

# Children on Independent Reviewing Officers

A report of children's views by the  
Children's Rights Director for England



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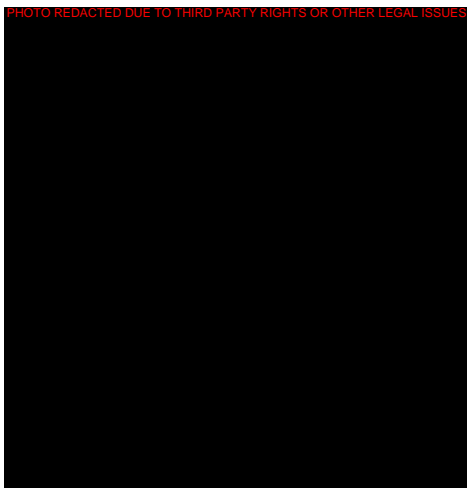


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# Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England



As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people in care for their views about their rights, their welfare, and how they are looked after in England. The law also gives me the duty to ask children getting any sort of help from council social care services, as well as care leavers and children and young people living away from home in any type of boarding school, residential special school or further education college.

As well as asking children and young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, with my team I also give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people in care, getting children's social care support or living away from home. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

Independent Reviewing Officers (usually shortened to 'IROs') are professionals working with children in care in addition to their social workers. Each child in care should have an IRO. The IRO's job is to check

that the council is doing what it should be doing for the child while they are in care, to go to all the child's reviews and to make sure they are done properly, to check on the child's care plan, and to make sure the council takes proper notice of the child's wishes and feelings. The government is checking how IROs are doing in those tasks, and it has just issued a new handbook giving new guidance on how IROs should work for children. There is also a lot of discussion nowadays about how IROs should work in the future - for example, which organisation they should work for. I therefore decided to check directly with children in care what their experience has been of IROs and their work.

Our reports of children's views are all written so that they can be read easily by everyone - including children, professionals and government ministers. You can find and download copies of all our children's views reports (and a Young Persons' Guide to the new IRO handbook), on our children's website: [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan'.

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# How we asked the children for their views

We used a web survey to ask children for their views and experiences of Independent Reviewing Officers. We invited children in care to take part by writing to their local social care councils, asking them to pass on our invitations to children in their care. We made sure that only children in care, children being looked after by their local council or care leavers took part in our survey by only allowing it to be filled in by people who had the passwords we had sent out for them. The survey ran from December 2010 to February 2011.

Where people asked for paper copies of the survey, rather than filling it in on line, we entered their answers on the computer when the paper copy was sent back to us. We also sent copies of the survey in different languages for anyone who asked. We sent out copies in 12 different languages other than English that were asked for. These were Pashtu, French, Vietnamese, Dari, Kurdish, Sorani, Farsi, Simplified Chinese, Albanian, Fullah, Tigrinya and Punjabi. We had answers sent back to us in three languages other than English; these were French, Vietnamese and Punjabi.

In this report we have set out the answers children and young people gave us to every question we asked them. Where we asked an 'open question' without giving choices to choose from, we have given all the answers that came from more than one in 10 of the people who answered that question. Because the children used many different words for similar things in their answers, we have grouped together those answers which say much the same thing.

We wanted to know whether particular groups of children and young people had different experiences or views about IROs, so for each question we checked whether there were very different answers between boys and girls, between children aged under 14 and young people over 14, from children in different sorts of placements, from asylum seeking young people, or from disabled children and young people. Where we found big differences, we have said so in this report. We counted a difference of 10 percentage points or more as a 'big difference'.

Where we have given a percentage in this report, it is always the percentage of all the children and young people who gave an answer (even to say 'not sure' or 'don't know') to that question. To make sure that the percentages aren't misleading, though, we have not given a percentage number if fewer than 100 people answered that particular question.

Where we have put a child or young person's exact words in this report as a quotation, this is because what they wrote was a good example of what others had said, or was a clear summary of what others had said.

We know that in a few local authorities, staff used different methods to encourage children to take part in our survey. We did some cross-checking on the responses that came in and there was no evidence that the support had made any difference to the answers the children gave.

Another point we need to make about this survey is that while we were carrying it out, we did get some emails from IROs saying that they did not think we would get answers we could use from the children, and that they would not understand important questions like the one where we asked which organisation children thought IROs should work for. We don't agree: we asked the children to say where they were not sure of how to answer a question. On the important question of which organisation children thought IROs should work for, we are clear that the many children who weren't sure enough to answer actually said that (in fact 32% said they weren't sure), so that the 68% who did answer the question believed they did have a valid view to give about which organisation IROs should work for in the future.

In this report, we have not added our own professional comments or views, and we have not left out any views from children and young people that we, professionals or the government might disagree with. As with all our reports of children's views, we have done our best to write this report so that it can be easily read by children themselves, by professionals working with children and by politicians.

# The children who gave us their views

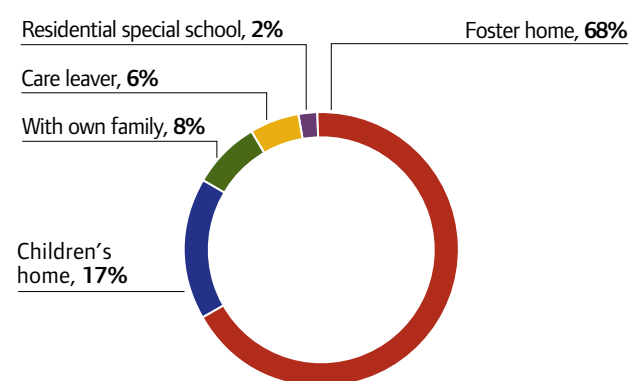
Altogether, 1,530 children and young people answered our survey to give their views on IROs. They came from 118 different local authorities in England. They were all children in care, children being 'accommodated' in a placement by their local authority, or care leavers. In this report, we have used the words 'children in care' to include all children being looked after by their local authority, whether this is because they have been put into care by a court order or because they are being 'accommodated' in a placement by the council by agreement with their parents. This is because the children themselves talked about being 'in care' if they were being looked after by their local council, however they got there.

Of the 1,444 who told us their age, the average age was 14. Out of the 1,453 who told us their gender, 51% were girls and 49% were boys. Of the 1,455 who told us their ethnic background, 83% said they were white, 6% that they had a mixed background, 5% that they were black, another 5% that they were Asian, and 1% that they had other ethnic backgrounds.

We asked how many children would describe themselves as asylum seekers, and 77 (5% of the 1,412 who answered this question) said they were asylum seekers. We also asked whether or not children would describe themselves as disabled, and 166 (12% of the 1,436 who answered this question) said they were disabled. We asked them about their disability, and the three most usual answers were learning disability (53 children), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (29 children) and autism (20 children).

Figure 1 shows the different placements children told us they were living in at the time of our survey. Just over two thirds (68% of those who answered this question) were living in foster homes and 17% were living in children's homes. Some children and young people were living in very different settings. Eight per cent were living at home with their family, but with support from social care services. Six per cent were care leavers living independently and a small number (22 children) were boarders in residential special schools.

**Figure 1: Where the children responding were living**



Based on the responses of 1,432 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

For all the questions we asked for this report, we have checked whether there were any big differences in the answers given by children in foster care and children in children's homes, and whether children in care but living at home, or care leavers, had very different views from children and young people generally.

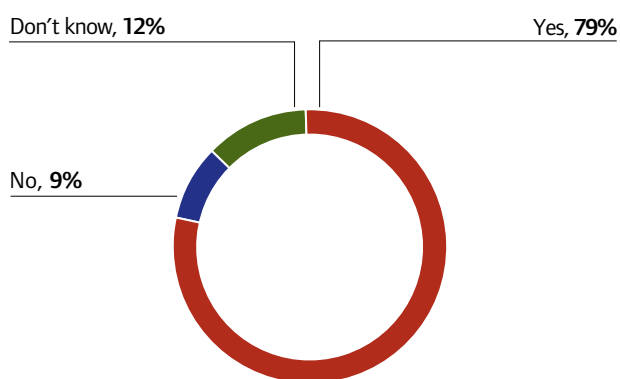


# Having and contacting an Independent Reviewing Officer

Before we explained what an Independent Reviewing Officer is, we asked children and young people in our survey whether or not they already knew what an IRO is. Out of the 1,485 who answered this question, **two thirds (66%) said they did know what an IRO is. Older young people were more likely to know what an IRO is; 71% of those aged 14 or over knew what an IRO is, while only 58% of those under 14 knew.** Although the numbers were too small to give a percentage (there were fewer than 100 children in each group), children living in residential special schools were less likely to know what an IRO is, and care leavers were more likely than other children and young people to know this.

Then we asked whether the children and young people in our survey actually had an IRO at the time they were filling in the survey. Figure 2 shows their answers.

**Figure 2:** Responses to the question ‘Do you have an IRO?’



Based on the responses of 938 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**Nearly eight out of 10 children and young people in care in our survey (79%) told us they had an IRO.** Less than one in 10 said they didn't have one. But as many as one in eight (12%) said they didn't know whether or not they had one.

There were no big differences between boys and girls, between over- and under-14s, or between children living in different sorts of placements in whether they told us they had an IRO. Disabled children in care were no more and no less likely to say they had an IRO than children generally in the survey. The law does not say that care leavers should have an IRO, and care leavers were much less likely to say they had an IRO than other people in our survey. Still, 28 of the 61 care leavers who answered this question said they did have an IRO.

We asked those who told us they had an IRO whether they knew how to contact their IRO if they wanted to. Out of the 730 children and young people who answered this question, **71% who had an IRO said they knew how to contact their IRO, and 29% said they didn't know how to contact them.** There were no big differences between different groups of children and young people, except that **care leavers were more likely than others to say they didn't know how to contact their IRO** (though we need to be careful not to be too sure of this, because the numbers were small – nine of the 19 care leavers responding who had an IRO said they didn't know how to contact their IRO).

We then asked those who had told us they had an IRO and knew how to contact them, whether they had ever actually had to contact their IRO themselves. We asked them not to count talking to them when they were both at review meetings. We had answers to this question from 506 children and young people, and **one in eight (12%) who knew how to contact their IRO had actually contacted them.**

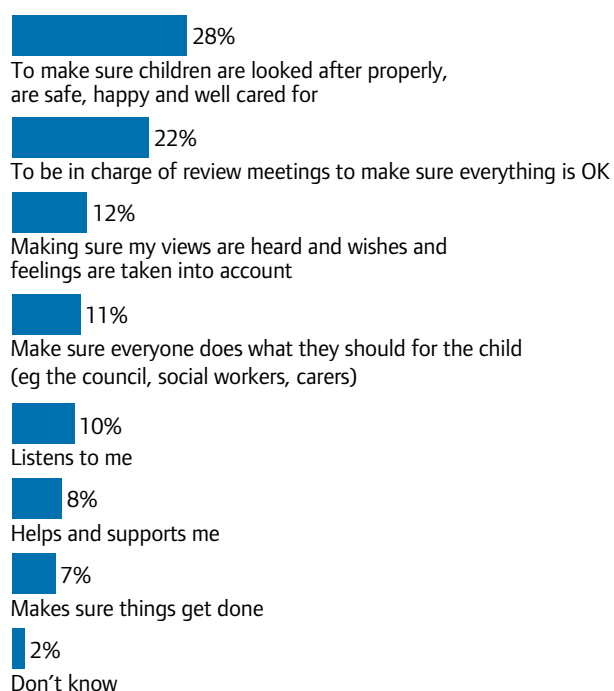
Although the numbers were too small to make any real comparisons between different groups of children in how they answered this question, one finding did stand out. **Not one of the care leavers who said they had an IRO told us they had ever contacted their IRO.**

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# What IROs do

Figure 3 shows what children and young people in the survey thought should be the main job of an IRO from their point of view. We asked them to write down just one main job. These are the jobs written by the children and young people themselves – we didn't make any suggestions or give them a list to work from.

**Figure 3:** Responses to the question 'What are the main jobs of an IRO?'

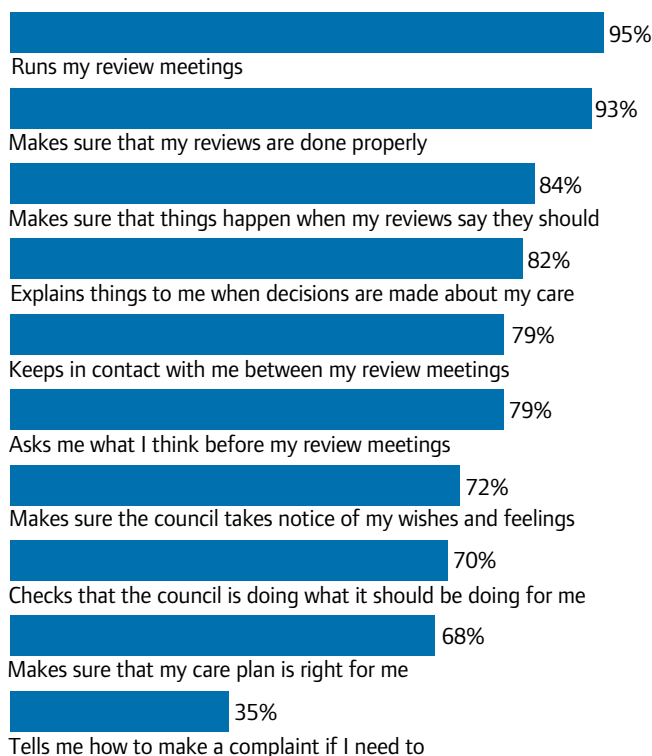


Based on the responses of 858 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

From what children said, **two jobs stood out as the main jobs they expected from IROs. One was checking that the child is being looked after properly, and the other was running their review meetings.** These were followed, some way behind, by making sure that children's wishes and feelings are taken into account, and checking that professionals are doing what they should be doing for the child. **Checking on things clearly came out strongly from our survey as a top IRO job.**

Our next question was to find out what IROs actually did for children. This time we did give the children a list to go through, asking which ones their IROs did for them. We took the list from the law and guidance about what IROs should do. Figure 4 gives the children's answers.

**Figure 4:** Responses to the question 'What does your IRO do for you?'



Based on the responses of 698 children who answered this question. Percentages are based on multiple answers provided by the children responding.

**The children clearly saw IROs very much as the people who do care reviews.** Top of the list of what they actually do for children came running reviews, making sure reviews are done properly, making sure that review decisions are carried out, and explaining decisions which usually come from reviews.

Lower on the list came **things that fewer than three quarters of the children answering this question saw their IROs as doing for them: making sure that their wishes and feelings are taken into account, making sure that the council is doing what it should for them, and making sure that their care plan is right. Very much bottom of the list was telling children how to make complaints if they need to.** That last job was the only one that fewer than two thirds of the children told us their IRO did for them.

**The government sees IROs as very important in making sure that each child's care plan is right for that child. This job came low on the list of things children told us they thought their IRO actually did for them, with just over two thirds (68%) of the children telling us their IROs did this.**

Many children wrote what their IROs did for them in their own words. Here is a selection of how they described their IROs and what they do:

- Someone who checks with you what's going on
- They come to my LAC reviews
- To check that everything is being done correctly for the young person
- To overlook the care of a young person and give a non-biased opinion on that child's situation
- Makes sure county council is doing their job properly
- To make sure children's voices are heard
- They want to try and make things the best things can be in care
- To help decide what is right for a young person and basically be the boss of a review
- Make sure the council takes proper notice of your wishes and feelings
- Someone that you can put your views forward to and they listen to you
- To make sure I am treated good and looked after proper
- Makes sure my care is done properly
- To make sure everyone does their job right
- Run the meetings and make sure everything is fair and make sure the young person's views are taken into account
- To make sure my social worker and other people do a good job for me
- They try to make your dreams and wishes come true... I think my IRO is the best. Just talk to them and it helps solve everything, especially if your social worker is always busy
- Keeps an eye on your care plan
- They talk to the council to try and make better plans
- Somebody who goes to your reviews and to represent me and chase up things from reviews
- Listen to what a child is saying and try to put things right for the child if they feel things are not going right
- To review the care of young people and help to provide an independent view.

We asked children to tell us anything else their IRO did for them, which we hadn't put on the list of IRO jobs. Two came top of the list of these other things, each from more than one in 10 of the 284 children who told us about extra things their IRO actually did for them. The first of these was **making sure the child is OK and happy**, and the second was **being good at listening to the child and making sure they could have their say**. One wrote to us about how their IRO 'makes me feel like a person rather than a number', and another about how theirs 'listens to my requests and tries her best to make things happen'. Other examples of what children wrote to us about things their IRO did for them were: 'she phones me up to make sure I'm OK'; and 'explains what all the big words adults use to me are and what they mean'. Two children wrote to us that they particularly liked the fact that their IRO brought food to share with them whenever they met together.

We asked the children who had contacted their IRO for help themselves to tell us the reasons for contacting them, and what their IRO had done.

Here are the top five reasons children gave us for contacting their IRO, from the 56 children who told us their reasons.

What was the reason for contacting your IRO?	Number of children
To talk about personal problems	11
Contact issues	10
Placement issues	8
To talk about my review	7
To ask for help/advice/information	6

Here is the full list of what the children told us their IRO had done to help them when they had contacted them. A total of 52 children told us what their IRO had done.

What did your IRO do to help you?	Number of children
Contacted other people to sort things out	19
Visited and talked with me	14
Gave me information or explanations I wanted	9
Called an extra review meeting for me	4
Helped me to move to a new placement	3
Helped me to make a complaint	3

Some children wrote more about what their IRO had done. Three children wrote about how they had been extremely worried about something, and how **their IRO had calmed them down and then given them practical help to sort things out**: 'just spoke with me and helped me to calm down'; 'tell me to calm down and she came over to talk to me'.

Although the numbers of children who had contacted their IRO and told us about that were small, these lists (which were from the children themselves without any suggestions from us) show some of the things that children need from their IROs and the sort of help they can get from them.

As well as finding out what IROs did for children, we wanted to find out how children thought their IROs were doing at what they did. So we asked children and young people what they thought their IROs did really well, and what their IROs needed to do better in the future.

Altogether, 614 children told us what they thought their IROs did really well for them. Here is the list of things that at least one in 10 of those children told us their IRO did really well for them. The percentages are out of the 614 children who answered the question.

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What does your IRO do really well for you?	
Listens to me	17%
Chairs my review meetings well	13%
Makes sure I get my say	12%
Sorts things out for me	12%

Examples of things children told us their IROs sorted out for them were care plans, contact arrangements and personal problems. Thirty-one children (5%) said there was nothing they thought their IRO did really well for them, and 13 children (2%) said they thought their IRO did everything really well for them.

Along with listening, children told us about how their IRO also explains things and makes sure that their views are taken into account: 'always asks me what I think about the choices made for me'; 'he is very good at explaining things and a good listener'; 'listens to what I am saying and feeling'; 'helps me push for things I want, helps me have a voice'. Explaining why some things can't happen can be as important as listening and helping the child to have a say in things: 'supports me in everything I need and helps me understand why some things can't happen'. Chairing meetings well for children was important: 'makes my reviews easy and understandable'. A few children praised their IROs for always turning up and for being on time: 'always attends meetings and listens and never late always early'; 'is reliable and turns up for meetings on time'. One summed up the importance of honesty and respect for a child's views: 'Tells me the truth and doesn't try to make things seem different than what they are, she also respects my opinions.'

When we asked what children thought their IRO needed to do better, we got a very strong message back. Although **approximately 500 children had told us of things they thought their IRO did really well for them, around a quarter of the 614 responding told us things they thought their IRO should do better. This is strong support from children for how IROs are doing. Over half of the children who answered the question about what IROs needed to do better said that there was nothing theirs needed to do better.**

**The only thing that more than one in 10 of the children answering the question thought their IRO needed to do better was to be more available and easier to contact:** 'come and see me more'; 'keep in contact throughout your stay in care, not just at the meetings'. Two people wanted to keep the same IRO: 'be the same person'; 'have the same person at least some of the time'.

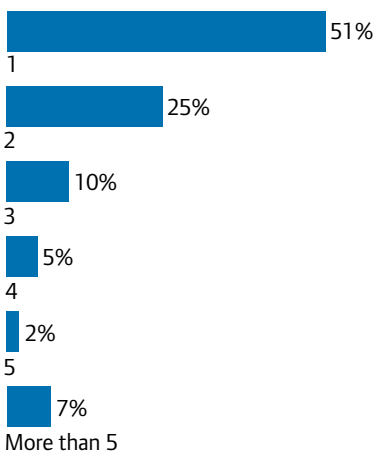
We found that boys and girls were similarly positive about their IROs, and so were children aged under 14 and young people aged 14 and over.

# How many IROs have children had?

One of the things that the government has said is important about IROs is that children in care will probably keep the same IRO even when their social worker changes. We therefore asked in our survey how many IROs each child had already had by the time they filled in the survey. Their answers are in Figure 5.

**Close to half the children (51%) had only ever had one IRO. A quarter had had two IROs so far, and almost a quarter (24%) had already had three or more IROs since coming into care.** We did not find that either boys or girls, or those under or over 14, were more likely to have had more IROs since coming into care. Disabled children in care were more likely to have had more changes of IRO, though again we need to be careful in saying this because that information came from only 68 disabled children.

**Figure 5:** Responses to the question ‘How many IROs have you had since you came into care?’



Based on the responses of 680 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

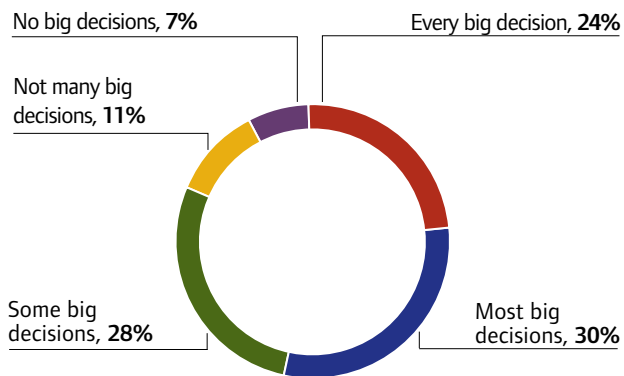
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# Making decisions – IROs and reviews

Decisions about their lives are important to children in care, and IROs are important in checking on the decisions that are made. So we asked children how many of the big decisions in their lives they thought their IRO took part in. Figure 6 gives their answers.

**Figure 6:** Responses to the question ‘How many big decisions does your IRO take part in?’

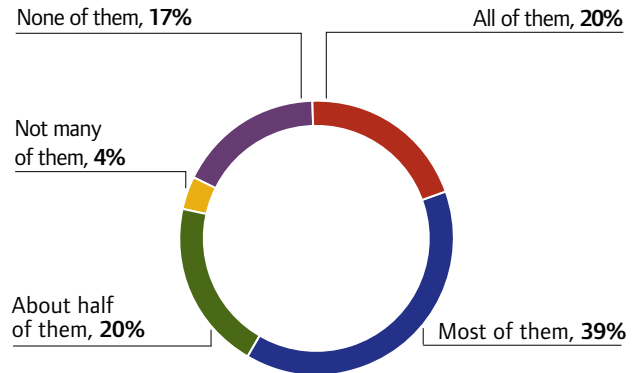


Based on the responses of 680 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**Over half the children (54%) told us they thought their IRO took part in most or all of the big decisions about their lives in care. Another 28% thought they took part in some of the big decisions about their lives.** Only 7% thought their IRO didn't take part in any of the big decisions about them, and just over one in 10 weren't sure about how to answer this question. Overall, the children thought IROs played a big part in the decisions affecting their lives.

Most decisions – apart from emergency ones – about children's lives in care should be made in their care reviews, and many children had told us that they saw their IROs as there to make sure their reviews happened properly. Figure 7 shows how far children thought the big decisions about their lives were actually being made in their reviews.

**Figure 7:** Responses to the question ‘How many big decisions about your life are made in your review meetings?’



Based on the responses of 1,429 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**Well over half the children (59%) told us that all or most of the big decisions about their lives in care were made in their reviews. This is how the law says those decisions should be made. However, one in five told us that only about half these decisions were made in their reviews, as they should be, and as many as 17% told us that none of the big decisions about their lives had been made in their reviews.** Given what the law says about making decisions in reviews, these responses from children are worrying.

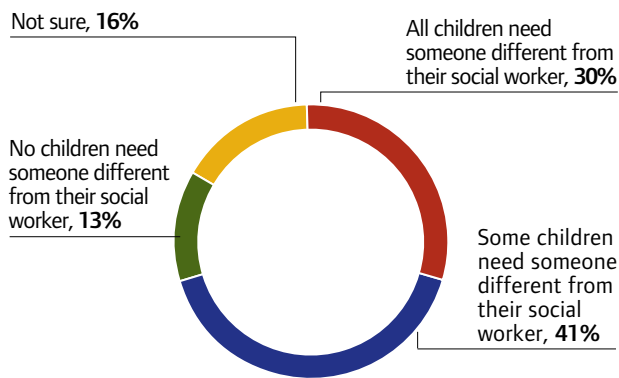
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# Who needs an IRO?

We asked whether children thought they needed a separate professional to carry out the IRO tasks set out in the law, or whether they thought their social worker could do those tasks. Figure 8 gives the answers to that question.

**Figure 8:** Responses to the question ‘Do children need someone other than a social worker for the IRO tasks?’



Based on the responses of 1,493 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

In total, **71% thought that some or all children needed someone other than their social worker to carry out the tasks an IRO does.** Just under a third (30%) of the children thought that all children need someone other than their social worker to do these IRO tasks. Another 41% thought that some, but not all, children needed someone other than their social worker to do these tasks. **Only a minority, 13%, thought that the IRO tasks could be done by social workers without needing someone different to do them.** There were no big differences between groups of children in what they thought about this, although disabled children were slightly more likely to say that all children needed someone other than a social worker to do the IRO tasks for them.

Here are the four top reasons given by those who thought all children should have someone other than their social worker to do the IRO tasks for them. The percentages are from the 389 who gave reasons.

Reason for saying that all children need someone different from their social worker	Percentage
The more people to help the better	27%
Social workers don't always do their job properly	19%
Your social worker might not be the right person for you	18%
Social workers aren't always available/are too busy	14%

Here are some examples of what children wrote when they wanted more people to help them than just their social worker: ‘two are better than one’; ‘because you need a second opinion’; ‘it helps children get advice from other people not just one person’; ‘social workers can't get everything right! If someone else is able to do things for us then there will be less mistakes made!’. Some thought that it was important to have another person who was independent, like their IRO: ‘a child's social worker gets very close to the child and this person can take a look at the bigger picture’; ‘it is good to talk to someone not involved in the case’; ‘because recently I felt that my social worker sided with social services instead of listening to me’; ‘IRO can make sure changes are made. Social workers need to ask their bosses everything’.

Some children who were concerned that their social worker was not the right person to do these IRO tasks for them wrote more about this: ‘might be scared just to talk to their social worker’; ‘because sometimes young person would prefer to talk to someone other than their social worker’; ‘some young people have problems opening up to social workers out of fear of possible repercussions’. On social workers not always being available, one child summed this up for many others when they wrote, ‘Because social workers are not always there for us.’ One said, ‘Social workers move on frequently, my IRO was around for 12 years.’

The 13% of children answering this question in the survey who said that social workers could do the IRO tasks and there was no need for a separate person, gave us three top reasons for this view. Here they are. The percentages are out of the 194 children who said their social workers should do the IRO tasks.

Reason for saying that social workers should do the IRO tasks without needing an IRO to do them	
Social workers already do these things as part of their job	49%
The child already gets on well with their social worker	26%
There can be too many different people in your life	13%

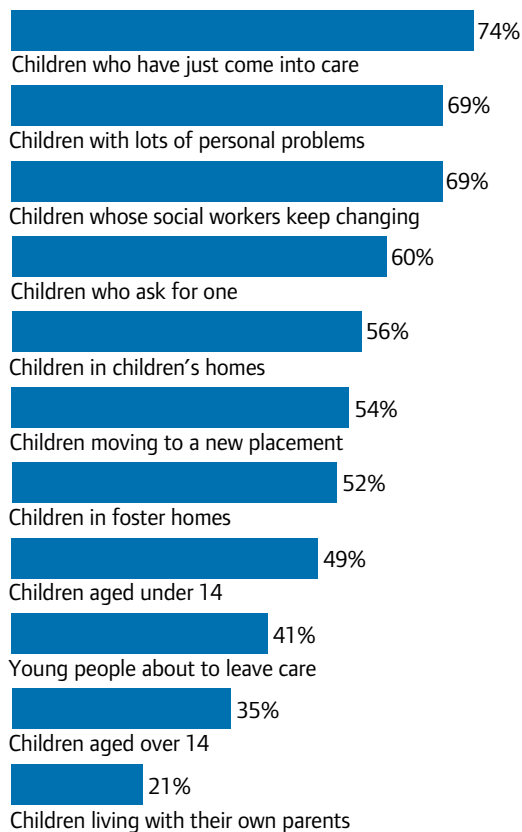
There were some more thoughts written about why social workers were the best people to do IRO tasks as well as their other social worker jobs. One person wrote, ‘Your social worker should do these things because they are the ones who take care of all your other needs.’ Another was concerned about the cost of having IROs as well as social workers: ‘Social workers should do these things for the simple reason that it will save them money instead of wasting it all on other people to do these things.’

Here are two examples of what children wrote about wanting their social worker to do the IRO tasks because they already got on well with them: ‘you know them very well so you will have more freedom to talk to them about things’; ‘by just having one person working with you means that you will build a stronger relationship with them, rather than having other workers around’.

On having lots of different professionals involved in their lives, one person just wrote, ‘Some children may not want another person involved – one can be enough!’

Out of the children and young people who said that some, but not all, children needed someone other than their social worker to do the IRO tasks for them, three main groups of children were mentioned (from a list we suggested) by more than two thirds of the 567 who answered this question. **The three groups of children they most thought needed an IRO were children who have just come into care, children with a lot of personal problems, and children whose social workers kept changing.** The full set of answers is set out in Figure 9.

**Figure 9:** Responses to the question ‘Who really needs an IRO?’



Based on the responses of the 567 children who answered. Children could give more than one answer.

As well as showing the three groups of children that were listed as needing an IRO by more than two thirds of the people answering this question, Figure 9 gives us some other important messages. **A majority of children (60%) thought that children should be able to choose whether or not they wanted an IRO. Just over half (54%) thought that one time children might need an IRO was when they were moving placements. Many children and young people thought that children under 14 needed an IRO more than older ones did – although leaving care was another time when many thought an IRO might be needed.**

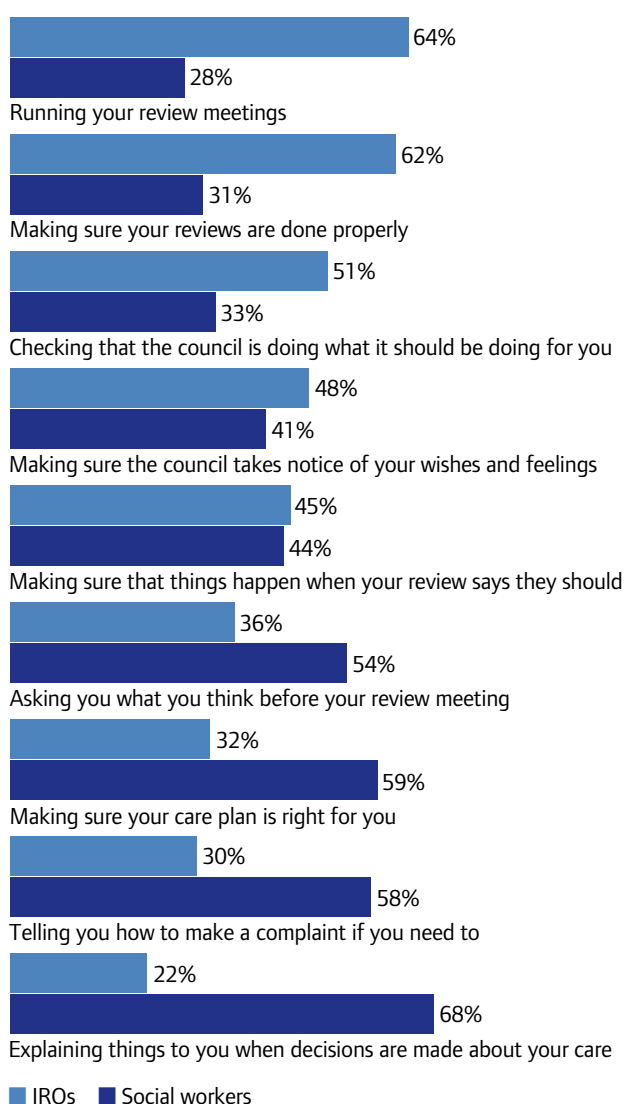
Looking at how different groups of children and young people answered this question, we did not find any big difference in the pattern of answers from boys and from girls. However, there were some big differences in how children and young people of different ages answered the question. **Young people aged over 14 were more likely than children under 14 were to say that people from their own age group needed an IRO. Over-14s were also more likely than younger children to say that young people about to leave care needed an IRO.**

Although the numbers were too small to be sure of this, children tended to say that those in their own sort of placement needed an IRO. So children in children's homes were likely to say that those in children's homes needed an IRO, and children in foster homes were likely to say that foster children needed an IRO. The one exception to this was children who were in care but placed back with their own families, who were less likely than others to think that people in their own sort of placement needed an IRO.

# IROs and other professionals

We heard different views about whether some IRO tasks could be done by a social worker. Children told us the good and bad things about having different professionals working with them. Using a list of tasks we asked children whether an IRO or their social worker would be the best person to do each one. Figure 10 gives the results.

**Figure 10:** Responses to the question ‘IROs versus social workers – who’s best for which task?’



Based on the responses of 1,376 children. Not every child answered every question.

It is important to remember that this question asked children who they thought was best for each task, if they had to choose between an IRO and a social worker. We already know that 30% of the children we asked thought that all children actually needed both a social worker and an IRO, and that another 41% thought that some children needed both.

**There were three tasks that many more children thought were better done by IROs than by social workers. These were running review meetings, making sure reviews are done properly and checking the council is doing what it should for the child.**

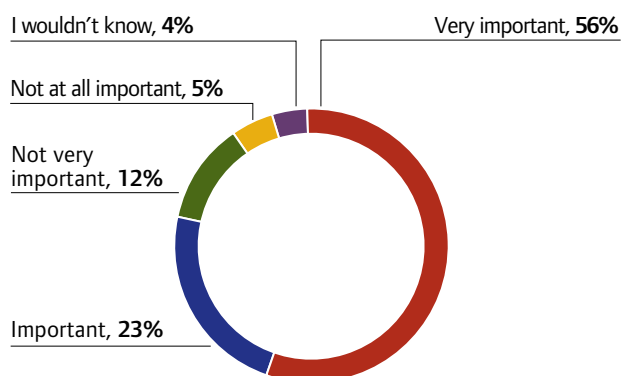
**There were four tasks that many more children thought were better done by social workers than by IROs. These were explaining things to the child when decisions were made about their care, telling the child how to make a complaint if they needed to, making sure that the child’s care plan is right for the child, and asking the child what they think before each review meeting.**

Two tasks came in the middle, with only just a few more children saying that they were better done by an IRO than by a social worker. These were **making sure that the council takes notice of the child’s wishes and feelings, and making sure that things happen when the child’s review says they should. For these two tasks, the children we asked were almost evenly divided between those who preferred them to be done by one sort of worker or the other, but with a very slightly greater vote in favour of them being done by an IRO.**

With quite a few different sorts of professionals working with each child or young person in care, we asked them to tell us how important they thought it was to have an IRO, a social worker, an advocate, and a Guardian (a person to tell the court what is in the child’s best interests when decisions about care are being made by a court).

The next four figures give the results of this 'vote', telling us how important children and young people in care thought it was to have each professional working with you.

**Figure 11:** Responses to the question 'How important is it to have a social worker?'

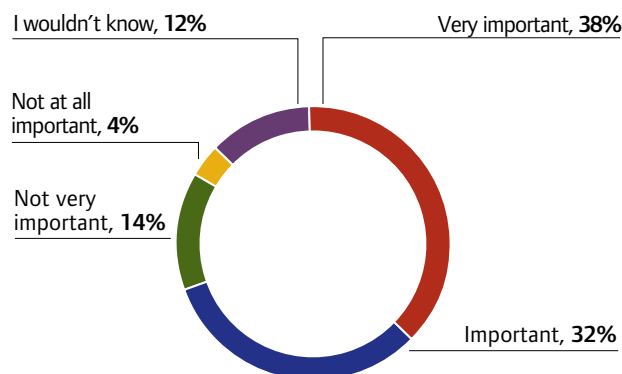


Based on the responses of 1,325 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

Out of the children and young people in care who answered this question, **79% (almost eight out of 10) said it was important or very important for a child in care to have a social worker.** Only one in 20 (5%) thought it was not at all important to have a social worker, and very few (4%) said they didn't know how to answer this question.

There were no big differences between boys and girls, between those aged over 14 and those under 14, between disabled children and other children, or between those in different sorts of placements in their view of how important it was to have a social worker. Our survey suggests that asylum seeking young people were more likely than others to see having a social worker as important or very important (though the numbers were too small to be too sure about this).

**Figure 12:** Responses to the question 'How important is it to have an IRO?'



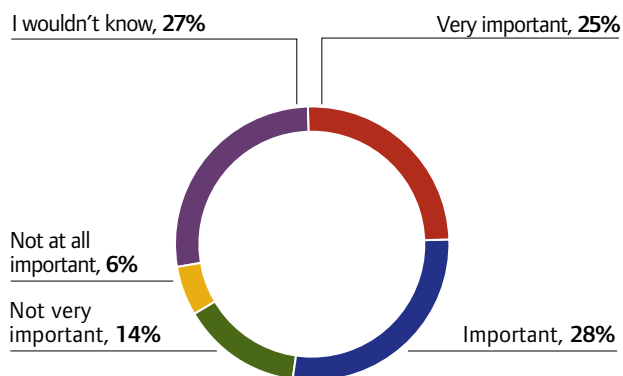
Based on the responses of 1,394 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**The second most important professional to have, according to our children, was an IRO, with 70% of the children and young people (over two thirds) saying that it was important or very important to have an IRO.** This was fewer than those who said having a social worker was important or very important, but was still a large majority of the children responding. Again, very few (4%) thought it was not at all important to have an IRO among their professionals, but one in eight (12%) weren't sure how to answer this question.

As with having a social worker, **we did not find any big differences between boys and girls in how important they thought it was to have an IRO, nor were there any big differences between those aged under or over 14, between disabled children and others, or between children in different sorts of placements.** Asylum seeking young people tended to be more likely than others to see having an IRO as important or very important. **Children living back at home with their parents were less likely than others to see having an IRO as important or very important, with 52% saying it was important or very important to have one.**

Care leavers in our survey were likely to see having a social worker and having an IRO as about equally important.

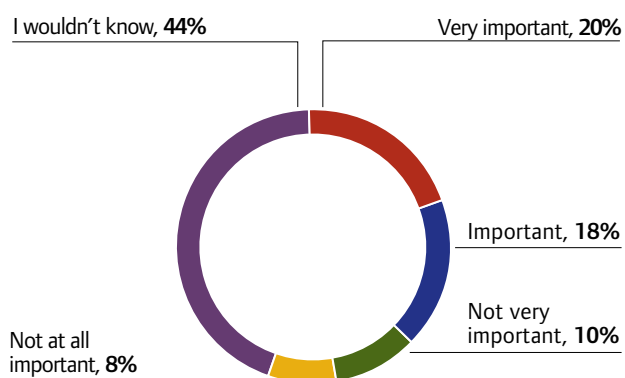
**Figure 13:** Responses to the question ‘How important is it to have an advocate?’



Based on the responses of 1,359 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**Advocates came third in the children's listing of the most important professionals to have, with just over half (53%) saying it was important or very important to have an advocate.** Answering about advocates, though, many more children weren't sure whether or not it is important to have one – over a quarter (27%) said they didn't know how to answer the question.

**Figure 14:** Responses to the question ‘How important is it to have a Guardian?’

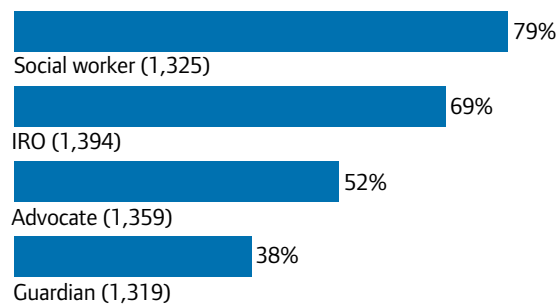


Based on the responses of 1,319 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

Answers about the importance of having a Guardian were very different from those about social workers, IROs and advocates. The most usual answer, from as many as 44% of the children, was that they did not know enough about Guardians to be able to say whether they were important or not. Of course, many of the children and young people would not have had a Guardian (though much the same could be said about having an advocate too – only social workers and IROs are professionals all children in care should have). In total, 38% said that it was important or very important to have a Guardian, putting Guardians last out of the four professionals we asked about.

Figure 15 gives a summary of how each of the four professionals scored in terms of importance. **Social workers scored top, followed by IROs, with 10 percentage points between them. Advocates scored 27 percentage points below social workers for importance. Guardians were 41 percentage points below social workers.**

**Figure 15:** A summary of how children rated the importance of different professionals



The numbers on the right are the percentages of the children answering about each professional who rated that professional as important or very important. The numbers in brackets are the numbers of children who gave us their ratings of each of the different sorts of professional.



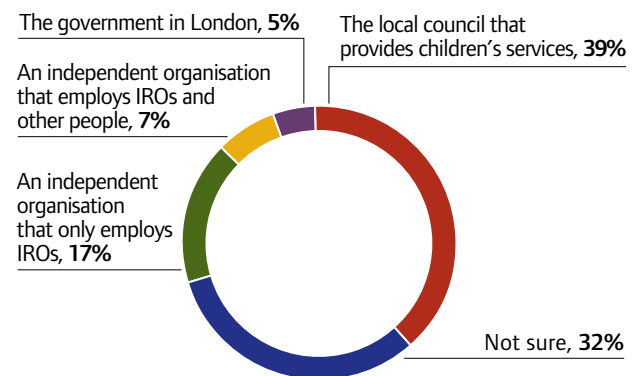
# What organisation should IROs work for?

Our final question asked what organisation children thought IROs should work for. There is a lot of discussion, including amongst IROs themselves, about this question. Some people doubt whether IROs working for a council can be independent enough to 'take on' that council if they need to. Others think that each council needs IROs working for it to keep checking that it is doing the right things for the children in its care.

We gave children in our survey four possible answers to choose from, together with a 'not sure' answer. As we said at the beginning of this report, we did get messages sent to us while we were doing this survey saying that children were not likely to be able to answer a question properly about where IROs should work in the future. But we still asked the children for their views, and we give their answers here for everyone involved in future decisions about IROs to consider. People must now decide how much weight they should give to what the children said.

That 'not sure' choice was especially important as this was a difficult question – nobody has any experience of IROs ever working for anyone other than the local council that provides children's services. A total of 875 children answered the question, and of those, 280 (32%, or almost a third) took the choice of saying they were not sure who IROs should work for in the future.

**Figure 16:** Responses to the question 'Which organisation do you think IROs should work for?'



Based on the responses of 875 children who answered this question. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

**Out of the children who chose where they thought IROs should work, the clear majority view was that in the future IROs should carry on working for the local council that provides children's services.** This option got over twice as much support from children as any other choice of where IROs should work. The main other choice, that IROs should work for an independent organisation that only employs IROs, only got support from 17% of the children, compared with 39% for IROs carrying on working for the local council. The children who thought IROs should work for the local council outnumbered those who thought they should work anywhere else. The children's view in this survey was very clearly in favour of keeping the present arrangements.

## Last messages

'My IRO makes sure what's said is done'

'An IRO is to help decide what is right for a young person and basically be the boss of a review'

'An IRO should get my point of view across to the local authority to get them to listen'

'Not everyone just wants a social worker!'

'It can be easy to talk to different people about different things'

'It is important to have someone impartial you can talk to'



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