



# NORTHERN IRELAND GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

## ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT 2014/15



# FORWARD



**Patricia Nicholl**  
**Chief Executive**

It gives me great pleasure to present the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency's second Annual Quality Report. The Report documents the journey which NIGALA has taken over the past year to give effect to the DHSSPS vision as set out in *Quality 2020- a 10 Year Strategy* to protect and improve quality in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

As Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency I am committed to the provision of high quality standards of service in advising the courts of children's wishes and feelings and in independently representing and safeguarding the interests of children who are the subjects of Specified Public Law proceedings and Adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland.

Guardians ad Litem are highly dedicated and skilled, they play a vital role in the provision of safeguarding and child welfare services at a critical point in the State's intervention in family life. This intervention is normally to protect children from abuse and neglect and only embarked upon when other interventions have been unsuccessful. It typically involves difficult judgements in balancing the rights of the child and birth family to be together and the right of the child to be protected from harm.

The Agency underwent two significant reviews in 2012 (*Investors in People Post Recognition Review* and the *RQIA review of the NIGALA Governance Arrangements*) which reported in 2013. Taking forward the recommendations of these reviews has given rise to a significant Change Management programme within the organisation designed to enhance the oversight of the quality of the service and the quality of the work of the Guardian.

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NIGALA began the implementation of an integrated programme of change in 2014/15 which included the introduction of a revised Professional Development Framework, a new Leadership and Management Framework, a Professional Accountability Framework and a Learning and Development Strategy. It is anticipated that these initiatives will support the sustainable behaviours required to ensure the delivery of the Agency's strategic objectives and to promote service improvement and improved benefits for service users.



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**Patricia Nicholl**

**Chief Executive NIGALA**

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# INTRODUCTION

*Quality 2020* was officially launched on 17 November 2011 by Edwin Poots, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The purpose of *Quality 2020* is to create a strategic framework and plan of action that will protect and improve quality in health and social care over the next 10 years.

Its vision is for the HSC “to be recognised internationally, but especially by the people of Northern Ireland, as a leader for excellence in health and social care”. It highlights five strategic goals necessary to realise this vision:

- **Transforming the culture;**
- **Strengthening the workforce;**
- **Measuring the improvement;**
- **Raising the standards; and**
- **Integrating the care**

*Quality 2020* defines Quality under 3 main headings:

**Safety** – avoiding and preventing harm to patients and clients from the care, treatment and support that are intended to help them;

**Effectiveness** – the degree to which each patient and client receives the right care (according to scientific knowledge and evidence-based assessment), at the right time in the right place, with the best outcome;

**Patient and client focus** – all patients and clients are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and should be fully involved in decisions affecting their treatment, care and support.

In line with the ‘*Quality 2020*’ principles, NIGALA agree that quality is everyone’s business and is a part of everyday business and with HSC there is never a time to be complacent and always room for improvement.



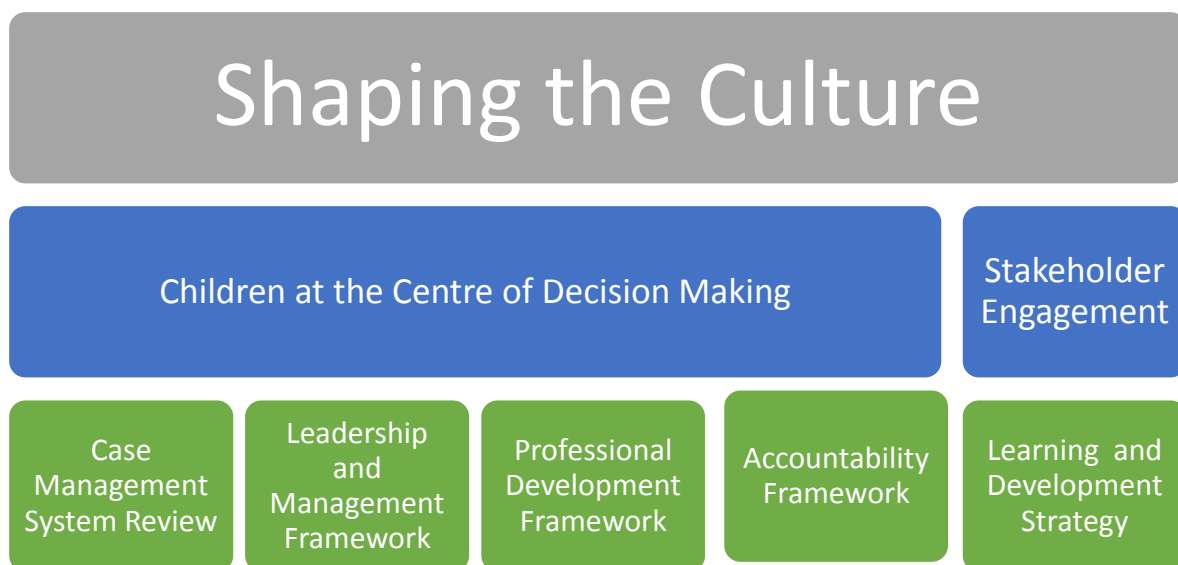
This Quality Report sets out what NIGALA have achieved to improve its services under each of the five strategic goals: Transforming the Culture; Strengthening the Workforce; Measuring the Improvement; Raising the Standards; and Integrating the Care.

## 1. Transforming the Culture

Organisational culture is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs and rules; it is defined as the way an organisation conducts its business and it affects the organisations productivity and performance.

The NIGALA seeks to place the child at the centre of its activities and to promote the behaviours required to support the delivery of the Agencies strategic objectives, service improvement and improve benefits for service users. This can be seen in Diagram 1 below.

**Diagram 1**



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## The Challenge of Change

As with all Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations, NIGALA has been the subject of much change in recent years, originating both from within and from outside of the Agency. At the same time the Guardian role has been under pressure with court applications continuing to rise (an increase of 52% in cases over the last 9 years).

The climate of austerity within the public sector and uncertainty about budget resources in the 2014/15 business year posed particular challenges for the Agency. The unanticipated reduction of 2.5% in the NIGALA budget in September 2014 forced the Agency to prioritise spend in hitherto unthinkable ways. In these circumstances the Agency struggled to maintain appropriate staffing levels and recruitment to key posts in the organisation was hampered.

Following intense negotiations the DHSSPS have continued to recognise the front line nature of the services delivered by NIGALA and as such the reduction in the budget allocation for 2015/16 reflects that position and takes account of the continued demand for services.

In 2014/15 NIGALA embarked on the implementation of an integrated programme of change. Some of this planned work was outlined in the Agency's 2013/14 Quality Report and was included in a Service Improvement Plan involving the following;

- **Implementation of NIGALA Accountability Framework**
- **Implementation of NIGALA Professional Development Framework**
- **Progressing the action plan emanating from the Agency's audit of compliance to the Francis Report**

### Implementation of NIGALA Accountability Framework

In response to an RQIA recommendation that a system of quality assuring live reports produced by Guardians be introduced, the Agency has developed the *NIGALA Accountability Framework*. While Guardians exercise professional independence in making a recommendation to the Court, premised on their assessment of the child's needs and best

interests, they are accountable to the Agency for the quality of their work. Increased workload demands in a climate of austerity require clear accountability arrangements to evidence quality standards.

In 2014/15 the Agency developed an enhanced specification for the Guardian Case Information System (GCIS) to enable the collation of data in relation to key areas of Guardian performance and quality indicators in respect of the role and work of the Guardian in live cases which will be capable of being monitored and will inform revised appraisal and supervision processes. This work also entailed a review of the NIGALA Professional Standards aimed at promoting consistent standards of Guardian best practice (see *Raising the Standards* section).

The Accountability Framework has been informed by the Agency's 2014/15 Audit of Knowledge and Skills (see *Strengthening the Workforce* section). The Framework has also been informed by an ongoing process of knowledge exchange with *The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service* (CAFCASS). A group of NIGALA senior managers visited CAFCASS on 5 August 2014 and considered the organisation's approach to a range of matters including a self-efficacy approach to performance management, the development of a transparent approach to activity analysis, the improved use of data to inform performance and the organisation's approach to allocation and case management.

Specifications for enhanced GCIS functions will aim to promote a data led way of working which will enable individual/team and organisation data comparisons. Implementation on the Framework is contingent on the timeline for delivery of the GCIS development enhancement project. This project incurred delays primarily due to its interface with data transfer project from BSO.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- The NIGALA Accountability Framework will be implemented in 2015/16



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## Implementation of NIGALA Professional Development Framework

The drivers for the *Professional Development Framework* came from both Investors in People and the RQIA and the Framework takes into account the Agency's overall plan with regard to the various elements of peer support such as professional development groups, mentoring, journal clubs, and coaching practice. As RQIA recommended –

*NIGALA should facilitate a structured system of peer support for Guardians Ad Litem which is underpinned by robust management oversight of social work practice standards.*

### Coaching

During 2014/15 the Agency undertook training for all staff in *An Introduction to Coaching* delivered by *Advance Coaching*. The rationale behind this training was to develop a coaching culture within NIGALA. The Agency has integrated coaching into the NIGALA *Professional Development Framework* and is committed to integrating coaching behaviours into all areas of its business, but particularly through areas of peer support such as Professional Development Groups. NIGALA is fortunate to have a very experienced and knowledgeable workforce but whilst we have a tradition of providing training from external sources, we believe we could much better harness the knowledge and skills of our professional staff and ensure greater knowledge exchange.

- Four full day sessions took place between January and March 2015, thereby ensuring that all our staff, administration, management and Guardian, were trained in coaching. The training included sessions on *Understanding Coaching* (including defining coaching, key coaching skills and *Understanding Self Coaching* (such as qualities of a good coach, emotional intelligence and resilience) and *Creating the Context and Structure for Coaching* where attendees looked at areas like trust and a code of ethics.
- NIGALA views this coaching training as the beginning of a process of embedding a coaching culture within the Agency. *Advance Coaching* met with the Senior Management Team to feedback on their reflections of the Agency and to start to formulate a plan for the further implementation of coaching throughout the organisation in the year to come.







***Staff getting interactive with coaching!***

## **Professional Development Groups**

The implementation of the Agency's Professional Development Groups (PDGs), which is the primary vehicle for the Agency's strategy to develop peer support across the Guardian workforce, was progressed through 2014/15. Staff were consulted at the annual Away Day in May 2014 and whilst there was overwhelming support for PDGs, there were concerns raised about the proposed implementation of coaching practice which led to a re-evaluation of how this was to be progressed. As referred to above, coaching is to underpin the role of the PDGs and therefore the training in coaching had to be completed prior to the Groups being constituted. This was achieved in year as outlined above and the development of the PDGs will be reported on in next year's Quality Report. The Agency has agreed a revised implementation plan for the PDGs which will be underpinned by a coaching approach independently facilitated by Advanced Coaching.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- NIGALA will further Progress the establishment of PDGs in 2015/16
- A strategy for further embedding a Coaching approach will be developed In 2015/16

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## **Progressing the action plan emanating from the Agency's audit of compliance to the Francis Report**

In 2014/15 NIGALA progressed an action plan in respect of the Francis Report under the umbrella of the Social Care Governance Action Plan which was overseen by the Social Care Governance Committee.

NIGALA's policy is to welcome and encourage comments and complaints as well as suggestions, comments and thanks. Complaints are viewed as an important source of feedback to the organisation and provide valuable information about areas for improvement as perceived by service users.

As part of this action plan NIGALA completed the following;

### **Review of NIGALA Complaints Policy**

NIGALA Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy was reviewed to take account of the Francis Report and to streamline the management of complaints within the Agency. Guardian ad Litem case related complaints must follow a defined process under the NIGALA Panel Regulations (1996) and therefore the Executive Team presented a new Complaints Policy and Procedure to support the consideration of complaints about the Guardian ad Litem in connection with Public Law and Adoption Proceedings under the Children (NI) Order 1995 and Adoption (NI) Order 1987. This Policy and Procedure was approved by the NIGALA Board in May 2014.

### **Development of a Complaints Investigation Manual**

In 2014/15 NIGALA developed an Investigations Manual. The purpose of the manual is to promote a consistent high standard of investigative practice by providing guidance on the key matters that need to be considered in the planning, preparation, interviewing, record keeping and reporting tasks in the course of an investigation.

The manual was compiled by reference to material from Charis Consultancy, NIGALA Case-Related Complaints Policy, the HSC Complaints Policy, the NIGALA Disciplinary Policy, the NIGALA Grievance Policy and the NIGALA Adverse Incidents Policy. The Agency also introduced a revised set of leaflets on comments, compliments and complaints.

### **Introduction of a mechanism for Learning Lessons**

The Agency also introduced a learning lessons approach to the review of complaints and comments received from service users and reported adverse incidents. Bi-annual reports are now submitted on these lessons and reflections on practice to the Social Care Governance Committee.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- NIGALA will continue to embed its leaning lessons Process and to develop a service user and outcomes focus to this work.

## **2. Strengthening the Workforce**

Health and Social Care is changing, as is the case across the entire Health and Social Care sector demand for services is rising inexorably. There is a need to reshape our service and to support our workforce to deliver new and innovative ways of working. In this wider Context of change NIGALA is seeking to continuously improve and raise standards of practice and service delivery.

NIGALA has many strengths in terms of its workforce. Our retention rates are amongst the highest in the HSC family in Northern Ireland with the majority of staff throughout corporate, administration, Guardian ad Litem and management having been with the Agency for more than 10 years. However there is no room for complacency and, as already acknowledged, staff across all sectors are faced with unprecedented levels of Change and increased workload demands.

NIGALA is working to develop both a culture which welcomes change and innovation and to develop strong leadership at all levels to support these changes. This can be achieved through strengthening and developing the workforce to enable capacity to deliver. Whilst change is inevitable, management is committed to reducing the impact on staff by improving communication of why the change is necessary or required, prioritising and staging change and ensuring that change supports the overall mission of the Agency.

It may be a cliché, but the old adage that an organisation's primary asset is its staff is particularly true for NIGALA. We are, and always have been, a lean organisation with a small, flat management team whose resources are predominantly used to provide a voice for the child in court proceedings via Guardian representation. Therefore we are very aware that our workforce needs to be continuously strengthened and developed to meet the increasing demands it faces.

In 2014/15 NIGALA has endeavoured to strengthen its workforce in a range of ways including the following;

- **NIGALA Learning and Development Strategy**
- **Strengthening NIGALA Solicitors Panel**
- **Strengthening Staff Communication**

### **Learning and Development Strategy**

One of the key ways NIGALA encourages the development of its staff is through the Learning and Development Strategy. NIGALA developed a formal *Learning and Development Strategy 2014 – 2016* in response to a recommendation in the 2012 *Investors*



*in People Review*. The importance of continual professional development is clearly articulated in the *Strategy* and annual Training Plans remain the key vehicle for developing people to support service improvement and practice development. This is supported by embedding continuous learning through effective supervision, and a continued focus on shared learning and coaching.

All Social Work staff are expected to comply with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) which requires 90 hours continuous professional development (CPD) within each three year registration period. There are a number of mandatory training activities that must be completed by all staff. Individuals have a responsibility to maintain a CPD record, including reflection on activities undertaken.

Each year a series of internal training activities are arranged for Guardians, largely driven by the need to be kept up to date with developments in child protection, family support and adoption.

In order to ensure that training is effective and good value for money, the post evaluation training form was revised in 2014/15 in consultation with staff and is now used to evaluate training. An annual report on *Effectiveness of Training Delivered within NIGALA* is produced each year.

The Agency approved the 2014/15 Training and Development Plan in May 2014. The NIGALA training budget was reduced by 10K as part of the savings measures introduced to manage the 2.5% reduction in Revenue Resource Level (RRL) imposed by the Department in September 2014. This reduction in the training budget required an embargo on all unplanned short course attendance and conferences in the 2014/15 year in order to prioritise training and development to meet Business objectives enshrined in the 2014/15 Business Plan 2014/15 which were designed to support the implementation of the NIGALA Professional Development Framework.

Examples of training and development activity delivered in 2014/15 are;



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### *Talking Mats*

In April the Agency provided training on 'Talking Mats' for 24 Guardians. Talking Mats is an established communication tool, which uses a mat with symbols attached as the basis for communication. It is designed to help people with communication difficulties to think about issues discussed with them, and provide them with a way to effectively express themselves in a visual way that can be easily recorded. The training was strongly evaluated by those who took part and due to its low tech nature is being used regularly by guardians to assist them in communicating with children, especially younger children.

### *Child Sexual Exploitation*

The Sector Manager for Safeguarding in the SEHSCT provided training to the SMT in October 2014 and to Guardians on the 5 November. The training focused on the revised regional guidance-and assessment of risk in cases of suspected and identified Child sexual exploitation. Such training will be vital to the Agency's response to the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual exploitation-and the Thematic Review of Child sexual exploitation being undertaken by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNi).

### **NIGALA Solicitor Panel**

A further example of how the Agency has sought to strengthen its workforce is demonstrated through the role of the NIGALA Solicitor Panel. The primary role of the Guardian Ad Litem is to represent children in specified public law proceedings and this role is delivered via a tandem model whereby the court appoints a Guardian and the Guardian appoints a Solicitor for the child. In order to ensure that the child receives the best possible service from their Guardian and Solicitor, NIGALA constituted a Panel of appropriately qualified Solicitors in 2012 and work has been ongoing through 2014/15 to ensure the successful reconstitution of this Panel in late 2015.

A working group was established to plan for and deliver on the reconstitution of the Solicitor Panel. A review of the existing Panel was undertaken to inform the reconstitution. NIGALA works collaboratively with the Law Society and the Northern Ireland Legal Services



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Commission to ensure effective communication and information sharing in support of good governance in relation to the operation of the Panel.

The *Guardian/Solicitor Reference Group* is the mechanism through which issues of common interests are addressed and the implications for practice disseminated alongside the identification of joint training initiatives. The working group drafted and consulted on reciprocal feedback forms based on the mutual expectations contained within the Protocol for the working relationship between the Guardian and Solicitor.

The feedback forms are being integrated within the Guardian Case Information System (GCIS) and will be issued for completion on a case by case basis at the conclusion of the court proceedings.

There are a number of strategic developments that require consideration when progressing the reconstitution of the Panel. Revisions to civil legal aid remuneration will result in composite based fees which will have implications for the work that Solicitors will be able to undertake in cases. The NIGALA responded to the consultation and considered the implications and likely impact on the service provided to children. The Department of Justice consultation on the rationalisation of the Northern Ireland Court Services Estate with proposals for court closures required consideration in respect of the location of family courts. In our previous Quality Report NIGALA undertook to provide a programme of joint training for Panel Solicitors with Guardians and in 2014/15 this programme included the following –

- The Toxic Trio – Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence and Mental Health
- Child Sexual Exploitation

### **Communicating and Consulting with Staff**

In NIGALA's first Quality Report the Agency undertook to implement the recommendations made in the Communication Strategy that was introduced in 2013/14. The management structure within NIGALA serves to maximise the accessibility of managers and facilitates the exchange of communication with Guardians which, in turn, promotes the Agency's capacity to be responsive.



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During 2014/15 the NIGALA Communication Strategy was implemented with all actions delivered. Communication/consultation was also facilitated on a formal basis by:

- a) a quarterly staff meeting led by managers ensuring that all staff are consulted on relevant policies, corporate plans, professional practice and the latest initiatives.
- b) a Joint Consultative Committee with the Trade Union NIPSA which is convened on a quarterly basis and as necessary to consult on new and revised policies.

An additional method of communication within the Agency is the publication of a six monthly internal news bulletin which highlights developments within NIGALA, training and development opportunities, staff social activities as well as external initiatives in social care and family justice. It is available electronically and in hard copy.

All staff engage in the development and feedback on policies and procedures through the use of a compliance software called Metacompliance. This enables all staff to confirm that they have read and understood policies and encourages them to shape organisational plans via internal Metacompliance electronic surveys.

As part of the HSC Change Day initiative NIGALA pledged to 'raise awareness about the importance of good communication between Management and Staff to support delivery of front line services' and this will continue to be taken forward during 2015/16.

In March 2015 NIGALA assessed progress in relation to its Communication Strategy and recognised the need to take forward a series of actions to improve communication in the 2015/16 year. These actions will focus on the implementation of the NIGALA Children's Participation Strategy, the re-design and restructuring of the NIGALA website and a particular focus on internal communications with staff and Self Employed Guardians in respect of change management.



## **NEXT STEPS**

- NIGALA will put in place a revised internal Communication Strategy which ensures that all staff have an Understanding of the rationale for planned Changes and improves the involvement and Contribution of all staff to the Change management Process.
- Aligned to this strategy NIGALA will put in place a Human Resources Strategy to support our Transforming the Culture agenda which will define our commitment to staff in delivering the service to the highest quality standards.
- NIGALA will put in place robust arrangements for the reconstitution of the NIGALA Solicitors Panel in 2015/16.
- NIGALA will review its Learning and Development Strategy to take account of the new NISCC Professional in Practice approach to Post qualifying training.

## **3. Measuring the Improvement**

NIGALA recognises the need to evaluate the impact of service improvement initiatives on service users. Currently improvement is measured through the following mechanisms;

- **Service User Engagement and Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)**
- **Service user and stakeholder feedback**
- **Introduction of NIGALA Children's Report**
- **Introduction of NIGALA revised Guardian Court Report**

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Core themes for NIGALA in 2014/15 were:

- to enable stakeholders to influence and actively contribute to the strategic direction, effective operation and on-going development of the Agency and
- to put in place a mechanism for the effective engagement of children and young people into relevant NIGALA policy development and decision making processes
- to ensure effective feedback from service users and stakeholders.

To further these aims a number of initiatives were undertaken in 2014/15 and include the following:

## **Stakeholder Events**

### *Care Proceedings in Northern Ireland - A Snapshot Study*

In 2014/15 NIGALA presented the results of this study in a series of seminars to a range of professionals including Trust social workers and management along with solicitors involved in family law. The study, albeit small, indicated some key themes in compliance to Northern Ireland Guide to Case Management (2009), the timeliness of Trust article 50 Applications and provided some insight into factors influencing delay.

The study was further presented to the Childcare in Practice Annual General Meeting on 26 June 2014 and was presented as Cafe Conversations to the Northern Ireland Confederation for Health and Social Care (NICON) 2014 conference. In addition the study formed the basis for two seminars to legal and social work professionals in 2014.

### *Tackling Delay and Working Together*

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015 NIGALA hosted a Stakeholder Event at the Antrim Civic Centre. As part of an ongoing action plan the event focussed on the need for improved liaison between NIGALA and HSC Trusts and also focused on the pending DHSSPS Pilot on Tackling Delay in Care Proceedings.

55 people attended in total, including practitioners and management from each of the HSC Trusts, representative from the HSCB, members from the DHSSPS members of NIGALA including Guardians ad Litem, members of the Executive Team and the Board chair.



*(l-r) Bernard Mitchell (NIGALA Chair), Jerome Dawson (DHSSPS), Patricia Nicholl (CEO, NIGALA), Michael McCluskey (AD Acting NIGALA) and Anthony Douglas (CEO, CAFCCASS)*



*Attendees at the NIGALA stakeholder event breakout session*

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Further to the event NIGALA proposes to convene further joint events with the Trusts involved to further explore the issues for the Pilot in 2015/16 when the Terms of Reference, timescales and arrangements for the Pilot are clarified.

### **Consultation with the Judiciary**

During 2014/15 the Agency continued to convene one to one bi-annual meetings with representatives from the judiciary including the Head of the Family Division of the High Court, Mr Justice Maguire. Meetings took place on the 19th May 2014 and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

The Chief Executive also attended a meeting between the Directors of Childcare for the Trusts and the Head of the Family Division of the High court on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014, to discuss matters of common interest. In addition, the Agency continued to collaborate with the judiciary through regular attendance of the Chief Executive at Children Order Advisory Committee (COAC) meetings and attendance of Operational Managers at regional Family Court Business Committees.

### **Effective engagement of children and young people**

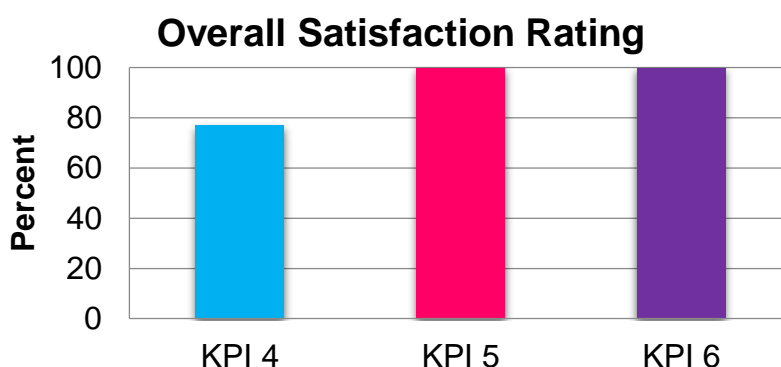
During 2014/15 NIGALA has progressed this matter with the assistance of the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC). VOYPIC produced a Benchmarking Paper which, along with a scoping exercise by NIGALA of arrangements for involving children and young people by other Childcare agencies in Northern Ireland and CAF/CASS in England and Wales, will form the basis of the Agency's approach to the engagement of children and young people in NIGALA. Further to a workshop with NIGALA Senior Management Team a draft strategy for the participation of children and young people was devised. Further consultation on the draft strategy will be undertaken with young people before proposals are presented to the Agency's Board for approval.

## Service user and stakeholder feedback

All Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to the satisfaction of service users and stakeholders with the service were met in 2014/15. Three KPIs relate to service feedback and are reported here in detail. The DHSSPS set the Agency a KPI of **75%** of responses to our survey from stakeholders to give a satisfaction rating of **‘good’** or **‘excellent’**. The satisfaction rating among the stakeholders is detailed in the Chart below.

In addition, NIGALA seeks quantitative and qualitative information from service users and key stakeholders on an annual basis. Such information provides baseline data for the Agency to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the service and the experience which users and stakeholders derived from its service delivery.

**Chart**



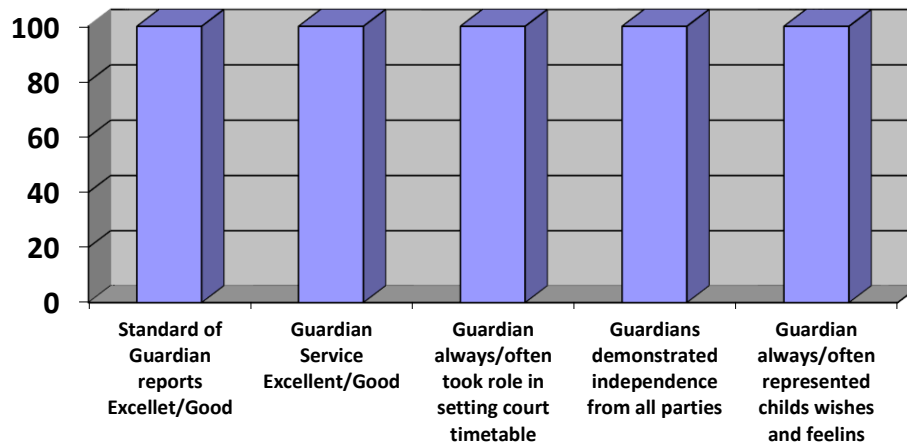
## **Evaluation of the Guardian ad Litem Service by the Judiciary**

7 out of 18 members of the judiciary returned feedback (39%).

The Agency sought more detailed response from the Judiciary on the key roles of the Guardian ad Litem in court proceedings.

**Chart**

**Judiciary Feedback**



**Evaluation of the Guardian ad Litem Service by Children and Young People**

***Paper questionnaires***

These questionnaires were forwarded to younger children under the age of nine and children who chose this method or for whom this method was deemed more suitable. 62 paper questionnaires were returned. Girls and boys gave responses in equal numbers.

77% reported their Guardian as either excellent or good. 92% of the children reported that they always or most of the time understood what the guardian had said to them. 90% reported that they mostly or always found their Guardian easy to talk to. 94% felt their Guardian had mostly or completely listened to what they had said.

**Viewpoint Questionnaires**

104 Viewpoint questionnaires were offered to young people. 54 young people (52%) opted for the opportunity to complete the feedback themselves, 50 (48%) opted for VOYPIC assisted feedback. 34 (30%) were completed overall.



19% of the 54 young people who opted to complete their questionnaires alone returned responses compared to 40% of those referred to VOYPIC. This may indicate the value of continued involvement of VOYPIC in the process of seeking children's feedback using viewpoint.

### **The impact of PPI activities on the Quality of the Service and next steps for 2015/16**

As a result of the PPI activities in 2014/15 NIGALA now reviews individual feedback from children within a month of receipt. This has enabled the Agency to identify specific issues arising from individual cases at an earlier stage for resolution.

In addition, staff are being encouraged to make carers and young people, where relevant, aware at the outset of proceedings of the complaints process for the Agency. This had been reflected in the Agency's new information leaflets provided to children and young people.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- As result of early work done on children's participation in 2014/15 the Agency will, in 2015/16, begin implementing elements of a participation strategy including the involvement of young people in the induction of Guardians.
- From feedback from young people in 2014/15 the Agency is reviewing children's feedback mechanisms with a view to obtaining more commentary from young children as opposed to statistical information.
- As a result of feedback in 2014/15 the Agency is involving young people in a review of developing a process for children's feedback to be fed back to individual Guardians.
- As a result of feedback in 2014/15. NIGALA, in 2015/16 will be exploring how the level of feedback from the Judiciary can be increased.

## Feedback and Learning from Complaints, Comments, Compliments

During the period 2014/15 NIGALA received a total of 24 Comments, Compliments and Complaints broken down in the table below:

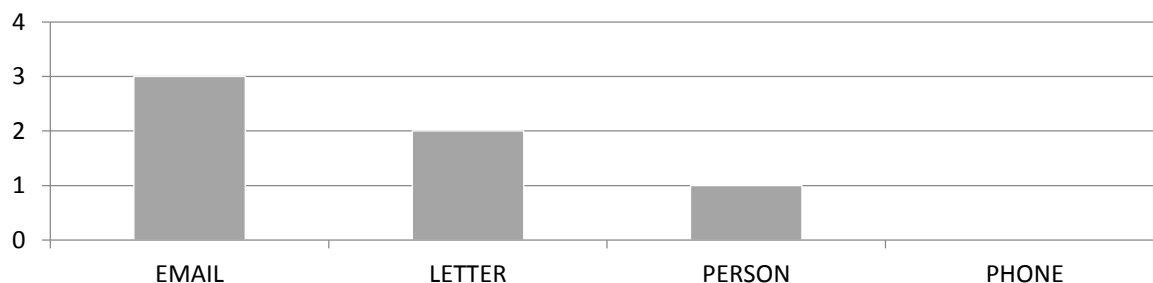
	EMAIL	LETTER	PERSON	PHONE	Total
<b>Comment</b>	3	5	3	4	15
<b>Compliment</b>	3	2	1	0	6
<b>Complaint</b>	0	2	0	1	3
<b>Totals:</b>	6	9	4	5	24

### Comments, Compliments and Complaints

A key element which also informs the management of risk is the NIGALA Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and reporting system.

A total of 24 comments, compliments and complaints were received in period with 6 arriving by email, 8 by formal letter, 4 in person and 5 via telephone.

### Compliments

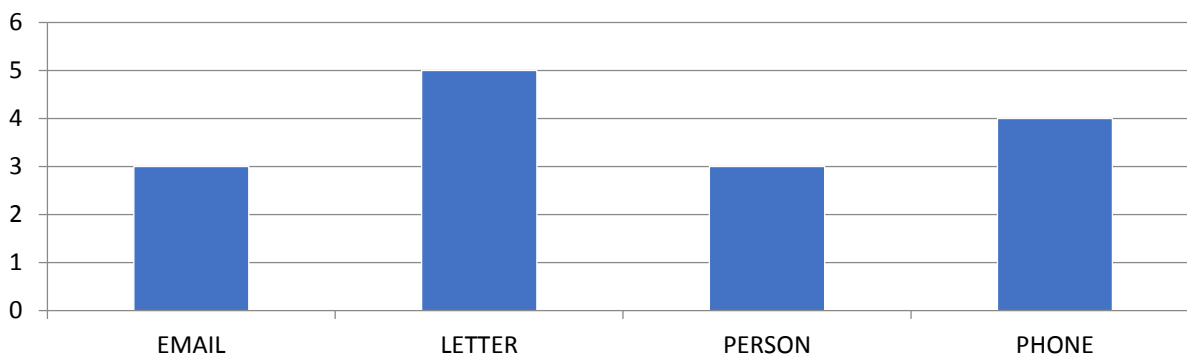


NIGALA received a total of 6 compliments in period with 4 compliments reflecting the positive work of the Guardians Ad Litem in cases. One of the compliments was from adoptive



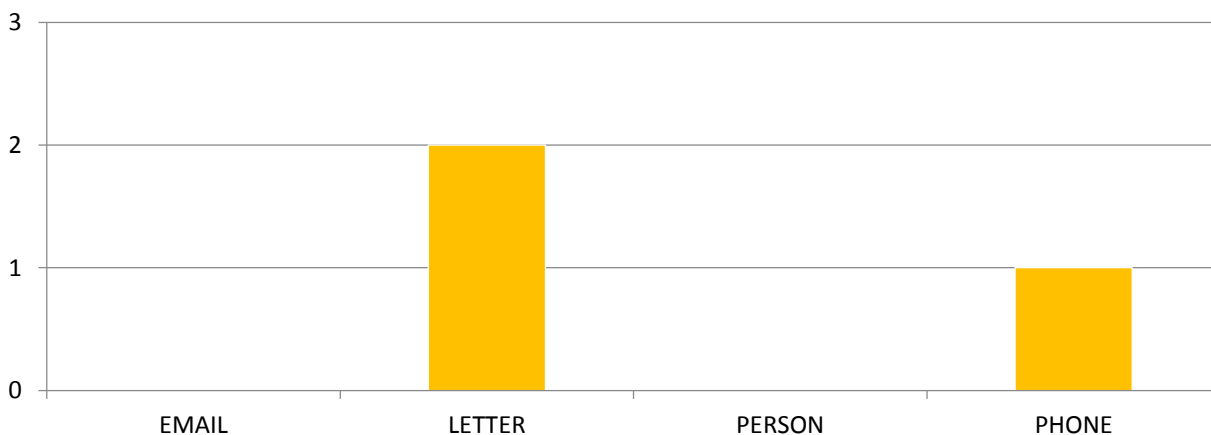
parents praising the work of the Guardian Ad Litem during proceedings. One compliment was received from an independent fostering agency that was extremely positive about the role of the Guardian and the specific role of listening to the child.

### Comments



A total of 15 comments were received. 5 of these comments were complaints made by parents (one made by third party on behalf of parents). As the cases were still live before the court, the parents/complainants of two of the comments were advised the issue being raised was better dealt with in the court arena during the lives of the cases. 2 of the 5 parents/complainants decided not to pursue/follow up after case closure and 1 of these is still live before the court.

### Complaints



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NIGALA received a total of 3 case-related complaints in period. One complaint was made by a parent, another by adoptive parents, and the third complaints was made by prospective adoptive parents. Two of these complaints were resolved at Stage 1 local resolutions stage of the NIGALA Complaints Procedure and one complaint proceeded to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. All actions and lessons learned are recorded by the responsible manager and implemented where relevant across the organisation.

### **Lessons Learned:**

NIGALA hold bi-annual lessons learned seminars. Lessons learned from the above include the following:

### **Comments:**

- In relation to the comment from the panel solicitor querying the number of appointments, GCIS amendments and enhancements on solicitor appointment being implemented. Refinements by geography being reviewed through the reconstitution of the Solicitors Panel.

### **Complaints:**

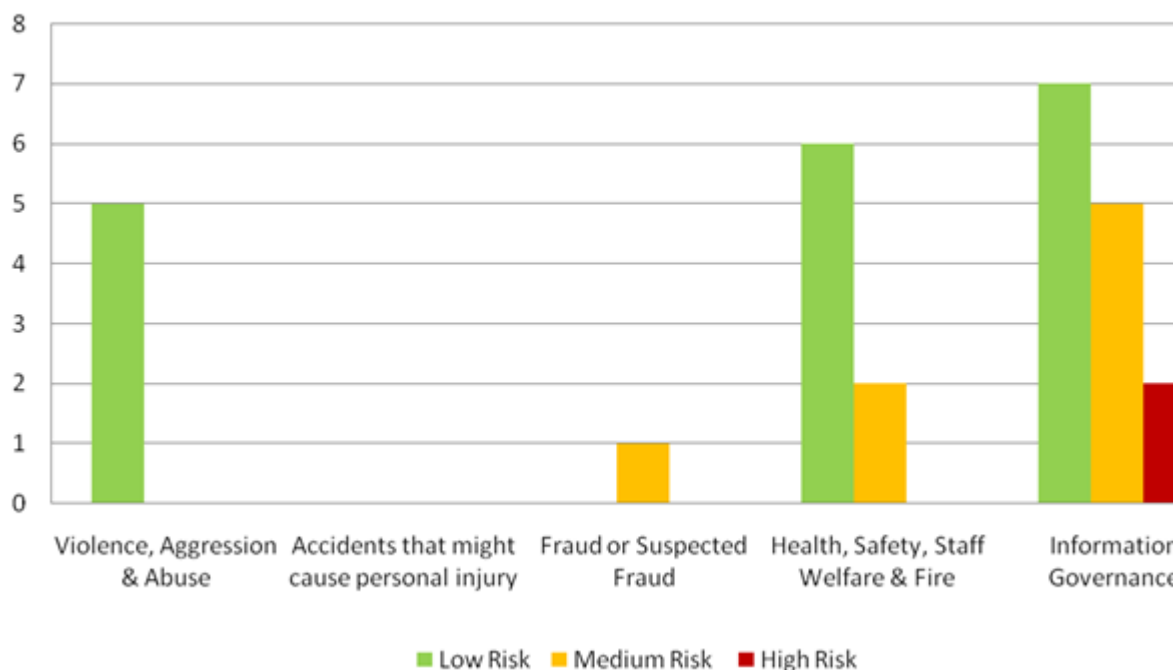
- Francis compliance - in the management of a Comment, Complaint or Concern under a live case that NIGALA would address the issue after the case has been completed.
- As part of coaching training to include scenarios on how parents/Guardians should be approached with respect to comments, compliments and complaints
- Parties to be advised that notes taken during interviews relating to the complaint can become discoverable.
- Acknowledgement of the timeliness of providing information to the court could be the basis for a complaint.
- Check that addresses are correct on GCIS at case closure when selecting feedback to ensure correspondence is delivered to the correct address.

## Learning from Adverse Incidents

In support of the management of risk, NIGALA has an effective incident management system in place to capture the categories of incidents. The Risk Management Committee takes staff safety extremely seriously. All incidents are managed by an individual manager with all outcomes and lessons learned recorded and relevant actions plan implemented to ensure policies and procedures are updated and to avoid any recurrence.

During the year 2014/15 there were 28 reported incidents (see chart and table below). Five incidents were linked to violence, aggression and abuse of staff. Eight of the incidents were in relation to health, safety, staff welfare and fire, two of which were considered medium risk and six low risk. One incident was in relation to fraud or suspected fraud. With regard to information governance, there was a total of 14 incidents recorded, 7 of which were considered low risk, five graded at medium risk and two as high risk.

**Incidents by Grade and Type**



Risk Level	Violence, Aggression & Abuse	Accidents that might cause personal injury	Fraud or Suspected Fraud	Health, Safety, Staff Welfare & Fire	Information Governance	Total
Low Risk	5	0	0	6	7	18
Medium Risk	0	0	1	2	5	8
High Risk	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	5	0	1	8	14	28

The high risk incidents included an ICT support failure during September which resulted in an ICT support officer and ICT incident log being put in place.

With regard to the lessons learned, ICT knowledge and capacity should be available at all times. ICT projects will invest in staff through training and awareness raising. The second high risk was a lapse of a Guardian Ad Litem's professional registration due to non-payment of the annual fee, which resulted in the Guardian being unable to participate in case work until the issue had been resolved. A formal action plan is now in place to ensure the awareness of raising of all social work staff in respect of the importance of mandatory professional registration.

#### **Lessons learned in relation to low risk incidents include:**

- Alarm maintenance checks to include check on sensors to ensure alarm does not sound due to sensor failures.
- Ensure all teleconference calls are ended once the conversations have finished.
- Ensure all information post related incidents are recorded even if they are minor and no information has been lost.
- Need for a formal protocol between HSCTs and NIGALA for sharing information on volatile/potentially violent clients to inform risk assessment.



- Escalation of Risk and Adverse Incident Policy is reviewed.
- Information with respect to allocation should only be available to the allocation manager.
- AD reminded to check email recipients before sending email.
- Importance of assessing likely risks before interviewing clients alone in NIGALA office in view of Trust decision to see client in their office with two staff present.

**Lessons learned in relation to risks graded as medium include:**

- All office admin requested to ensure personal sensitive information sent to NIGALA which arrives damaged should be logged as an incident and the sender informed of the damaged post.
- NIGALA staff will exit the Dobbin Centre on hearing the fire alarm and notify the fire brigade and the landlord that the fire alarm has activated.
- Staff should ensure all case files are held securely within the office area.
- New policy in place covering the returning of case files at case closure. This ensures that all hard copy case files are returned to the records officer for shredding

**NIGALA Children's Report**

In 2014/15 NIGALA progressed the development of a children's report. This document holds the child's views and comments from the Guardian as how those views were expressed in court and, if the Guardian was recommending something to the contrary, the reasons why. This form could be kept by the child or included in the child's file. NIGALA consulted with staff on this new form and undertook a series of awareness raising sessions. The form will be implementing in 2015/16.

## Introduction of NIGALA revised Guardian Court Report

Based on the 2013/14 consultation on this refined role of the Guardian In January 2014 the Agency established a short-life Task Group involving Guardians led by an Assistant Director. The primary role of this Task Group was to **review and amend Court Report Templates** in the context of the following changes/developments;

- Guardian's practice experience;
- Reviews of Family Justice in both Northern Ireland, England & Wales (2011);
- Lessons from Research and Case Management Reviews;
- Case Law ( Re B-S Children (2013), Re B ( a child) (2013);
- Changes to Legislation in England and Wales -PLO (concluding cases within a 26 week deadline)
- Tri-borough Pilot evaluation in England (2013);
- Consultation/stakeholder feedback relating to the '*Refined Role of the Guardian*'.

The NIGALA made changes to the **Initial Analysis Report** template and revised the **Final Analysis Report** template. The latter containing a framework for an '*options Appraisal*' as part of the Guardian's analysis (Re B: Re B-S)

Having received approval from COAC, the Family Judge and Executive Directors of Social Work, NIGALA plans to move forward to launch both court report templates for use across all courts in 2015/16.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- In 2015/16 NIGALA will undertake a Stakeholder consultation on the revised Guardian Court Report
- In 2015/16 NIGALA will implement the NIGALA Children's Court Report

- In 2015/16 NIGALA will, as part of its re-constitution of its Solicitor Panel, re-introduce reciprocal feedback between solicitors and Guardians.
- NIGALA will strengthen its information on the impact and outcomes of PPI on the improvement of the service.

## 4. Raising the Standards

NIGALA has carried out key pieces of work under the *Raising the Standard* strategic goal including –

- **The NIGALA Professional Standards Review**
- **Revised NIGALA Quality Assurance Mechanism**
- **Leadership and Management Framework**
- **Self-assessment of Board and Committees**
- **NIGALA Policy Review**
- **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

The following are some examples of progress made in this area of quality improvement.

### **NIGALA Professional Standards Review**

#### **Background to the Review**

As part of the Social Care Governance Committee Action Plan 2014-15, it was agreed that NIGALA would review the NIGALA Professional Standards, 2007.

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The standards relate to the day to day work of the Guardian in their role as the independent representative for the child or young person. As such they are specific to the practice of the Guardian.

Whilst the standards are primarily for Guardians a statement of expectation, a common framework for developing and sharing good practice and a basis for demonstrating accountability and achievement, they also provide a transparent statement of intent for service users (children and the courts) and stakeholders.

The aims of the Standards are –

1. To provide a professionally competent service for children.
2. To outline what the courts can expect through an efficient and effective service.
3. To provide an independent voice for the child in court proceedings.
4. To present a measurable criteria by which the service can be monitored, reviewed, appraised and inspected.
5. To adopt a consistent and standardised approach to the role of guardian ad litem whilst ensuring that innovation and creativity are allowed and encouraged.

They are divided into six sub-standards –

1. The Welfare of the Child
2. Guardian Ad Litem Conduct of a Case
3. Report Writing
4. Recording
5. The Participation of Children and Young People
6. Continuous Professional Development

The revised Standards have been updated to make the overall document more concise and reflect the changes that have occurred over the intervening period. In addition the standards



are now outcome focused in line with the recommendations coming out of the RQIA review (2013). The Standards will underpin the NIGALA Accountability Framework. The Standards were approved by the Social Care Governance Committee in March 2015 and following consultation with the Guardian group will be implemented within 2015/16.

## Revised NIGALA Quality Assurance Mechanism

The NIGALA approach to quality assurance was reviewed in 2014/15 following the consultation of the Refinement of the Role of the Guardian (2013).

The quality of professional practice and the performance of the Guardian ad Litem is central to the success of the Agency and to the quality of the service user experience. The Francis Report, proposes an 'integrated hierarchy of standards of service' to promote the likelihood that a service will be delivered safely and effectively. Standards range from mandatory fundamental service standards to discretionary developmental standards, with clear expectation of zero-tolerance towards any organisation providing services that do not comply with the fundamental standards. The standards are set to be evidence-based and measurable, and be clear about what needs to be done to comply. They should also be subject to regular review and modification.

The revised mechanism for quality assurance in NIGALA was agreed as comprising the following;

1. **File Audit** – a move from quantitative audit of closed files to a planned annual thematic approach to file audit.
2. **Introduction of an Audit Mechanism for Professional Practice** – undertaking of thematic audits on specific areas of Guardian professional practice. For example, the SMT or Board might identify a particular area of practice and request that a time limited audit is carried out.

3. **Improved alignment of quality assurance and supervision and appraisal practice** - under the new supervision and appraisal policy, learning and development appraisals will be undertaken by the Assistant Director who in turn will advise the QA&TM of learning needs and any quality assurance issues which may inform the annual audit plan.
4. **Research Evidence and Practice Wisdom** - it will be the responsibility of the QA&TM to disseminate research evidence and practice wisdom through the Agency. For example, this may be the learning from a themed audit which will be disseminated through a workshop or the sharing of new research via the document library.
5. **SCG Committee Responsibility** – SCG Committee to monitor compliance to NIGALA Professional Standards, the appropriate Quality Standards for Health and Social Care and the NIGALA Accountability Framework.

As part of NIGALA's approach to raising standards, a number of audits of practice were carried out in 2014/15;

### **Recording Practice**

A significant challenge facing NIGALA in recent years has been how best to balance the growing demands on Guardians Ad Litem while maintaining high standards of practice which is child focused and timely. Part of this work has included reviewing standards of practice in the context of Agency Policies. In 2014 an audit was carried out on recording practice which considered the important function of recording as part of the Professional role, including evidencing 'quality' and 'accountability'. As a result NIGALA has revised its Recording Policy and standards strengthening links with legislation and information standards.

### **Adoption Reports**

An audit was carried out on adoption reports with regard to timeliness, quality and compliance with statutory requirements and a report on this audit brought to SCGC in March 2015. The audit originated from the Social Care Governance Action Plan 2014/15 and tasked the SCGC

with ensuring that Guardians are fulfilling the statutory obligations placed on them under Adoption (NI) Order 1987.

The report was compiled jointly by the Assistant Director with responsibility for adoption within the Agency and the Quality Assurance and Training Manager. A random sample of adoption case files were selected for audit to include freeing and placement adoptions. The reports were audited against the following:

- Compliance with statutory requirements
- Lodgement on time in line with Court directed submission date
- Use of appropriate report format
- Quality of information
- Overall layout and presentation
- Identification of recurrent issues / themes

Overall a high standard of report writing was identified within the audit with a number of the reports being considered as exemplars of good practice by the auditors. The report also highlighted the importance of opportunities for training and development to address the challenges of adoption. The themes relating to the availability and quality of life story work and differing contact arrangements could usefully form the basis of a future audit to consider issues that could be addressed within the regional adoption forums.

## **Leadership and Management Framework**

The NIGALA Board approved the NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework in March 2014. The Leadership and Management Framework developed for NIGALA in 2013/14 focused on the leadership behaviours of the Senior Management Team (SMT).

In September 2014 the Agency reviewed the implementation of The NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework to take account of the Quality 2020 Leadership Attributes Framework. In October 2014 the Agency tested out the framework in respect of the Senior Management Team in the mid-year appraisal for Senior Managers.



In November 2014 The Senior Management Team to undertook a baseline self assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to deliver to the Leadership and Management Framework Behaviours and Attributes, The outcome of this exercise will contribute to the 2015/16 learning and development plan for senior management.

It was agreed that the NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework would be rolled out across the Agency in 2015/16.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- The NIGALA Action Plan for the support of Senior Managers in delivering to the NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework across the organisation will be implemented in 2015/16.
- NIGALA will develop an Action Plan to consider the introduction of a 360 feedback assessment from Guardians and managers in respect of NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework.
- All staff in NIGALA will be given the opportunity to contribute through a consultation on the NIGALA Leadership and Management Framework being rolled out across the Agency in 2015/16

## **Self-assessment of Board and Committees**

In 2014/15 all Board Committees undertook a self assessment exercise and a review of effectiveness in preparation for the completion of the annual Board effectiveness exercise.

## Policy Review

NIGALA has completed a number of policy reviews during 2014/15. All policies have followed a process of policy review and equality screening, staff consultation which included discussion at staff meetings, joint consultation with the Union and final approval by the Board.

The Next Steps outlined in last year's report concerning the development of a Complaint's Investigation Manual, the treatment of comments within the Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and the development of a Policy Development and Review Schedule were all completed. The following list of policies were consulted upon during 2014/15 -

## Health and Safety

During 2014/15 the NIGALA Health & Safety Policy Statement and associated bulletins have been revised and were approved by the NIGALA Board in April 2015. The annual fire, general and COSHH risk assessments were completed for each NIGALA office during December 2014/January 2015 and DSE risk assessments for staff are ongoing. There was four Carecall Awareness sessions held for staff during 2014 and a number of Stress at Work Awareness sessions were offered to staff during January and February 2015. A stress management action plan is currently being devised for 2015/16.

## NEXT STEPS

**NIGALA will devise a stress management action plan in 2015/16**

**The revised Health & Safety Policy Statement will be submitted to NIGALA Board for approval in 2015/16.**

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## 5. Integrating the Care

The objective of the Quality 2020 strategy to integrate the care is to develop integrated pathways of care for individuals. NI has an integrated HSC system but in order to be effective there should be seamless movement across all professional boundaries and sectors of care. This has implications for the transfer of information and how data is held.

Examples of how this can be done –

More effective and secure info systems to allow for sharing of info across the HSC – *we could possibly use this by way of examples GCIS and how it informs regional statistics.*

Barriers to integrated multidisciplinary and multisectoral working will be identified and removed – *we must have an example of this?*

Other possible examples within this section could be the BME evaluation and the tandem model of working.

As an *Arm's Length Body* and a specialist service, NIGALA sits outside of the integrated health and social care service to some extent and therefore has a greater challenge in evidencing examples of compliance with this particular strategic goal of Quality 2020. However within these constraints we offer the following examples of good practice.

### **Lean Allocation Project**

To support efficient and streamlined working, NIGALA embarked on a lean process review of the case allocation process. The case allocation process identifies which Guardian can take a new case appointment allocated by the court. This process, which has been in place since 1996, needed to be revised in light of the pressure of resources in terms of administrative and management support and fair and equitable case allocation across the Guardian group. The HSC Leadership Centre facilitated engagement with all staff and a pilot phase for case allocation was commenced in October 2014. Weekly communications on the process with refinements and responses to staff queries were issued with follow up

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discussions on the process with administration, management and Guardian staff. Identified changes were earmarked for improvement to the electronic case management system and new specifications for system development were approved for implementation.

The Pilot or testing phase of the Lean Methodology Allocation Project commenced on 6 October 2014. Several aspects of the testing phase proved effective in ensuring that only referrals with adequate paperwork and information are accepted for allocation alongside the introduction of protocols for the management of the timeliness of referrals with the Northern Ireland Court Service, Achievement of allocation of a Guardian to a child within the KPI of eight days improved with no cases being allocated outside of the eight day KPI and the majority of cases being allocated within three days during the Kaizen testing period. This compared to a pre Kaizen position wherein seven cases had waited more than 10 days for allocation; five waited 15 days and one case took longer than 21 days to be allocated.

NIGALA has a key performance indicator of 11 live cases per full time equivalent Guardian (37.5hrs per week for a full time Guardian). When comparing average caseloads for Guardian's for the pre-Kaizen period (April to September 2014) and comparing during Kaizen (October to March 2015) the number of employed Guardian staff meeting the key performance indicator increased significantly with the numbers in the pre-Kaizen period showing 26 Guardians with fewer than the KPI target. Between October and March 2015 this figure has reduced to 12 Guardians.

The revised process for allocation presented challenges for Guardian's. Concerns related to the reliability of the caseload weighting process and the perceived reduction in direct communication from and with the allocating manager

A working group of Guardians, allocation managers and the corporate services manager was established in order to co-produce an alternative set of "case load weighting and allocation solutions" in line with the lean methodology. The Group met on three occasions and agreed a revised proposal aligned with the original objectives of the Lean Methodology Allocation Project.



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The revised Allocation Protocol will be amended to reflect feedback from the original Kaizen testing phase and group discussions. It is proposed this protocol will be adopted to support a revised pilot testing phase in 2015/16.

## **Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Evaluation**

Throughout 2014/15 NIGALA has undertaken an evaluation of practice in working with children and families from BME communities.

In recent years the population of Northern Ireland has diversified, with the number of ethnic minorities more than doubling between 2001 and 2011. Research in the area of working with ethnic minorities in the care system remains limited and there is a significant lack of information in the Northern Irish context. Previous research identified a number of key challenges including language barriers and lack of cultural competency amongst social workers.

The primary objective of this study is to consider the volume of cases referred to NIGALA from ethnic minority families in 2013/14 and generate knowledge from the cases about cultural competency in the Agency.

The research design included a mixed methods approach. Data collection involved three tools, a file audit to review cases referred to NIGALA between April 2013 and March 2014; a survey questionnaire administered to all Guardians and semi-structured interviews with a sample of Guardians.

The study has highlighted the volume and range of BME groups with whom Guardians worked in 2013/14. The survey identified the difficulties experienced by Guardians in building rapport with families when interviewing via an interpreter and the time spent researching cultural factors. A series of recommendations for improving practice will be considered and implemented in 2015/16.



## NEXT STEPS

NIGALA will undertake a further testing phase of Lean proposals to revise the case allocation process in 2015/16.

In 2015/16 NIGALA will launch and publish the findings of the evaluation of Guardian practice in working with black minority ethnic groups.

## CONCLUSION

NIGALA remains committed to quality improvement and continued service development. 2014/15 has proven a challenging year. It is generally accepted that most people struggle with change, but when change occurs within the backdrop of austerity, it can become more difficult to manage. Communicating the need for change effectively will pose continued challenges for the Agency as we move forward.

Under such conditions, the core values of NIGALA have become increasingly important. In prioritising our services, we continue to focus on safeguarding the interests of children in specified public law and adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland. Many of these children represent some of the most vulnerable in society. Maintaining the centrality of children in decision making within NIGALA along with a continued commitment to quality, accountability; and transparency will be the hallmarks of how NIGALA responds to austerity in the years ahead.

Going forward the Agency will ensure that our children and young people remain a priority alongside the continued focus on the development and support of a highly professional, qualified Guardian ad Litem workforce.

