# Consultation on the impact of COVID-19 on the Family Courts in Northern Ireland

# INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESPONDENTS

This sheet explains the purpose of the consultation and the implications of your taking part in it. Before you complete the online questionnaire, we need to make sure that you are fully informed about the consultation and are taking part willingly.

## Purpose of the consultation

The research team from the School of Law, Ulster University working on the project *Understanding and Supporting Legal Participation of Litigants in Person* is conducting this consultation to provide the Northern Ireland perspective on similar consultations in England and Wales, such as the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory consultation - <https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/remote-hearings-rapid-consultation>

The team wants to understand the impact of COVID-19 on family proceedings cases in Northern Ireland courts. In light of the requirement to comply with guidance from the Public Health Authority and Northern Ireland Executive to minimise the spread of COVID-19, the operations of the courts and judiciary have necessarily radically altered. The aim is to understand the impact of the alterations on the progression of family proceedings cases and on the working practice of court staff and court users.

## Who can take part?

The consultation is open to anyone who is, or has been, involved in family proceedings cases in Northern Ireland since the end of March when the measures to combat the pandemic were implemented. It is open to the judiciary, legal representatives, litigants, court staff, Court Children’s Officers, Guardians ad litem, McKenzie friends, court interpreters, intermediaries and others who have been directly involved in family litigation procedures. **We regret that it is not open to children under 18 involved in family cases**.

## Taking part in the consultation

Taking part in the consultation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire and to confirm that you understand what is being asked of you and that you agree to take part. The questionnaire takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. If you no longer want to take part, close the questionnaire without submitting your responses. If you have submitted your responses and want to withdraw them, contact the research team using the contact details below, by 5pm on Friday 30 November 2020.

## Data protection

You are not required to give any personal, identifying details about yourself. However, you can give your name and email address if you are willing to be contacted further. These personal data will be stored on a secure server held by Ulster University and will only be accessible by the research team. No personal identification information will be used in the reporting of the consultation. This means that your rights are protected as required by the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 1998. You should also be aware that Freedom of Information legislation allows access to certain non-personal or generalized data, and that the research team has a duty to report to the police any responses which reveals criminal behaviour likely to harm others.

## Reporting

The research team will analyse the data and prepare a report which will be made publicly available on our research project website: [www.ulster.ac.uk/litigantsinperson](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/litigantsinperson)

## Complaints

In the unlikely event of anything going wrong, you can make a complaint verbally or in writing to the Chief Investigator, Prof Gráinne McKeever, using the contact details below. Professor McKeever will be in touch with you about your complaint within five working days. If she is not able to resolve the complaint, you can take your complaint further using the formal procedures. More information on the Ulster University procedure can be found here:

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/75638/Complaints.pdf>.

## Funder

The research is funded by the Nuffield Foundation, which is an independent charitable trust which funds that informs social policy in the UK.

## Research team

The researchers involved in this consultation are:

* Chief Investigator: Dr Gráinne McKeever g.mckeever@ulster.ac.uk
* Dr John McCord ja.mccord@ulster.ac.uk
* Dr Lucy Royal-Dawson l.royal-dawson@ulster.ac.uk
* Dr Priyam Yarnell p.yarnell@ulster.ac.uk

They can be contacted at School of Law, University of Ulster, Shore Road, Newtownabbey, Co Antrim. BT37 0QB. Tel: 02890 366346. Project email: lipni@ulster.ac.uk