

What People Said About the
**PROPOSED NEW RULES
FOR THE INDEPENDENT
GUARDIAN SERVICE**





First, a quick reminder..



The Independent Guardian Service (IGS) is a special programme that was created to help children and young people who come to Northern Ireland alone, without a parent or someone to care for them. These children might have left their country because it was unsafe, or because they were tricked, forced or taken away - this is sometimes called human trafficking or modern slavery.



These children are in a new place where everything is different. They might be scared, confused, and unsure of what to do next. That's why the IGS is important. It gives them a trusted adult - called an Independent Guardian - who helps them settle in, stay safe, and get the help they need.

Independent Guardians also provide help to children and young people who are from or live in Northern Ireland. They may be moved about by older people who make them do things for other people that hurts or abuses children and young people.

The Independent Guardian supports them in many ways, such as going to important meetings, helping with legal matters, or making sure the child's voice is heard.



What did the government do?

The government wanted to make the IGS better and make new rules for the service. They decided to ask people who know about the service, and the needs of the children and young people who use it, what they thought about some changes they were thinking about making.



Who replied?

Five different organisations sent in written responses to the government's questions on new rules for the IGS. These included health and social care professionals, government-related groups, and one charity called Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), who asked children and young people what they thought. VOYPIC works with children who have actually used the IGS, which means their feedback was especially important. Everyone who replied had experience or an interest in helping children and making services better.



What did the government ask?

In trying to make the IGS better, the government looked at who should be allowed to become an Independent Guardian. At the moment, an Independent Guardian must be a social worker and have worked in that role for at least 5 years. This is to make sure they have lots of experience. However, this rule has made it hard to find enough people to do the job.

So, the government asked: should we change the law so that a person can apply to be an Independent Guardian after just 1 year of experience as a social worker? They would still need to be fully qualified, but this could help bring more Independent Guardians into the service and help children sooner.

They also asked whether people with other useful jobs - like youth workers, counsellors, teachers, or people who know about immigration law and rules - should be allowed to join the IGS in other support roles. These people wouldn't replace Independent Guardians but could provide a wider range of help and support for children coming to Northern Ireland on their own.



What did people say?

- Everyone agreed that the 5-year rule should be changed. People thought that changing it would make it easier to have more Independent Guardians and help children more quickly.
- Some people thought 1 year of experience wasn't enough, and that 3 years might be better.
- VOYPIC shared the voices of young people, who said what matters most is what kind of person the Independent Guardian is. Children said they wanted someone who is kind, listens well, explains things clearly, and helps them feel safe.
- Many people said that the IGS could be even better if it included a team of people with different skills. This could include youth workers, legal advisors, or people trained in giving support with mental health. These people could work together with Independent Guardians to support children more fully.
- Some responses also reminded the government that children using the IGS might have been through very difficult experiences. It's important that Independent Guardians and anyone else in the team have training in how to support children who've been hurt or scared in the past.



What happens now?

The government has decided to make changes to the IGS. Independent Guardians will still have to be qualified social workers, but they will only need to have finished their first year of work.

It is hoped that this means the IGS can have more Independent Guardians to help children more quickly. The organisation in charge of hiring Independent Guardians can still choose to ask for more experience if they want, but the law won't force them to.

The government agreed that people working with children and young people who have come to Northern Ireland alone should be specially trained in giving trauma support.

The government also agreed that it's a good idea to bring in other kinds of professionals to help. In the future, the IGS might include roles for people with expertise in counselling, education, law, or trauma support. This could help children get more complete care, which meets all of their needs.

The next stage will be to change the law and make sure that the organisation in charge of hiring Independent Guardians is told when this happens.

The government is thankful to everyone who replied, especially the young people who shared their thoughts. Their views helped make the decision and showed how important it is to listen to children about the services that affect them.



