

Safeguarding and looked after children

National results for children's social work practitioners survey 2010 (NAT '10)

This is Ofsted's first annual survey of social work practitioners across local authorities in England.

The social work practitioner survey was conducted at the same time as a survey for third sector organisations. This report only shows the results from the social work practitioner survey at a national level; a separate report is available showing national results from the third sector.

The survey is based on 4,141 responses.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Survey background

This is Ofsted's first annual survey of social work practitioners across local authorities in England.

The social work practitioner survey was conducted at the same time as a survey for third sector organisations. This report only shows the results from the social work practitioner survey at a national level; a separate report is available showing national results from the third sector.

How to use this report

This report has been designed to help you easily understand and interpret the results of the survey at a national level and is intended to provide an overview of the wider survey findings.

It is divided into an executive summary and sections covering: demographics, induction, caseloads, training, workload, line management, organisational learning, communications, recording and sharing information, equality and diversity, the running of the service and summaries.

The percentage of positive responses is featured throughout this report. These refer to the combination of strongly agree and agree answers provided by respondents. Aggregated percentage positive scores may vary by plus or minus one percentage point after rounding.

A total of 4,141 social work practitioners took part in the survey overall, of whom 3,514 were working full time and 627 part time.

Percentages do not always add up to 100%. This is due to rounding and removal of not stated responses.

Survey methodology

The survey completion period ran from 22 February 2010 to 2 April 2010.

All eligible social work practitioners (defined as professionally qualified social workers registered with the General Social Care Council who work directly with children and young people) were invited to take part.

An appointed local authority contact in each authority was responsible for distributing the survey internally to all eligible social work practitioners by email.

The survey was administered primarily online. The survey was hosted by Ipsos MORI and all completed surveys were received directly back to Ipsos MORI.

Survey branded emails and letterheads were provided to help local authorities to communicate the survey internally.

Executive summary

This 2010 survey on safeguarding and looked after children paints the national picture of social work practitioners' views for the first time.

There were positive responses on training and levels of line management support received by social work practitioners.

However many social workers felt they did not have enough time available to them to work as effectively as they would like with the children and young people on their workload. Suggested solutions included increased staffing and more effective caseload management.

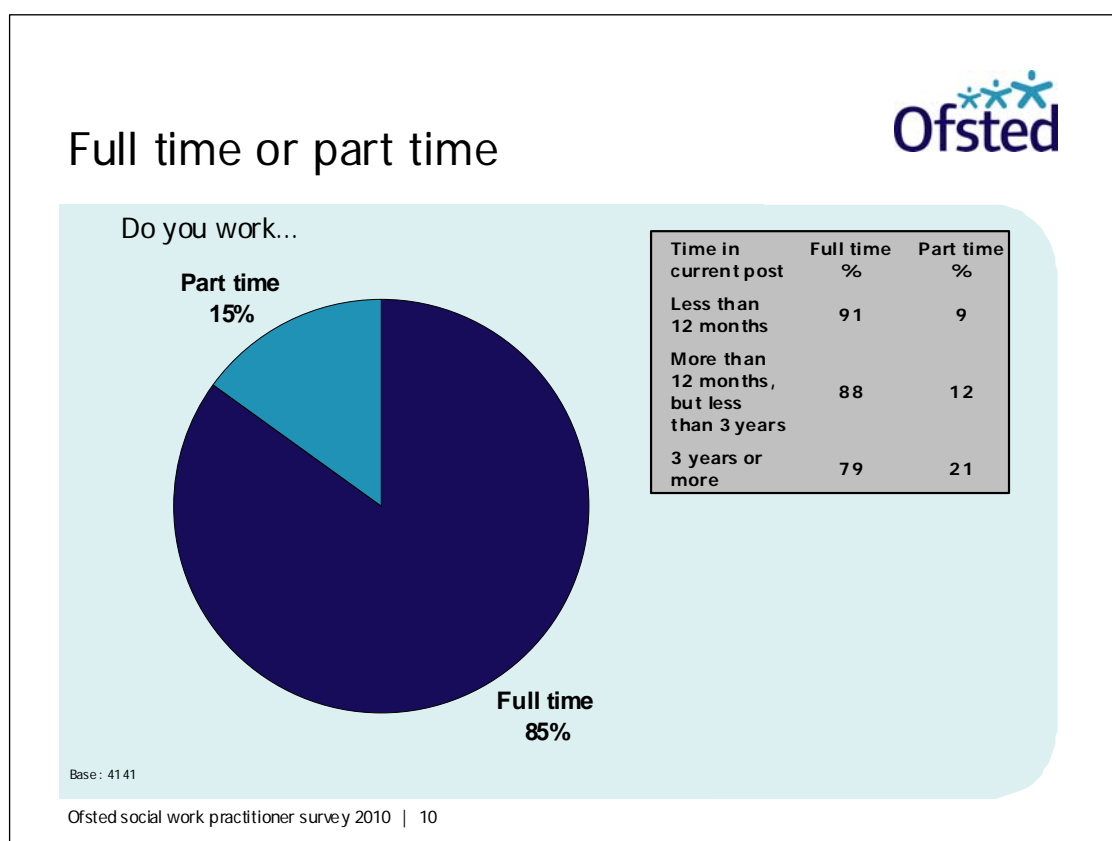
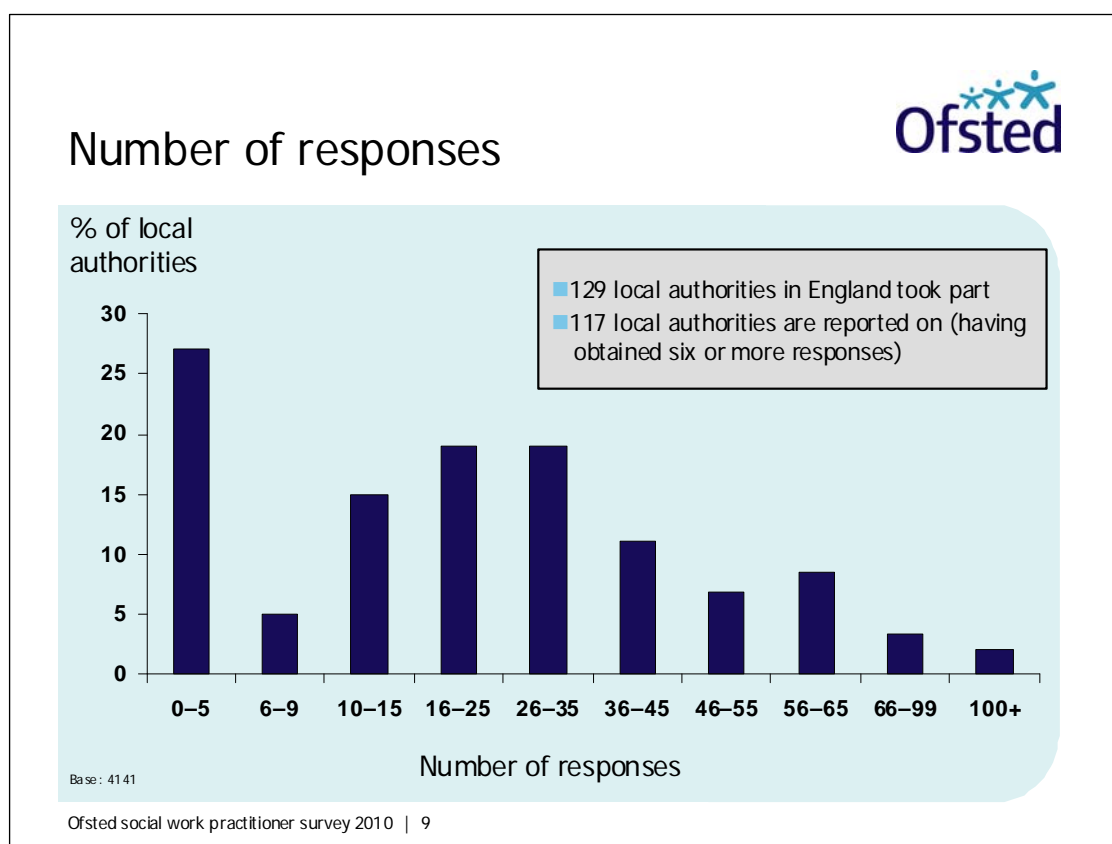
Generally, social work practitioners did not feel encouraged to suggest improvements or to have a say in the running of the service.

It appears that many local authorities find it a challenge to communicate the relevant issues raised in serious case reviews and policy and procedure updates.

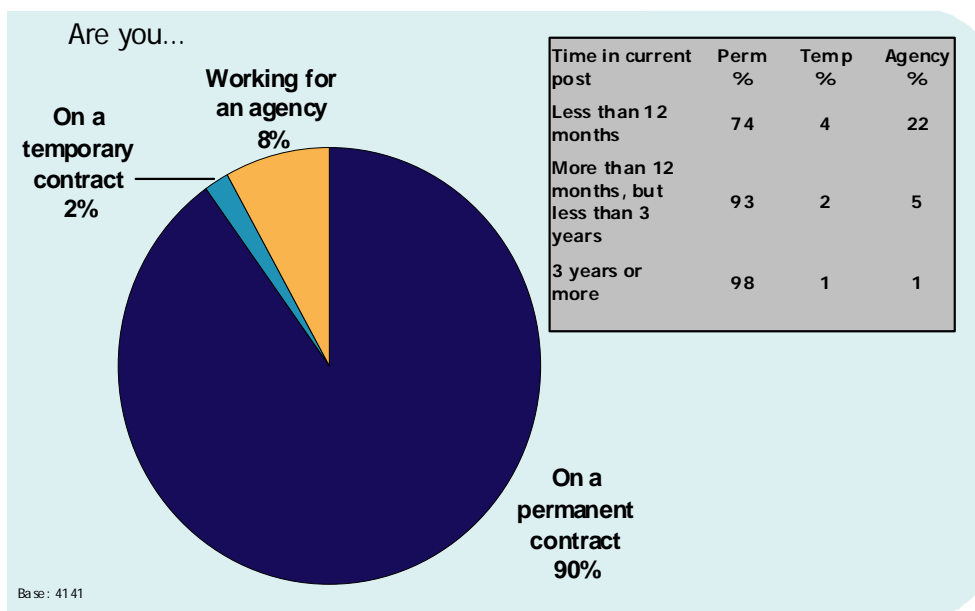
Many respondents felt that induction programmes had not been effective in preparing individuals for their role.

Finally, there were issues about internal communication and information sharing, as well as between local authorities and partners.

Profile of responses

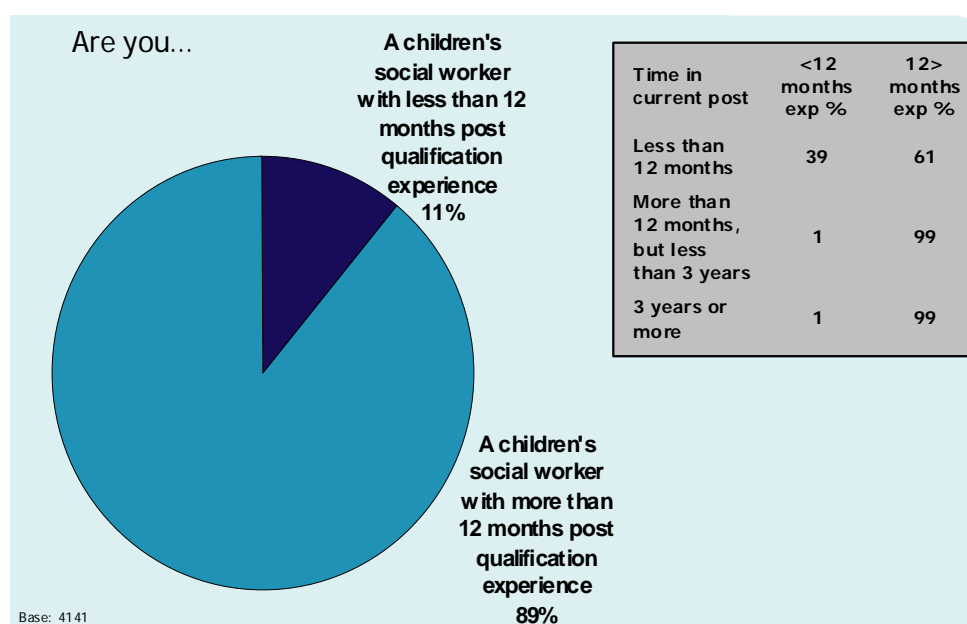


Contract



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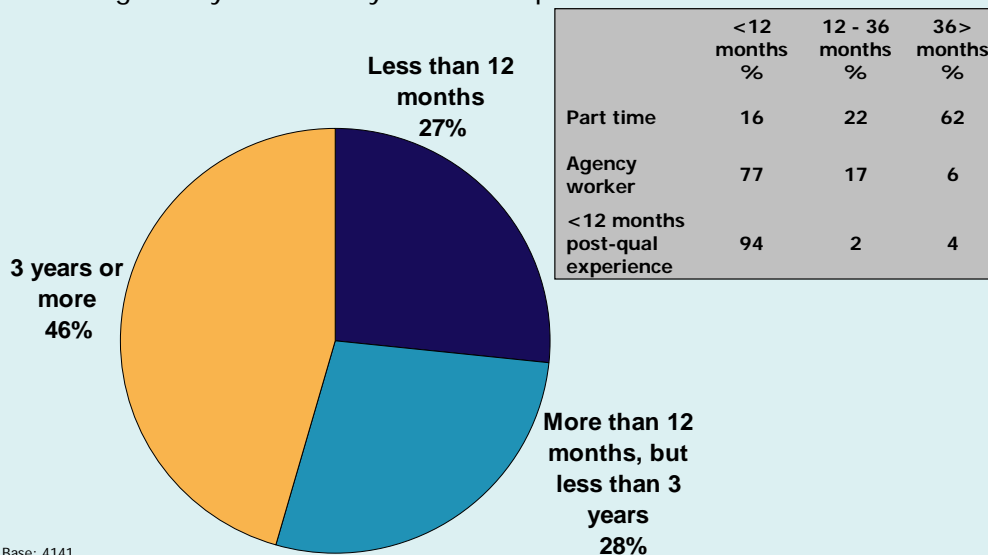
Post qualification experience



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Time in current post

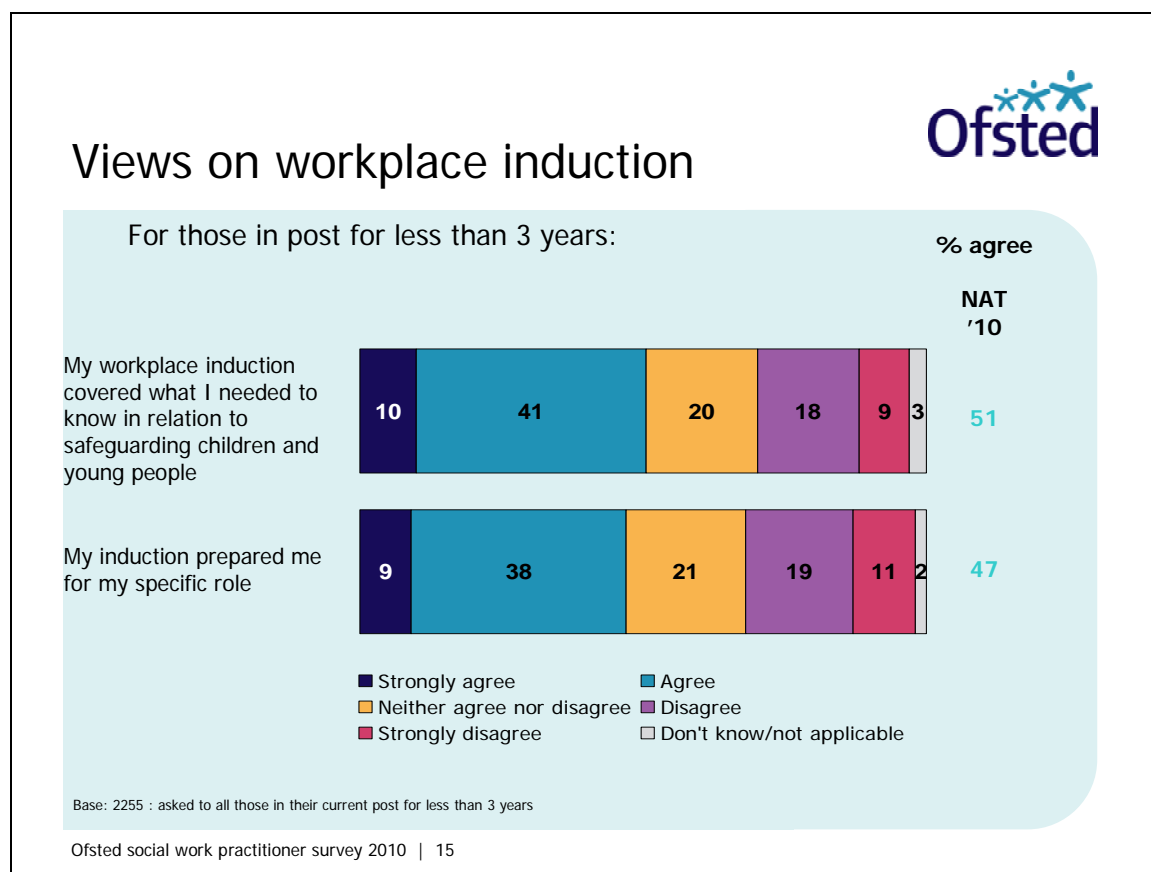
How long have you been in your current post?



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Induction

Induction is not necessarily equipping newly appointed social workers with what they need to know or preparing them for their role. Approximately 30% of responses were negative, although a fifth neither agreed nor disagreed with the questions posed. This suggests that induction could be more effective generally.



Caseloads

For newly-qualified social workers, just over half agreed their caseloads were protected sufficiently to allow them to undertake their safeguarding responsibilities.

Anonymous comments included:

‘Case loads are too high which means children and families are not visited as often as they should be. There is an acceptance that social workers will work in their own time, e.g.: writing court reports at home. This standard practice but has a detrimental impact upon the wellbeing of social workers and contributes to retention problems’.

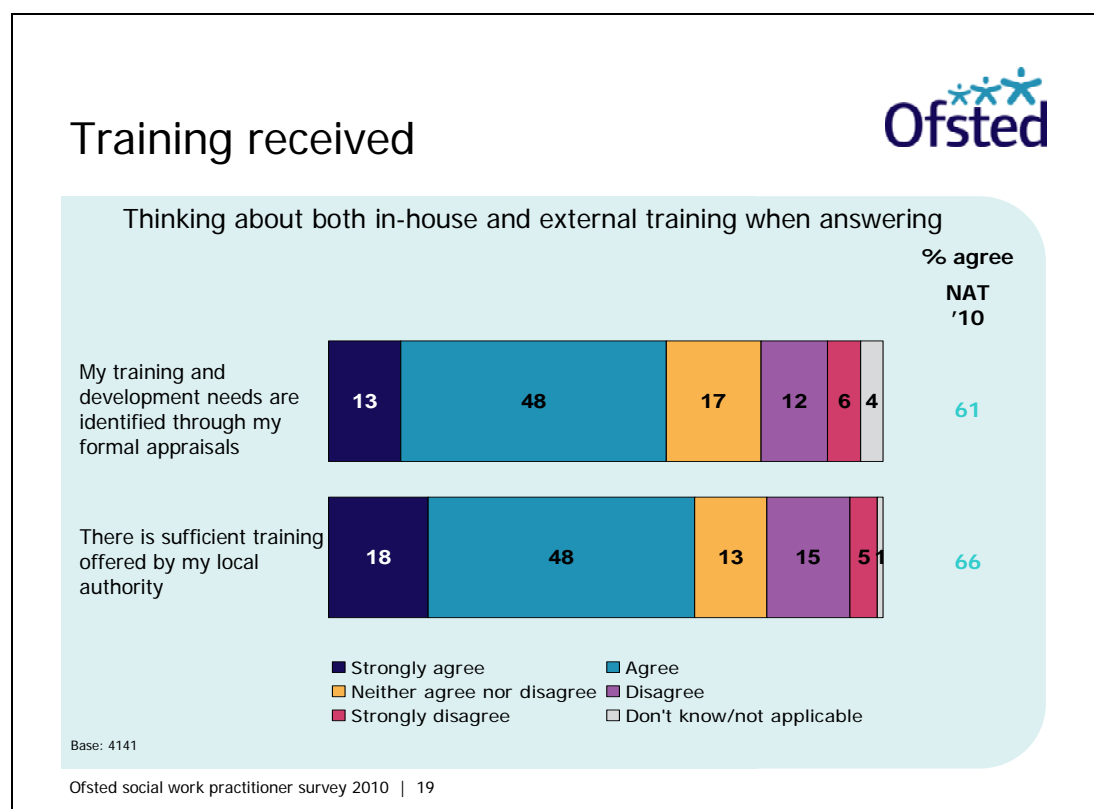


Training

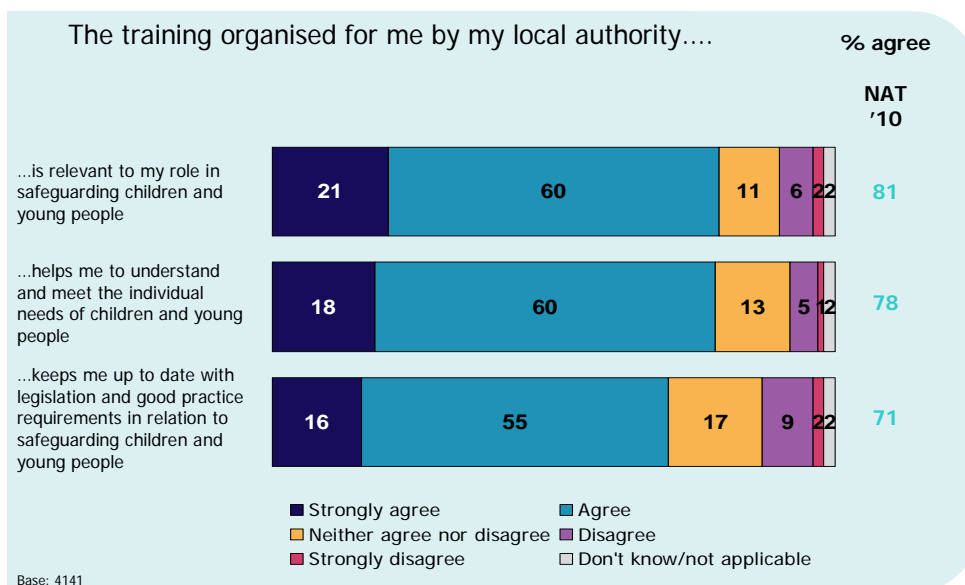
Just under two thirds of social work practitioners agreed there was sufficient training on offer. Training is largely viewed positively, particularly the relevance of the training received. Anonymous comments included:

‘Safeguarding training is of a very high quality and is multi-agency. This is helpful to gain an understanding of how other agencies work and interact with Children's Services’

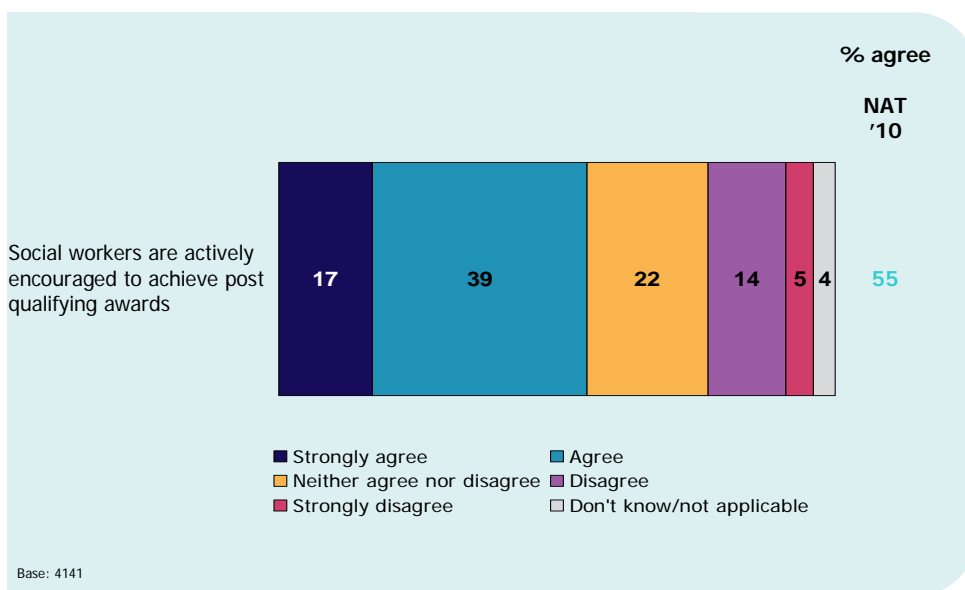
‘During training we are provided with policies and legislation to complete assessments or work legally, but when I have returned from training there is a barrier to implement what I have learnt. This is due to our managers focusing on other aspects of the job (i.e. performance and targets) rather than implementing good practice that would benefit frontline workers’.



Perceptions on the training provided



Post qualifying awards

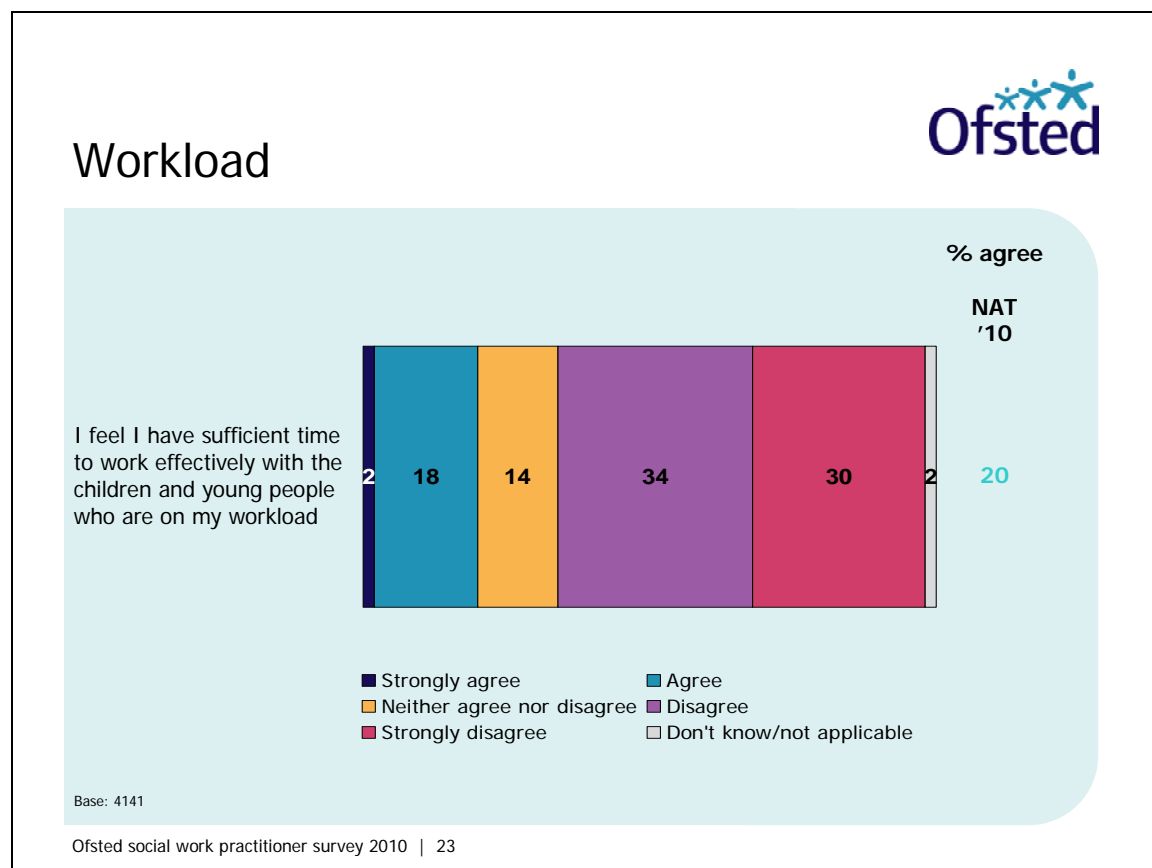


Workload

Sixty-four percent of respondents disagreed that they had time to work as effectively as they would wish to with children and young people. Identified causes for this included levels of paperwork; time spent recording information electronically; and sheer volume of work. Only just under a third of respondents agreed that there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced staff available and a quarter that there is effective caseload management system in place. Anonymous comments included:

‘Workloads, expectations and demands on social workers are unmanageable. The majority of us are working long hours to simply keep up. This issue of long hours is ‘hidden’ due to the expectations of management and the ethos of disciplinaries. We are frightened to say that we cannot manage our workloads’

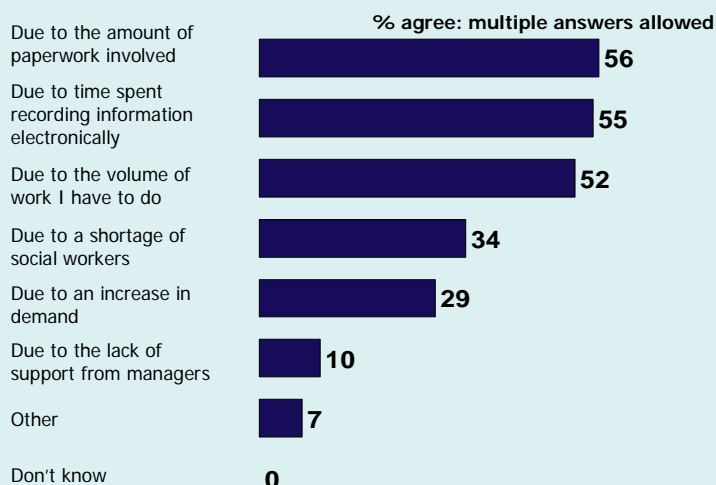
‘The dedication and skills of social workers who manage high case loads within chaotic structures are a strength. I would say the willingness of individual social workers to prioritise children’s needs, despite working in at times unsafe conditions and even if this means many unpaid hours of work, is the biggest strength’.



Views from those with insufficient time



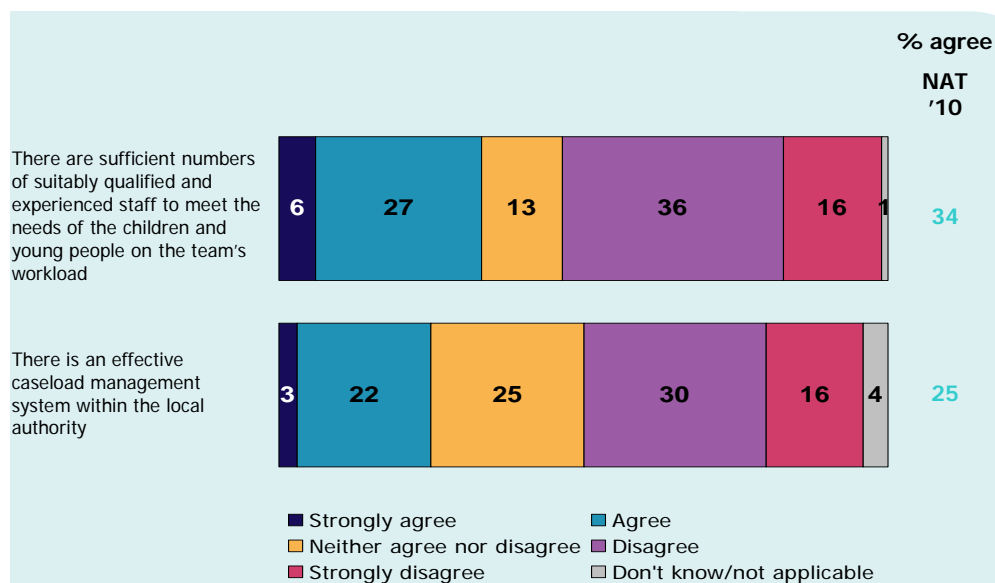
Reasons why insufficient time to work effectively with the needs of the children and young people on your workload?



Base: 2626 : asked to all those who felt they had insufficient time

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Managing workload



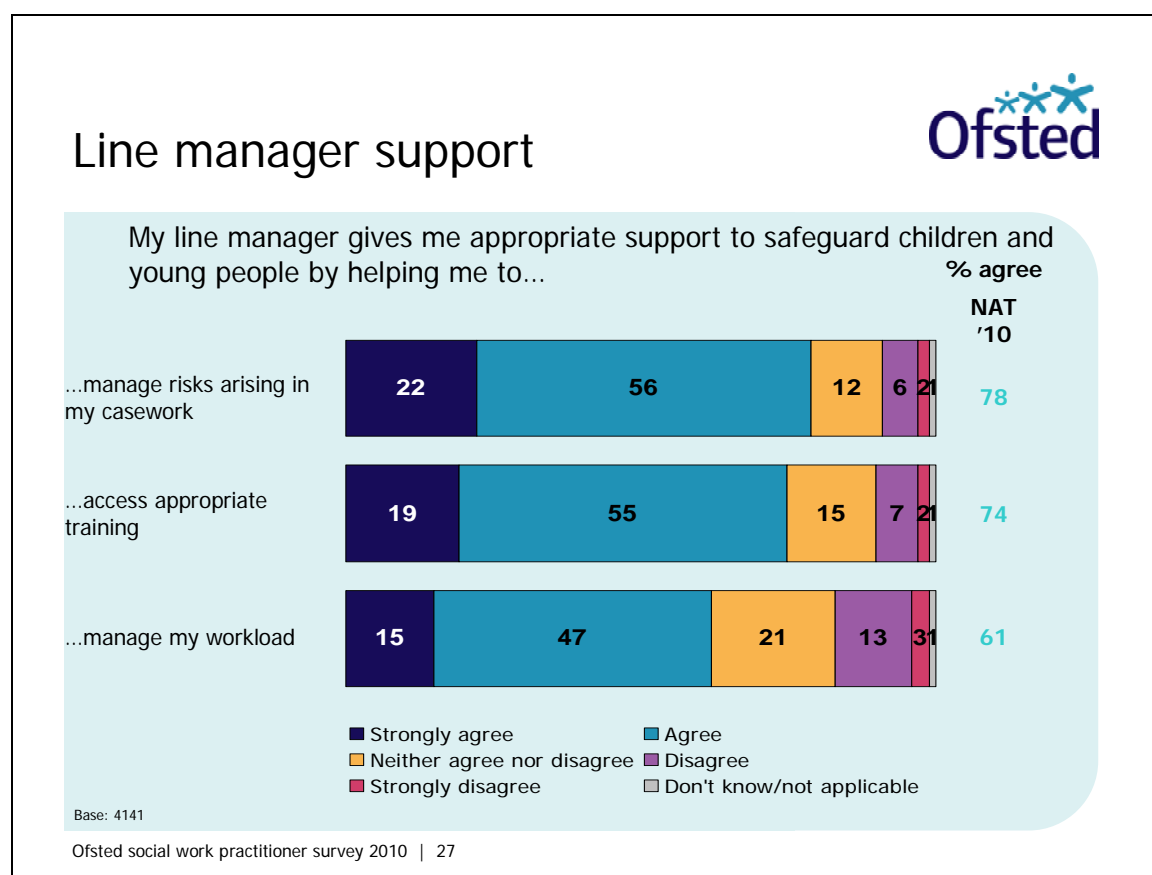
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Support received from line managers

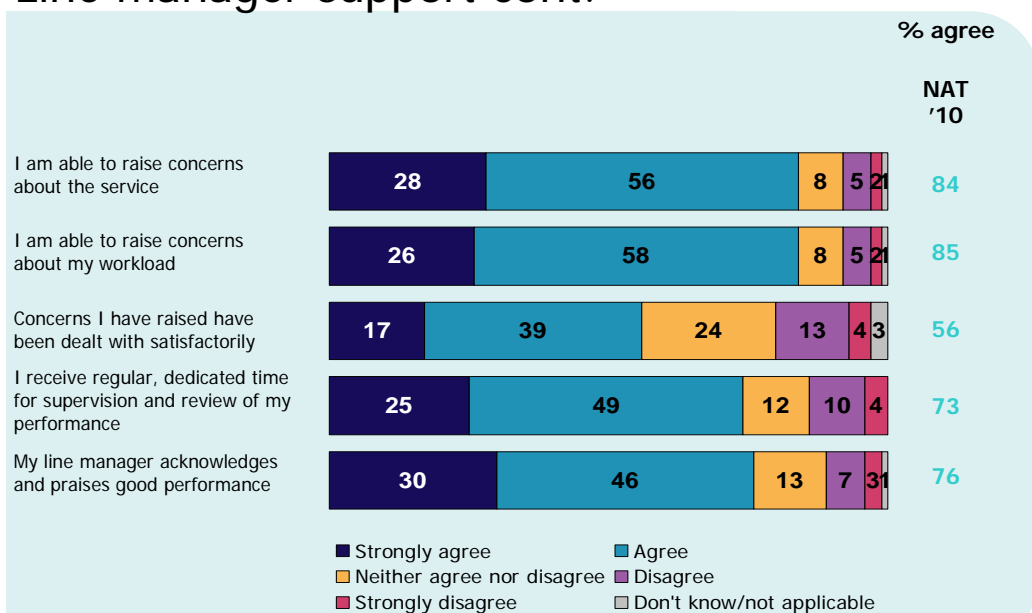
Across the country, line management appeared to be seen positively. However, it appears that managers may not be as equipped to address specific concerns since fewer people feel that any concerns they have raised have been dealt with satisfactorily (see Appendices, Q11). Anonymous comments included:

‘Social workers on the ground are given time to express their views regarding the cases they are working on before decisions are made. This has not been my experience elsewhere. Middle management are extremely supportive and encouraging. A creative approach will be taken to look at more complex cases. Whilst finance has to be considered, children's safety comes first’

‘In safeguarding services, there needs to be clear and consistent decision making at line manager level and also at service manager level. A clear process for challenging decision making without fear of reprisals’.



Line manager support cont.



Base: 4141

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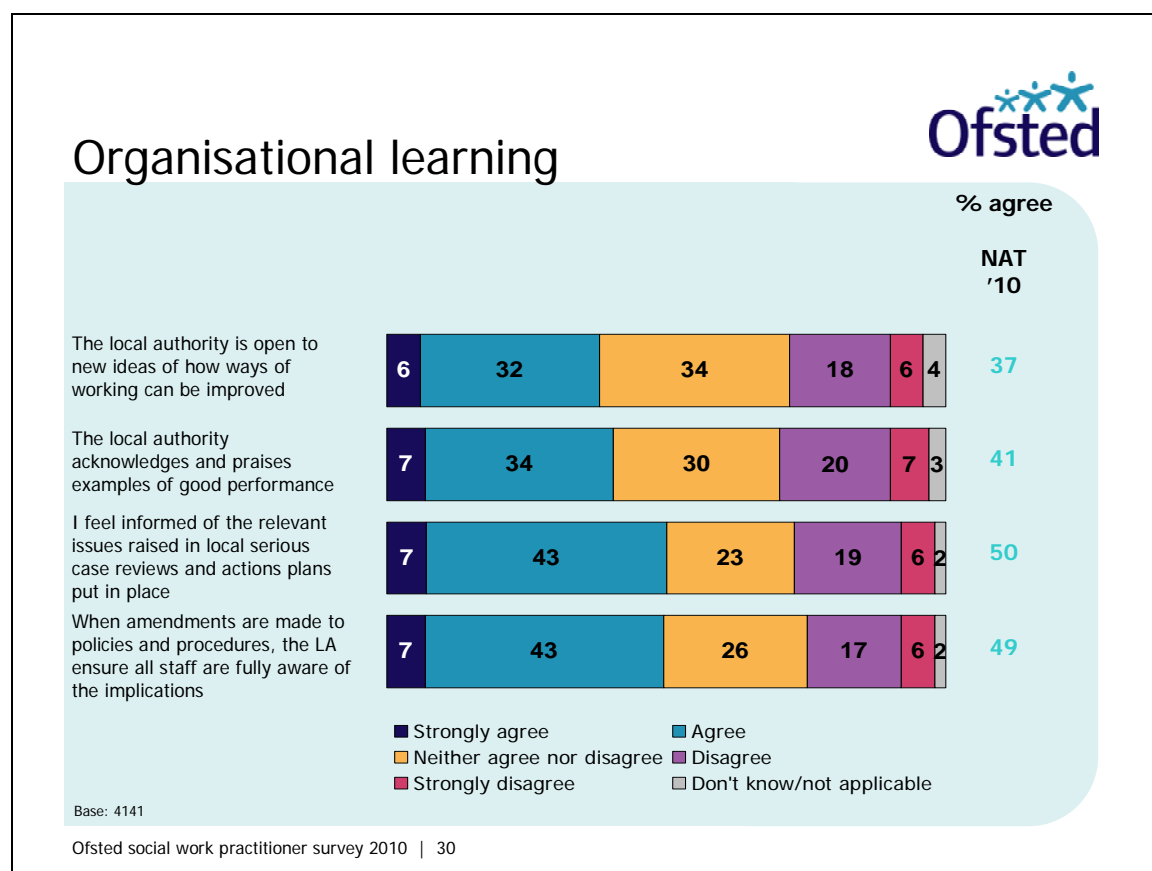
Organisational learning

Half of the respondents agreed they felt informed of issues arising from serious case reviews and also agreed that the local authority ensure all staff are aware of the implications when policy and procedure amendments are made.

Fewer (41%) agreed that their local authority praised examples of good performance and only 38% agreed the local authority is open to new ideas of how ways of working could be improved. Anonymous comments included:

‘Frontline workers and managers form a cohesive set of teams working together in a supportive way. My team meets daily in the morning to discuss the day's business’

‘Far greater consultation with front line staff as to how the service could be improved. Senior managers need to accept constructive criticism; as opposed to becoming vitriolic when suggestions re. improvements are made’.

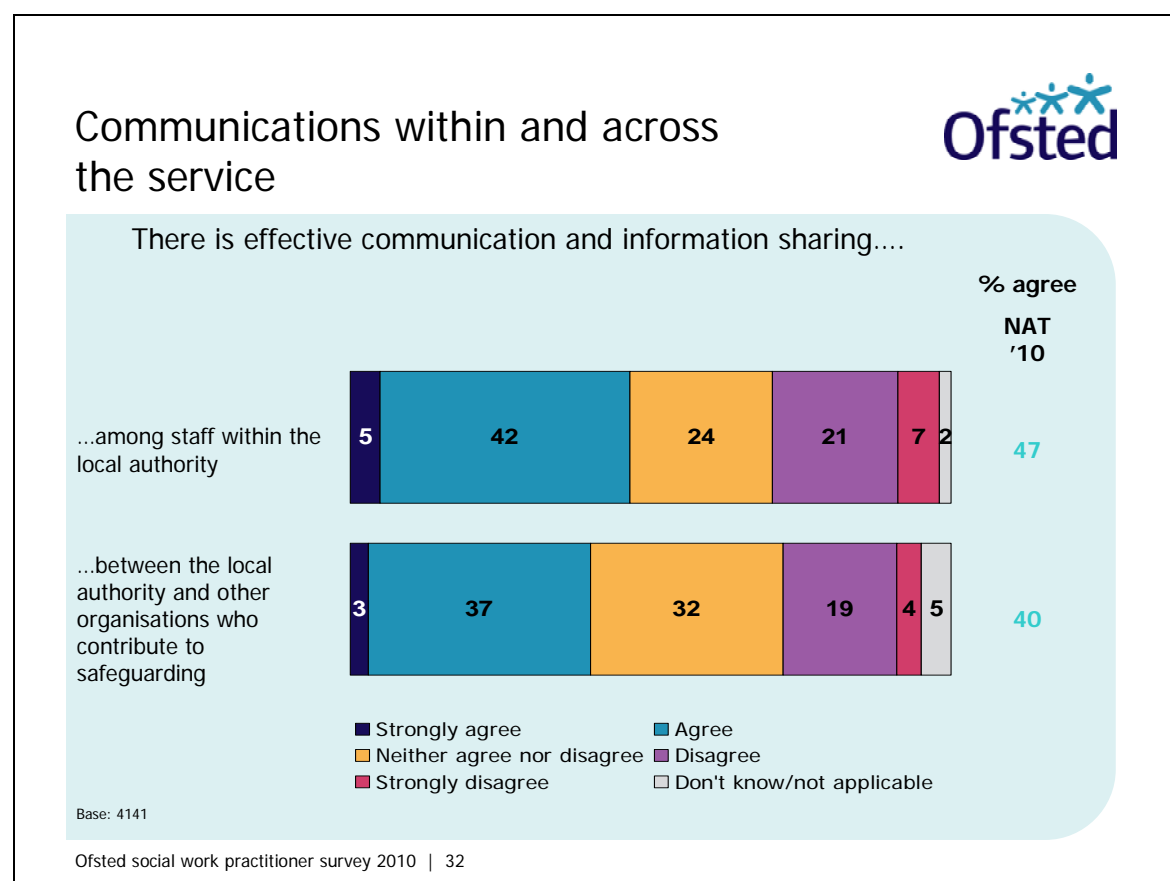


About communications

Fewer than half of the respondents agreed that communication and information sharing was effective **within** their local authority and 40% suggested this was the case **between** their local authority and other organisations contributing to safeguarding.

Nearly a third of respondents were neutral when asked whether communication and information sharing was effective between the local authority and other organisations who contribute to safeguarding (see Appendices, Q15b). Anonymous comments included:

'Communication on all levels is non-existent, this makes poor working relations. There is a lack of respect and care for us as human beings, we feel powerless. We have no say in basic decisions such as what is on our desk, how and where we want to sit'.

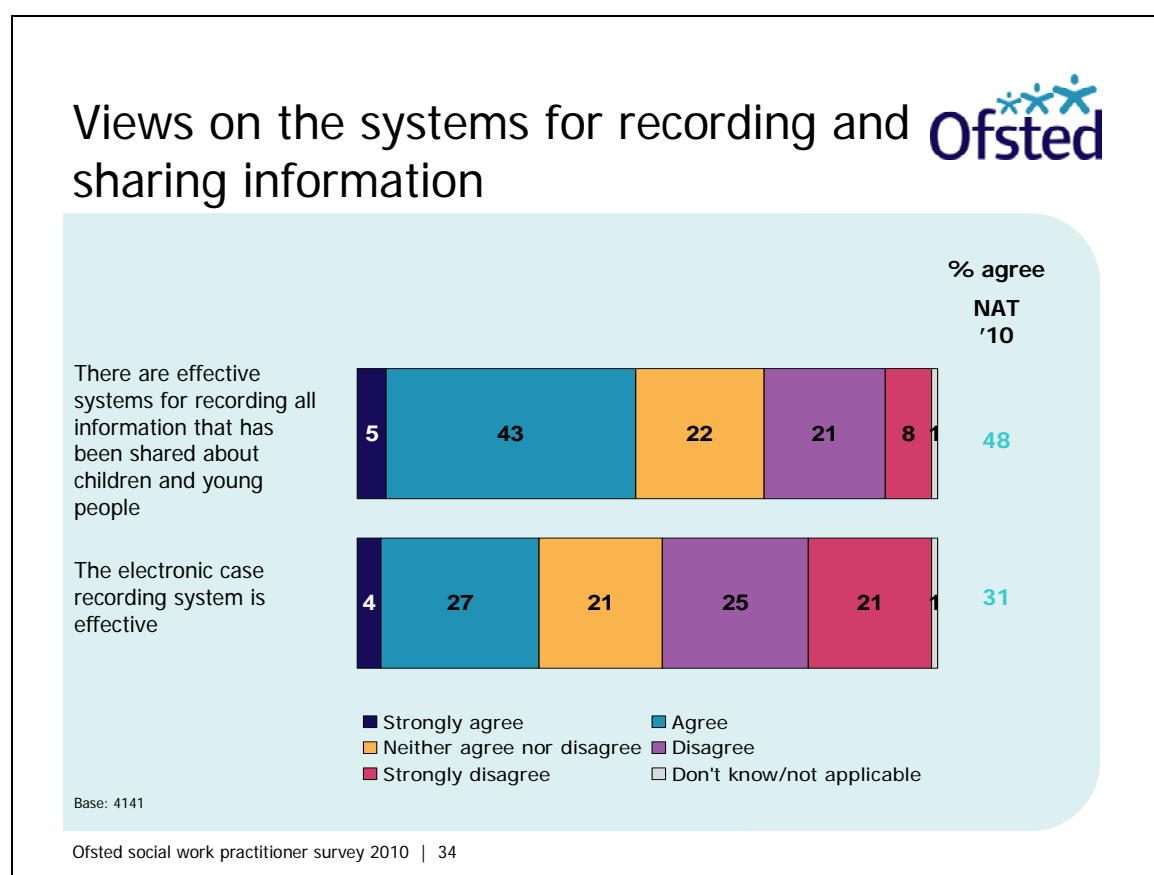


Recording and sharing information

Just under a third of respondents agreed the electronic case recording system was effective; nearly half actively disagreed. Anonymous comments included:

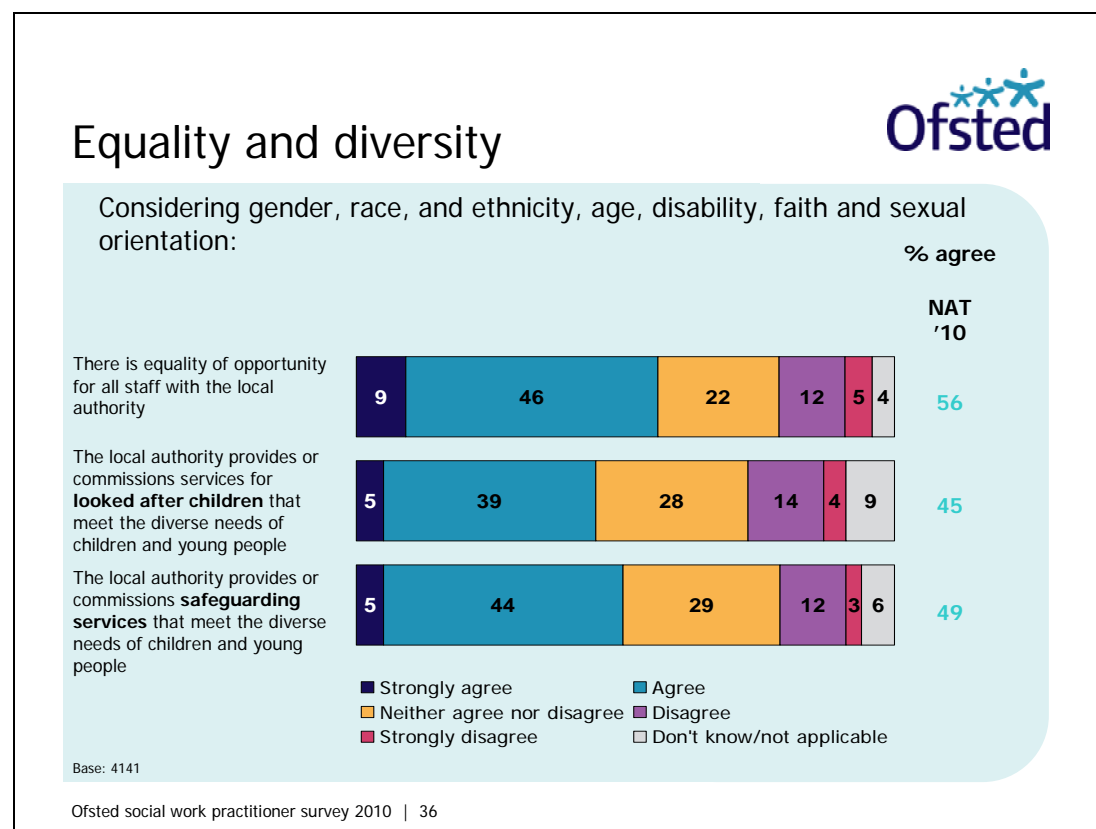
'The impact of inefficient electronic recording systems and bureaucracy in general needs to be given a significant review to ensure that children and young people get a quality service and time with their social workers'

'Electronic recording is an excellent idea but only when the information is on the system, this takes time and capacity (which is in short supply)'.



About equality and diversity

Just under half of respondents agreed the diverse needs of children and young people are being met. However, this is an area of uncertainty with 29% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

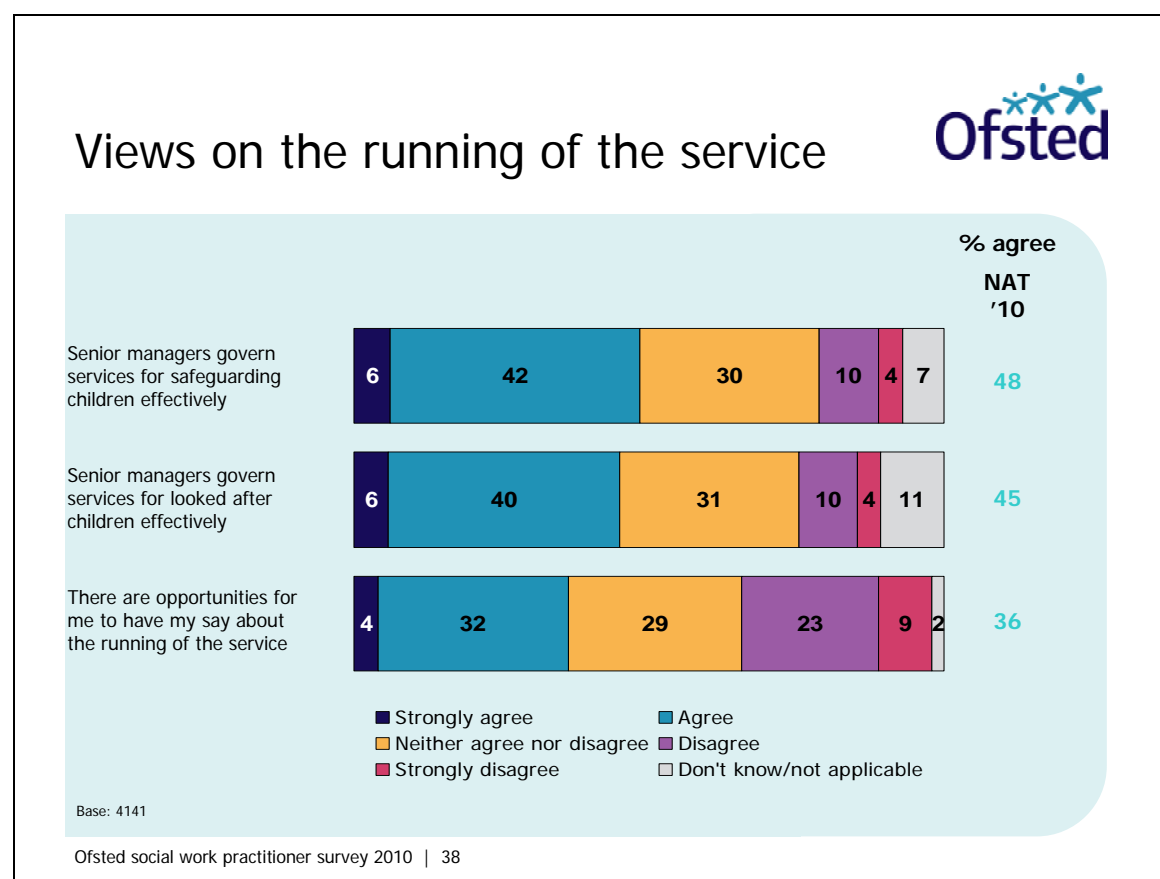


About the running of the service

Just over a third agreed there are opportunities to have their say about the running of the service. Anonymous comments included:

‘Children's Services have well structured procedures in place to safeguard children in the borough. Refresher courses are encouraged on a regular basis. Reminders of good practice’

‘The Management structure regularly hears our complaints and gripes but does little to remedy them resulting in disharmony in the workplace and far too much scope for important issues to be missed, which has the potential to have cataclysmic effect on the children that we aim to safeguard’.



Appendices

| Summary of all questions | | |
|---|---------|------------|
| | Agree % | Disagree % |
| Q1) My workplace induction covered what I needed to know in relation to safeguarding children and young people | 51 | 27 |
| Q2) My induction prepared me for my specific role | 47 | 30 |
| Q3) As a newly qualified social worker...My caseload has been protected sufficiently to allow me to undertake my responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people | 55 | 25 |
| Q4a) My training and development needs are identified through my formal appraisals | 61 | 18 |
| Q4b) There is sufficient training offered by my local authority | 66 | 19 |
| Q4c) The training organised for me by my local authority... is relevant to my role in safeguarding children and young people | 81 | 7 |

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| Summary of all questions | | |
|--|---------|------------|
| | Agree % | Disagree % |
| Q4d) The training organised for me by my local authority... helps me to understand and meet the individual needs of children and young people | 78 | 7 |
| Q4e) The training organised for me by my local authority...keeps me up to date with legislation and good practice requirements in relation to safeguarding children and young people | 71 | 11 |
| Q5) Social workers are actively encouraged to achieve post qualifying awards | 55 | 19 |
| Q6a) I feel I have sufficient time to work effectively with the children and young people who are on my workload | 20 | 63 |
| Q7) I feel that there are sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and experienced staff in the team to meet the needs of the children and young people on the team's workload | 34 | 51 |
| Q8) There is an effective caseload management system within the local authority | 25 | 46 |

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Summary of all questions

| | Agree % | Disagree % |
|---|------------|---------------|
| Q9a) My line manager gives me appropriate support to safeguard children and young people by helping me to...manage risks arising in my casework | 78 | 8 |
| Q9b) My line manager gives me appropriate support to safeguard children and young people by helping me to...access appropriate training | 74 | 10 |
| Q9c) My line manager gives me appropriate support to safeguard children and young people by helping me to...manage my workload | 61 | 16 |
| Q10a) I am able to raise concerns about the service with my line manager | 84 | 7 |
| Q10b) I am able to raise concerns about my workload with my line manager | 85 | 7 |
| Q11) Concerns I have raised with my line manager have been dealt with satisfactorily | 56 | 17 |

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Summary of all questions

| | Agree % | Disagree % |
|--|------------|---------------|
| Q12a) I receive regular, dedicated time for supervision and review of my performance with my line manager | 73 | 14 |
| Q12b) My line manager acknowledges and praises good performance | 76 | 10 |
| Q13a) The local authority is open to new ideas of how ways of working can be improved | 37 | 24 |
| Q13b) The local authority acknowledges and praises examples of good performance | 41 | 26 |
| Q13c) I feel informed of the relevant issues raised in local serious case reviews, and action plans put in place | 50 | 25 |
| Q14) When amendments are made to policies and procedures, the local authority ensure that all staff are fully aware of the implications for their practice | 46 | 23 |
| Q15a) There is effective communication and information sharing among staff within the local authority | 47 | 28 |

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Summary of all questions

| | Agree % | Disagree % |
|---|------------|---------------|
| Q15b) There is effective communication and information sharing between the local authority and other organisations who contribute to safeguarding | 40 | 23 |
| Q16a) There are effective systems for recording all information that has been shared about children and young people | 48 | 29 |
| Q16b) The electronic case recording system is effective | 31 | 46 |
| Q17) There is equality of opportunity for all staff within the local authority | 56 | 18 |
| Q18a) The local authority provides or commissions services for looked after children that meet the diverse needs of children and young people | 45 | 18 |
| Q18b) The local authority provides or commissions safeguarding services that meet the diverse needs of children and young people | 49 | 15 |

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Summary of all questions

| | Agree % | Disagree % |
|--|------------|---------------|
| Q19a) Senior managers govern services for safeguarding children effectively | 48 | 14 |
| Q19b) Senior managers govern services for looked after children effectively | 45 | 13 |
| Q19c) There are opportunities for me to have my say about the running of the service | 36 | 33 |

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