

# NIGALA

NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency

*A voice for Children and Young People  
in Family Courts*

## NIGALA Five Year Review of Equality Scheme

2016/17-2020/21

Conclusions from Review



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NI Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA) has committed to reviewing its Equality Scheme under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) every five years.

Ultimately, the purpose of this review is to take learning and set direction for the coming years by critically evaluating the way the organisation has implemented Section 75 over the past five years.

Below are the conclusions from the recent review.

## Conclusions

### How has the scheme's implementation benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups?

Over the past five years, our developmental work has produced specific outcomes for children with a **disability**. We have developed an app to enable greater connectivity with children who are preschool age or have learning needs. In addition, we have developed a toolkit for skills to reach children with a disability and younger children. These tools have been made accessible to all Guardians for sharing knowledge.

We have also progressed in reflecting and promoting diversity in our resources in relation to **gender identity** (for example by ensuring in our new tool that gender neutral characters with gender neutral clothing are displayed) and family as well as **ethnic background** (reflecting in images families that are reconstituted and families that are not European).

In relation to the workplace, NIGALA has made progress in identifying and seeking to address the needs of staff and candidates with a **disability**. Staff awareness days have proved to be effective in increasing awareness, knowledge and skills of staff and line managers in meeting the needs of colleagues with a particular disability. In addition, Tapestry has given a platform to staff across the regional HSC organisations who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

## **How are leaders within the authority engaged in the scheme's implementation?**

NIGALA board members receive the Annual Progress Report. The Chief Executive provides comment and approves the annual progress report.

Members of NIGALA's Senior Leadership Team are involved in Section 75 implementation in a number of ways:

- Contributing to annual progress reporting by identifying relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility
- Discussion and where required taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team by the Head of Corporate Services, the Facilities and Complaints Officer or the BSO Equality Unit
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff.
- Using their influence to raise equality issues with external stakeholders (such as HSC Trusts, solicitors, and in procurement processes)
- Designing and delivering on initiatives to develop the input from and involvement of children and young people in the work of NIGALA, such as through feedback and co-production.

## **Challenges and how they have been overcome, Good Practice**

Engagement with particular groups of children and young people remains an ongoing challenge. As outlined above, the use of digital technology aided feedback gathering from preschool age children and some children with a learning disability. Likewise, the establishment of a youth forum has been instrumental in facilitating the coproduction of key work, such as a Conference in 2020 entitled 'Are We Listening? 'I have the right to be safe and to have a better life. Make my life as good as it can be'. It was influenced in its design by children and young people and was important for staff working in health, social care and justice. It was an opportunity to participate in reflection, discussion and debate.

The limited ethnic diversity of NIGALA as a staff group vis-à-vis that of the children and young people involved in care and adoption proceedings means that we have to continue to challenge our own ideas and opinions.

## Lessons Learned:

### (i) Outcomes

- We recognise that:
  - A lot more children and young people that we work with do not identify as male or female;
  - We work with an increasing number of carers and foster carers who are same sex couples;
  - The ethnic profiles, countries of origin, needs and experiences of children and young people that we work with have changed in recent years
  - More of our staff now seek to combine work and caring for an older person or a person with a disability. Most of these are female. Their needs may currently not be met by our Carers Leave policy.

### (ii) Business Planning, Policy- and Decision-Making, and Governance

- Equality screening has been mainstreamed successfully in the development and review of corporate policies. The governance arrangements that have been put in place have played an important role in this.
- We recognise a gap in equality screening of decisions.
- To date, we have not requested information on how equality issues have been considered and informed draft policies that NIGALA receives from our provider of Human Resources services.
- We recognise that to date at Business Plan level, the equality objectives that we have included have not related to producing specific outcomes for individual equality groupings (i.e. diverse groups of children and young people). There is scope for building on the current objective, which relates to delivering on our Equality Scheme.

(iii) Monitoring and Engagement

- While we have access to key equality monitoring data in relation to children and young people some equality categories are not currently captured.
- To date, equality and diversity issues have not explicitly featured in discussions at the NIGALA youth forum.
- While engagement with organisations representing children and young people is embedded in our work, working relationships with voluntary sector organisations representing diverse Section 75 groupings are less well established.

(iv) Leadership

- Using our influence to raise equality issues with external stakeholders is an important element of Section 75 implementation and a key aspect of leadership that NIGALA provides (such as HSC Trusts, solicitors, and in procurement processes).
- Working in close partnership with the other 10 regional HSC organisations through the Equality Forum produces important benefits for small organisations in particular, including access to resources and prompts on deadlines. Likewise, awareness of progress across partner organisations can strengthen arguments of the need to bring about progress in one's own organisation. There remains scope for strengthening of sharing of good practice across the forum to enable the organisations to learn from each other.
- There is scope for drawing further on the leadership of NIGALA board members on the equality and diversity agenda.

## Going Forward

(i) Outcomes

- In response to emerging equality and diversity issues as regards the delivery of our functions, over the next five years we will focus on:

- gender identity issues for children and young people
  - issues relating to same-sex couples as carers and foster carers
  - Black and minority ethnic children and young people (in particular those who have been subject to trafficking and child sexual exploitation).
- In relation to our workforce we will devote more attention to the needs of our staff who care for older people or people with a disability. We will revise the Carers Leave policy with a view to meeting their specific support needs.
- (ii) Business Planning, Policy- and Decision-Making, and Governance
- We will seek to develop relevant objectives following on from engagement work with Guardians this work for inclusion in NIGALA's Business Plan.
  - In order to ensure that equality is considered at all times we will:
    - Introduce Equality as a standing item on SLT agenda every six months.
    - Prepare a short paper updating SLT quarterly following on from Equality Forum meetings.
    - Require updates on equality actions on a quarterly basis from those identified as responsible for the action.
    - Consider SLT agenda items which for equality implications and complete equality screening.
    - Provide update to Board on an annual basis.
    - All SLT and Corporate Team will attend screening training by way of improving understanding of equality implications and decisions which may require screening.
  - NIGALA will ask for draft equality screenings to be provided by our provider of Human Resources services alongside the draft policies. In turn, these will inform NIGALA's screening. Screenings will be shared with SLT in future.

(iii) Monitoring and Engagement

- We will explore equality and diversity issues for young people with the youth forum.
- In engagement with the Guardians, we will assess if there is a need to specifically capture other equality and diversity information.
- We will review our working relationships with Section 75 organisations to explore the sharing of resources, information and expertise that NIGALA could draw on in carrying out our functions.

(iv) Ensuring NIGALA staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

- We will review the content of job descriptions in relation to Section 75 implementation prior to being published to ensure the duties are clearly identified.
- We will provide refresher training for SLT and corporate services staff around equality screening.
- We will progress our work on supporting Guardians in continuously developing their cultural competencies as well as strengthening their knowledge and skills in relation to specific needs and issues arising on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Engagement with Guardians will identify further training needs relating to specific equality categories.

(v) Leadership

- We will highlight and demonstrate our commitment to the equality and diversity agenda to new leaders, such as Board members, when they join, including through induction training, and on an ongoing basis.
- The Equality Forum will dedicate more time to the sharing of good equality practice initiatives at its quarterly meetings to facilitate learning between the 11 regional HSC organisations.

**Appendix: List of policies screened from 1 Apr 2016 to 31 Mar 2021**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Policy Title</b>	<b>Decision</b>
2016-17	Use of Agency Workers Procedure	Screened out with mitigation
2016-17	Social Media Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2016-17	Disciplinary Procedure	Screened out with mitigation
2016-17	Capability Procedure	Screened out with mitigation
2016-17	Working Well Together Policy & Procedure	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Leave Pack:  1. Special Leave Policy 2. Employment Break Scheme 3. Flexible Working Policy 4. Term-Time Working Scheme	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Supervision Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Communication Plan	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Tapestry (our Disability Staff Network) Communication and Information Screening	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Family Pack (incorporating Maternity Leave, Adoption Leave, Paternity Leave, Parental Leave, Shared Parental Leave)	Screened out with mitigation



<b>Year</b>	<b>Policy Title</b>	<b>Decision</b>
2017-18	Consultation on Equality and Disability Action Plans 2018-23	Screened out with mitigation
2017-18	Final Equality and Disability Action Plans, Screening Document and Consultation report	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Adverse Incident Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2019-20	Attendance at Work Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Conflict Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Equality of Opportunity	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Environmental Management Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2019-20	Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Whistleblowing Model Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Workplace Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy	Screened out without mitigation
2019-20	Zero Tolerance Policy	Screened out with mitigation
2020-21	Complaints Policy	Screened out with mitigation