

Information for families

2021-22

Welcome to Niche...

You have been provided with this information because Niche may have been asked to undertake an independent investigation into the care you or your loved one has received. If you are at this stage then it is likely that you have been, and are going through, a very difficult time. We want to extend our most sincere condolences to you for this and offer the hope that we can answer your questions in a clear and compassionate way.

Niche has been undertaking independent investigations for many years, mostly in relation to healthcare, with all manners of organisations, with many different subjects and we have worked with many different families and carers. We treat each investigation as completely unique and we take the lead from each family in relation to how they (or you) want to engage with us through the process.

This document will provide you with the main information that you might need through this process although you can always talk to your investigation team if you would like more information or assistance.

Why do an investigation?

The purpose of an investigation is to gain an understanding of the full facts of the case which led to the outcome, whatever that might be. When investigations are conducted properly they can take quite some time to complete. This is because we use a broad range of investigative approaches and techniques (otherwise known as fieldwork), these include:

- **Interviews** – in some investigations we can interview hundreds of people. These include members of staff who have left, newer members of staff, senior leaders and other stakeholders.
- **Family engagement** – we spend time taking in your views on how care has been handled, we provide you with updates and we spend time talking to you about the findings when they are ready.
- **Document review** – we spend a significant proportion of the investigation reviewing documents. Sometimes we will read and critique thousands of documents, including the care record and this can take considerable time.
- **Forming a care chronology** – the first stage is that we form a very detailed timeline of events, this can sometimes take a few months to complete. This becomes the framework for our investigation and enables us to ask questions based upon any gaps or issues.
- **Draft reporting** – taking all of the above together we start to put together a draft report which we then refer for validation from key stakeholders.
- **Validation** – we ask the family and organisations to confirm the accuracy of our evidence only and not of the views we form.

Involving families, carers and individuals

It is really important for the views of families and individual service-users to be reflected within investigations, particularly that your questions are answered in the best way that they can be. At Niche we like to involve families, carers and individuals concerned right from the start, this means:

- **We meet you at the start of the investigation to make sure that your views and experiences are fed-in right at the beginning of the process;**
- **We make sure you have written information which details how the investigation will progress;**
- **We will ensure that you have our contact details and any other information that you need;**
- **We can help to put you in touch with other support agencies as needed;**
- **We will treat you with kindness and respect throughout the process;**
- **We will take your views seriously;**
- **We will clearly define the process of the investigation and ask you how, and if, you would like to be kept updated throughout the process;**
- **We will keep you up to date with emails or calls, whichever is your preference;**
- **We will talk you through the main findings of the investigation in a way that you will understand and can relate to;**
- **We can provide you with a 'jargon friendly' version of our final report if this is required; and**
- **We will provide you with additional supportive information through the course of the investigation or review where this is required.**

Are we independent?

As a firm, we value our independence and integrity to the utmost. We have built a solid, long-standing reputation for delivering independent investigations, reviews and evaluations which can be trusted by our clients and regulatory bodies nationally. Niche is a wholly owned (by its Directors), independent consultancy. We have no external shareholders, and no contractual or other relationships with any other organisation which would compromise our independence. Our Directors and senior staff have no conflicting interests in any other organisation and we ask them to make regular declarations in this regard.

It is crucial that our clients, regulators and families that we work with can be assured that we will take an independent view, regardless of the bill-payer and consequences of our findings. We always make clear that we welcome corrections of factual accuracy in our work, but we are wholly and independently responsible for our findings, conclusions and recommendations. No other agency – including our client – has the authority to “sign off” our report, or to insist on a particular form of finding, and we would escalate to senior staff any effort to influence our conclusions in this way.

What to expect next.

Going through the investigation process as a family can be a very difficult and frustrating experience, particularly as you want answers now, or, you may feel that the answers are obvious as you have already reached the conclusions that you want to. We ask you to bear with us through this process.

In terms of next steps you should expect the following:

- To be contacted to arrange an initial meeting;
- To be given the names and contact details of the investigation team;
- To understand and be able to contribute to the terms of reference and to ask all of the questions you feel you need to ask; and
- To put together any questions you might have for Niche not covered by the above.

We will provide more information as the investigation progresses.