results will update to show profiles available to the child(ren) in order of compatibility.

To show interest in a family, go to the adopter profile and click the 'Show interest' button. This will invite the family, and any connected practitioners, to view the child's profile that you are expressing interest on behalf of. The family (or their practitioners) can then choose whether to start a discussion with you.

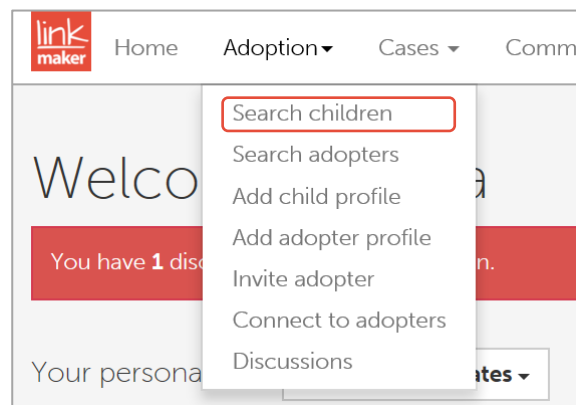
Optionally, you may want to bookmark profiles to view later. To bookmark a profile, click the 'Bookmark' button. These profiles can be found in the 'Bookmarked' tab, enabling you to return to them when you wish to show interest.



Searching, bookmarking and showing interest in child profiles

Once you have created an adopter profile ([see previous section](#)) or have been connected to a family, you can begin searching for potential matches.

To search child profiles, go to the 'Adoption' menu and select 'Search children'. Here you can filter your search results to find potential matches by using the filters on the right-hand side of the page. Please note that your search results will update automatically.



To find suitable profiles for a specific family, you can use the 'Order by compatibility for' filter. Select the family from the drop-down and your search results will update to show profiles available to the family, in order of compatibility.

You can choose to show interest in a child profile on behalf of your adopters, or notify your adopters directly of a profile you think will interest them.

To show interest in a child profile, go to the full child profile and click the 'Show interest' button, then choose an adopter profile from the drop-down. This will invite the child's social worker to view the family's profile and will notify your adopter of the expression of interest. The child's practitioner will then choose whether to start a discussion.



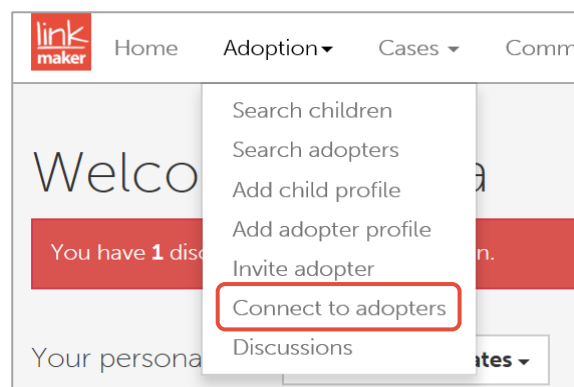
To notify your adopter of a child profile, click the 'Notify family' button and choose a family from the drop-down. The family will then receive an email suggesting they view the profile, which will also be added to their bookmarked list.

Optionally, bookmark profiles to view them later. To bookmark a profile, click the 'Bookmark' button. These profiles can be found in the 'Bookmarked' tab, enabling you to return to them when you wish to show interest.

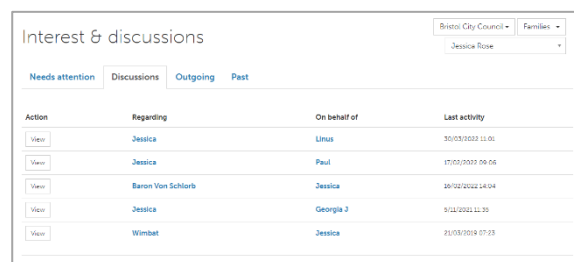
Using the 'Interest & discussions' page

The 'Interest & discussions' page is a dashboard of all discussions. You can view discussions relating to cases you are connected to, or view discussions for any case in your organisation.

To access the 'Interest & discussions' page, go to the 'Adoption' menu and select 'Discussions'. Alternatively, click the envelope icon shown in the right-hand corner, next to the 'Account settings' menu. This icon may appear with a red circle, indicating that you have discussions requiring your attention.



The page is separated into five tabs: 'Needs attention' for discussions that require an action; 'Discussions' for active conversations; 'Outgoing' for outgoing expressions of interest; 'Incoming' for incoming expressions of interest, and 'Past' for previously closed discussions.



Action	Regarding	On behalf of	Last activity
View	Jessica	Litus	30/05/2022 11:00
View	Jessica	Paul	17/05/2022 09:06
View	Baron Von Schlorb	Jessica	09/02/2022 14:04
View	Jessica	Georgia J	5/11/2021 11:30
View	Wimbat	Jessica	23/05/2019 07:23

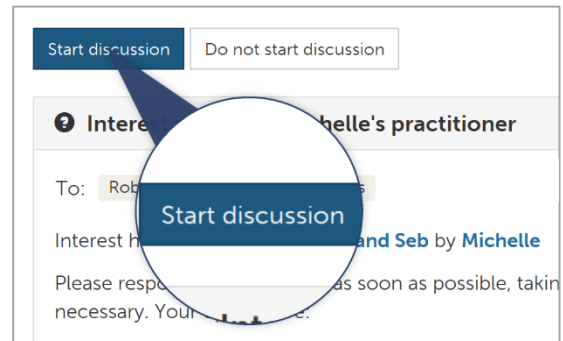
You have several filters on the 'Interest & discussions' page, enabling you to flexibly manage all cases in one place.

You are automatically subscribed to discussions relating to cases you are connected to. This means you will receive updates via email. You can choose to subscribe or unsubscribe from discussions whenever you like; just click the 'Subscribe' or 'Unsubscribe' buttons from within the discussion.

Managing incoming expressions of interest

Whether you are managing a child or family profile, you are likely to receive incoming expressions of interest depending on profile availability.

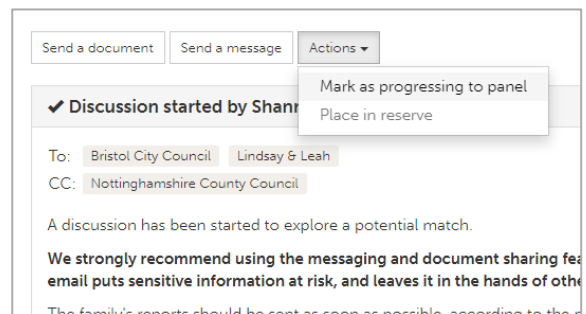
Once you have received an incoming expression of interest, you can view the profile expressing interest and choose whether to start a discussion with the 'Start discussion' and 'Do not start discussion' buttons.



If you choose not to start a discussion, you will be asked to provide some feedback. Alternatively, if you choose to start a discussion, you can then exchange messages and documents with the other party.

Indicating that a case is progressing to panel

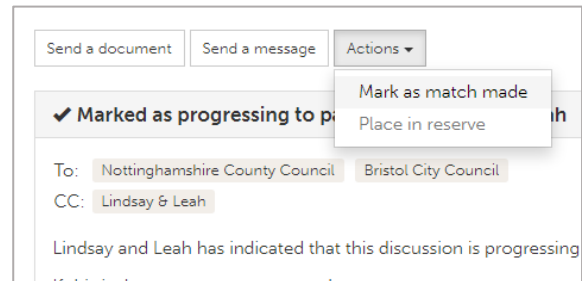
After a discussion concerning a potential placement has been started, the match may progress to matching panel. You can indicate this within the discussion by clicking the 'Actions' button and selecting 'Mark as progressing to panel'. The discussion recipient will be notified of this and your discussion will be updated.



Indicating a match has been made

Once a match has been made, go to the relevant discussion, click the 'Actions' button and select 'Mark as match made'.

If you are sure that a match has been made, the child adoption/family adopter profile will be deleted.



In the case of family adopter profiles, the family will no longer have access to Link Maker's family finding features, although will still be able to use the community areas of the site.

Deleting a child/adopter profile will remove all enquiries and links and is a permanent action. Within 20 days of the match being confirmed by both parties, all identifying information held on the adoption/adopter profile will be deleted and only statistics on how our system performed will be retained.

Creating and managing agency groups

You can create your own agency groups to use when filtering search results or setting a profile availability. These groups can be created for your own use, or made available to all practitioners at your agency.

To create an agency group, go to the 'Admin' menu and choose 'Manage agency groups'. Here, you will be able to view and edit all existing agency groups and create new agency groups by clicking the button 'New agency group'.



Generating reports

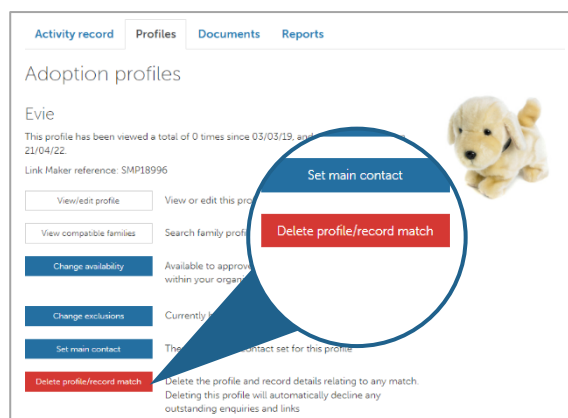
Link Maker offers various reports to help you find placements and keep records. For practitioners involved in adoption, Link Maker provides an available families report, a child family finding activity report, an adopter activity report, and usage & match reports.

1. The available families report produces a list of all families on Link Maker who may be a compatible match with specified criteria. To generate the report, go to the 'Admin' menu and select 'Available families'. Next, enter details in the fields provided, such as 'Permanence type' and 'Sibling group size'. This report can be generated multiple times for any combination of criteria.
2. The child family finding activity report produces a detailed account of the family finding activity that has taken place on Link Maker for a specified child/sibling group. To generate the report, go to the 'Admin' menu and select 'Family finding activity' under the 'Child specific reports (adoption) section. Choose a child or sibling group from the drop-down and click 'Generate report'.
3. The adopter activity report produces either a summary report of the family finding activity taken place on Link Maker for a particular family, or a detailed report including a record of discussions. To generate the report, go to the 'Admin' menu and select 'Adopter activity report' under the 'Adopter specific reports' section. Choose a family, the type of report you wish to generate and your specified date range. Finally, click 'Generate report'.
4. The usage & match reports can be found by going to the 'Admin' menu and selecting 'Usage & match reports'. By selecting the type of report you wish to generate in the 'Report' field, you can produce one of the following:
 - Usage report: an overview of profiles added, enquiries made and received
 - Child matches report: an overview of children matched, wait times, agencies involved, and who identified matches
 - Family matches report: an overview of families matched and the placing agencies involved

Deleting a child profile

Deleting a child profile is an irreversible action and will make the profile unavailable immediately.

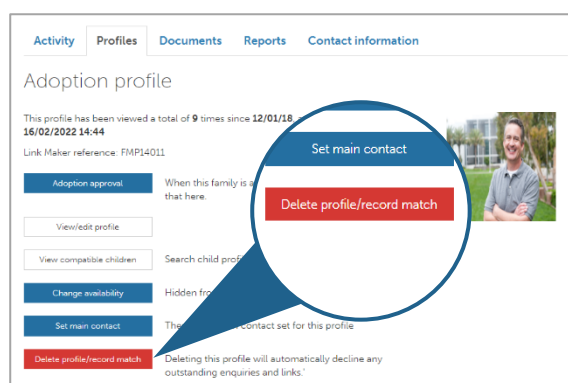
To delete a child profile, navigate to the 'Case management' page for the case, through the 'Cases' page. In the 'Profiles' tab, click the 'Delete profile/record match' button. You will then be asked some questions about why you are choosing to delete the profile and whether it has been matched.



Deleting a family profile

Deleting a family adopter profile is an irreversible action and will automatically decline any outstanding enquires and links and make the profile unavailable immediately.

To delete an adopter profile, navigate to the 'Case management' page for the case, through the 'Cases' page. In the 'Profiles' tab, click the 'Delete profile/record match' button. You will then be asked some questions about why you are choosing to delete the profile and whether it has been matched.



Managing your alert settings and receiving new profile alerts

You can receive your Link Maker notifications, as well as new profile alerts, through email or SMS. To manage your alert settings, go to the 'Account settings' menu and select 'Manage alert settings'.

You can be alerted via multiple email addresses, including your primary email address, or a shared inbox (for example). To add additional email addresses, click the 'Manage email alerts' button and enter the required details. To enable SMS alerts, enter the applicable telephone number(s) and choose which alerts you want to receive via SMS, click the 'Manage SMS alerts' button.

You can receive alerts when new child or adopter profiles become available to you. You can tailor these alerts to meet your needs, to ensure you are only being alerted to profiles that are relevant to you.

To enable profile alerts, on the main 'Manage alert settings' page, choose 'enabled' for the 'Alerts for child profiles' / 'Alerts for family profiles' fields. Fill in criteria for the profiles you are interested in and save your settings to begin receiving alerts.

Alert settings

Adoption - children Adoption - adopters Commissioning - children Commissioning - carers

Use the filters below to control the email alerts you receive when new families are added to the site. If you do not want to use one of the filters, simply leave it blank. To begin receiving new profile alerts, select 'Enabled' in the field below.

Alerts for family profiles Enabled

Basic details

Only include families from No filter
You can filter by any custom group of organisations. Click [here](#) to create a new group.

Permanence types No filter

Min age No filter

Max age No filter

Languages No filter

Makeup No filter

Existing children No filter

Geographical location

Managing account settings

All settings relating to your account, can be found in the 'Account settings' menu. You can change your password, username or PIN, manage your alert settings ([see previous section](#)), view your licence information, view our security information or logout of your account.

Using the Q&A boards

The community features on Link Maker allow adopters to share advice and peer support, and find agency resources. As a practitioner, you can help any adopters by answering questions posted on the Q & A boards. You can use the Q & A boards yourself to ask advice of other practitioners, or of families also.

Finding further help

For further help and support, click the 'Help' button in the top right-hand corner when logged into the site. Alternatively, view our step-by-step video tutorials at www.linkmaker.co.uk/pages/view/127 or call our support team on 0800 368 8549.