ABSENT:

An exploration of common police procedures for safeguarding practices in cases of missing children and adults

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December 2013

Contents

Executive summary

Over the past few years there has been an important change in the definition of missing persons in the UK. In order to assist in the process of risk management and to ensure that resources are deployed effectively several police forces across the UK have adopted two separate definitions of '*missing*' and '*absent*'. 'Missing' is "anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject to crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another." 'Absent' is "a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be" (ACPO, 2013, pg. 5). 'Absent' is to be used in cases where there are grounds to believe that the absence involves no apparent risk, or the level of risk is a tolerable one not meeting the threshold for a police-led missing person investigation.

Sussex police initially introduced this distinction in 2008 and on 1 April 2013 the use of 'absent' was rolled out nationally. Currently, **14** police forces in the UK are actively using the definition and it is expected that more police forces will implement this change in definition in the coming years.

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the NPIA (now the College of Policing) established a pilot in 2011 involving four police forces in an attempt to further explore the merits of this approach. It became clear that in the four police forces the new policy was interpreted and implemented differently. Early evaluations of the pilot scheme (for example, Bayliss and Quinton, 2013) seem to suggest that the overall number of 'missing' investigations has been reduced. This suggests that considerable savings can be achieved through this new policy. However, the change in definitions has also led to some concern, particularly in relation to safeguarding practices.

With established varieties in arrangements between the pilot forces, further scrutiny of the implementation of this new classification will be valuable and can shed light on current practices in relation to police risk assessment and risk management, multi-agency work, and safeguarding. In addition, it is clear that in some situations responsibilities between the police and other agencies such as care homes are being redefined and renegotiated. That makes it imperative to establish how well police forces work in partnership and communicate with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to those individuals who are now being classified as 'absent'. Therefore, this study will consider the experiences already gained from six police forces that use the new 'absent' classification.

Aims of the study

> To compare the experiences of **six** police forces and assess their *perceptions* of what they believe to be best policy and practice with regard to the definitional criteria of 'absent' and consequent management and investigation of 'absent persons'.

Objectives

1 To evaluate the roles of call handlers, supervisors and missing person coordinators in the six police forces, regarding the management and investigation of 'absent' people.

2 To examine the circumstances and occasions when members of the six police forces collaborate with other agencies in endeavouring to investigate and safeguard absent people.

Method

The cooperation of six police forces in England was secured through the assistance of the UK Missing Persons Bureau (now part of the National Crime Agency) who contacted senior officers on the researchers' behalf. These police forces have implemented the new classification over the past few years and therefore have gained varying levels of operational experience. Two methods were utilised, that of a focus group and an online survey. The focus group invite specifically extended to a call handler (or representative), a supervisor and a coordinator. These are the three roles that play a large part in shaping operational as well as strategic practice around 'missing' and 'absent':

Call handlers deal with the vast majority of missing person reports to the police and they are responsible for gathering "sufficient information to assess the nature of the incident and the level of response that is required, descriptive details of the missing person and any relevant information, including the latest location information that may lead to their early discovery. It is important to note that the extent of detail that is recorded by call handlers will depend on individuals police force procedures" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2).

Supervisors have an oversight role to ensure that initial assessment of the incident and the level of response are correct. Part of the role of the control room supervisor is to ensure that adequate resources are given to the investigation (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2).

The approval by ACPO for the introduction of the new definition was conditional on the role of a **missing person coordinator**, or someone performing this function, existing in police forces. While call handlers and supervisors have a wide variety of responsibilities beyond missing person cases, a missing person coordinator focuses exclusively on this type of case.

According to ACPO (2013, pg. 10) a missing person coordinator is required to collate information on all instances of absence and missing, ensuring records for individuals from children's and other care homes can be distinguished and reviewed. Their work should inform strategies for interventions to reduce the incidence of missing and absence, assist with identifying priorities for further safeguarding work, and provide a basis for ongoing engagement with relevant partners to ensure an effective collaborative response is being received from all agencies. The role should include liaison with other agencies and care providers (i.e. multi-agency work).

All six police forces sent between two and four individuals. In addition to introductions and a plenary discussion, two specific breakout sessions took place. Following the focus group, several themes were identified: the decision-making process of risk assessment in cases of 'absent', training of staff, staff's confidence, multi-agency work, reviewing procedures of 'absent' cases, and safeguarding measures.

Subsequently, three separate surveys were developed depending on the role of the respondent (call handler, supervisor, and coordinator). The survey was completed online through SurveyMonkey. The link was distributed to operational staff in the six police forces through so-called gate keepers within each police force. The surveys opened on 10 August 2013 and closed on 17 September 2013.

It is important to note that the results presented below are based on staff's personal work experience and beliefs. The scope of this study did not include a review of police records of 'absent' cases. Therefore, it has not been possible to verify the responses given in these surveys and the results should be considered as 'perception' of practices rather than established fact.

It is also important to note that variation of practices between police forces was expected. The national guidelines of missing person investigations are not compulsory and acknowledge that each police force has unique needs and demands.

In order to maintain their anonymity, police forces will be referred to as Police Force A, B, C, D, E and F.

Key results and areas for consideration

Overall, 655 people took part in the study: 330 call handlers, 305 supervisors and 20 missing person coordinators. Only four participants from Police Force B took part in the study. Therefore, Police Force B will not be included in the results or discussion regarding call handlers and supervisors. Police Force B will be included, however, in the discussion regarding the role of coordinators.

Call handlers

- There are variations of practice *between* police forces, as call handlers in some police forces are not expected to risk assess 'absent' cases while in other police forces they are.
- There are consistent variations of practices *within* police forces, which may be indicative of a lack of clarity in policies and/or expectations from senior management.
- The majority of call handlers follow a set protocol of questions in order to risk assess whether it is the first reported case or in repeated cases.
- The vast majority of call handlers do not handle reports from care providers differently than reports from a relative.
- Call handlers felt supported by their supervisors.
- Call handlers do not always consider the possibility of a person reported to them as having previously been a victim of abuse and/or child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- The majority of call handlers did not receive training in CSE and are not aware of the signs of CSE.
- Call handlers express a need to have more training in the new definition of 'absent' and CSE.
- Call handlers may not have immediate access to information regarding previous incidents of 'absent'. Given the search for the information is time consuming it may hinder call handlers from gaining information from previous incidents that may be relevant to the current situation and risk assessment.
- It may also be useful to store information regarding previous cases by the name of the person being reported rather than the reporting address, in order to maintain information regarding children in care as they are relocated to a new address.
- There is a lack of consistency and possibly clarity as to what checks are expected to be conducted before a risk assessment is completed.
- Call handlers did not feel confident their police force would support them if a person they classified as 'absent' came to harm.

Supervisors

- There are consistent variations of practice *within* police forces, which may be indicative of lack of clarity in policies and/or expectations from senior management.
- The majority of supervisors take action in areas of safeguarding. However, a significant minority of supervisors do not.
- Supervisors often agree with the original classification of 'absent'.
- When there is insufficient information supervisors will either classify the case as 'missing' or not classify it until they gather more information.
- Supervisors will consider key risk factors. However, they are less likely to consider whether the person was a victim of abuse or a victim of CSE.
- Supervisors in most police forces did not liaise with missing person coordinators. However, supervisors in Police Force D liaised with coordinators on a regular basis.
- Most supervisors did not know how many 'absent' cases were re-classified as 'missing' in their area, in the past month. The majority of supervisors in Police Force F were aware of these cases.
- Most supervisors received training regarding CSE (except for Police Force E). However, 30%–40% of supervisors in Police Forces A, C and D did not receive such training.
- A third of supervisors stated their training was insufficient, with the exception of Police Force F where most supervisors were happy with their training.
- Overall, supervisors were not confident their police force would support them should an 'absent' person come to harm.

Missing person coordinators

- Coordinators consider the risk of a person being a victim of abuse and/or CSE more often than call handlers and supervisors.
- The majority of coordinators take action to improve safeguarding outcomes and/or prevent reports of 'absent'.
- The majority of coordinators received training in CSE.
- Practices of review of 'absent' cases by coordinators vary substantially between police forces, with 80% of coordinators not reviewing 'absent' cases as part of their role in Police Force D.
- Almost half (43%) of coordinators did not know how many 'absent' cases were reclassified as 'missing' in their area in the past month.
- Coordinators in Police Force D do not tend to take action to improve safeguarding. They are also unlikely to be involved with multi-agency work and do not tend to attend multi-agency meetings.
- Coordinators tend to liaise regularly with social services, child care providers in their area and attend CSE meetings. However, they rarely or never liaise with other partners such as placements panels, adult and child care providers outside their area, adult care providers in their area, residential health services, local hospitals and Ofsted.
- Coordinators also tend to brief social services, child care providers in their area and CSE meetings, but are unlikely to brief other partners.
- 44% of coordinators provide training of 'absent' as part of their role.

1   Context and aims

Over the past few years there has been an important change in the definition of missing persons in the UK. In order to assist in the process of risk management and to ensure that resources are deployed effectively, several police forces across the UK adopted two separate definitions of 'missing' and 'absent'. Sussex police initially introduced this distinction in 2008 and on 1 April 2013 the use of 'absent' was rolled out nationally. Currently, 14 police forces in the UK are actively using it and it is expected that more police forces will implement this change in definition in the coming years.

At present the ACPO definitions are as follows:

Missing – "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."

Absent – "A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be." (ACPO, 2013, pg. 5).

Typical examples of 'absent' may include:

- Failing to return on time.
- Staying at a known location, such as with a friend.

Thus, absent is to be used in cases where there are grounds to believe that the absence involves no apparent risk, or the level of risk is a tolerable one not meeting the threshold for a police-led missing person investigation. In such circumstances there will remain an expectation that reasonable enquiries will continue to be conducted by the reporting agency, after the report to the police. Should the circumstances subsequently develop to a determination that the person is in fact 'missing' an expedient police response will ensue. Hence, the police response is likely to differ between cases of 'missing' and of 'absent'.

The need to define clear roles and responsibilities is derived from the premise that '**absent**' and '**missing**' person incidents implicitly require the assessment and management of risk. The process of risk assessment is dynamic and at times challenging. It is designed to assist escalation/de-escalation of response where appropriate and requires continuous review. This process demands that an effective supervisory and management regime is in place.

ACPO and the former NPIA (the National Policing Improvements Agency – now the College of Policing) established a pilot in 2011 involving four police forces in an attempt to further explore the merits of this approach. It became clear that in the four police forces the new policy was interpreted and implemented differently. Early evaluations of the pilot scheme (for example, Bayliss and Quinton, 2013) seem to suggest that the overall number of 'missing' investigations has been reduced. That suggests that considerable savings can be achieved through this new policy.

Nevertheless, the change in definitions has also led to concern, in particular voiced by third sector organisations. The Children's Society, for instance, commented that any savings made through the new policy should be invested back into safeguarding children (The Children's

Society, 2013). The charity Missing People emphasises the need for training, effective oversight and for the categorisation and review of all incidents involving children and young people through a lens of potential child sexual exploitation (Missing People, 2013).

Safeguarding is an important concept in relation to 'missing' and 'absent' and in relation to children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

• Protecting children from maltreatment.
• Preventing impairment of children's health or development.
• Ensuring children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
• Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Safeguarding is therefore a wider term than child protection, which is predominantly focused on children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, harm (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2013).

The ACPO guidance (2013) stipulates that going missing and being absent should be recognised with reference to safeguarding: as a symptom of other problems or issues. This is strongly evidenced by the accelerated report of the Office of the Children's Commissioner, which shows missing as one of the key indicators of child sexual exploitation. There is, for example, a growing consensus (Berelowitz, Firmin, Edwards & Gulyurtlu, 2012; CEOP, 2011; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012) that children and young people who are sexually exploited are likely to go missing from home or care on a regular basis and for short periods of time (Sharp, 2012, pg. 9). Safeguarding, therefore, is assumed to be the cornerstone of police policy in relation to both 'missing' and 'absent' cases.

With established varieties in arrangements between the pilot forces, further scrutiny of these arrangements will be valuable and can shed light on current practices in relation to risk assessment and risk management, multi-agency work, and safeguarding. In addition, it is clear that in some situations, responsibilities between the police and other agencies such as care homes are being redefined and renegotiated. That makes it imperative to establish how well police forces work in partnership and communicate with other agencies to reduce risk of harm to those individuals who are absent. Therefore, this study will consider the experiences already gained from six police forces that use the new 'absent' classification.

Aims of the study

To compare the experiences of six police forces and assess their *perceptions* of what they believe to be best policy and practice with regard to the definitional criteria of 'absent' and consequent management and investigation of 'absent persons'.

Objectives

1   To evaluate the roles of call handlers, supervisors and missing person coordinators in the six police forces, regarding the management and investigation of 'absent' people.

2   To examine the circumstances and occasions when members of the six police forces collaborate with other agencies in endeavouring to investigate and safeguard absent people.

2   Method

The cooperation of six police forces in England was secured through the assistance of the UK Missing Persons Bureau, who contacted senior officers on the researchers' behalf. These police forces have implemented the new classification over the past few years and therefore have gained varying levels of operational experience. Two methods were utilised, that of a focus group and a survey that was administered on line. The focus group was undertaken in May 2013 and served several purposes. The first was to explore varieties in practice between the six police forces that took part. In particular, specific areas of practice were to be identified that could be explored further in the subsequent survey. The focus group was also aimed at identifying policy and practice in relation to three different roles with the organisations. Finally, the focus group served as an opportunity to introduce the researchers to the police forces, allow for wider debate around 'absent' and 'missing' and allowed the researchers to discuss issues of methods and ethics with the police forces' representatives.

Each of the six police forces received an invitation to attend a workshop on 9 May 2013. The invite specifically extended to a call handler (or representative), a supervisor and a coordinator. These are the three roles that play a large part in shaping operational as well as strategic practice around missing and absent.

Call handlers deal with the vast majority of missing person reports to the police and they are responsible with gathering "sufficient information to assess the nature of the incident and the level of response that is required, descriptive details of the missing person and any relevant information, including the latest location information that may lead to their early discovery. It is important to note that the extent of detail that is recorded by call handlers will depend on individuals police force procedures" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2).

Supervisors "have an oversight role to ensure that initial assessment of the incident and the level of response are correct. Part of the control room supervisor is to ensure that adequate resources are given to the investigation" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2). Supervisors are required to ensure that the assessment of risk and management of the investigation is conducted correctly. "The risk level for all cases should be checked as soon as is reasonably practical and all actions outlined for investigating officers are properly carried out and recorded. The risk assessment should be considered at every shift changeover as to whether or not it is correct. The first review process by a detective supervisor should take place after 48 hours or sooner if required" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 3).

The approval by ACPO for introduction of the new definition was conditional on the role of a **missing person coordinator**, or someone performing this function, existing in police forces. While call handlers and supervisors have a wide variety of responsibilities beyond missing person cases a missing person coordinator focuses exclusively on this type of cases. ACPO (2013) stipulates that the number of coordinators will vary according to the size of each police force and that is also beneficial if the role is co-located with the Child Sexual Exploitation coordinator.

According to ACPO (2013, pg. 10) a missing person coordinator is required to collate information on all instances of absence and missing, ensuring records for individuals from children's and other care homes can be distinguished and reviewed. This will provide the necessary information for them to investigate the circumstances, identify locations the

individual was found, and review repeat occurrences, in order to identify trends and risk of harm. Consideration must be given to children missing education, persistent absence from schools, and youth offending service data on absconding and breaching to build a picture of local absence and missing trends. Their work should inform strategies for interventions to reduce the incidence of missing and absence, assist with identifying priorities for further safeguarding work, and provide a basis for ongoing engagement with relevant partners to ensure an effective collaborative response is being received from all agencies. The role should include liaison with other agencies and care providers.

All six police forces sent between two and four individuals. In addition to introductions and a plenary discussion, two specific breakout sessions took place.

The first breakout session was divided by police forces. Representatives of two police forces were joined by two facilitators from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (CEOP), the UK Missing Persons Bureau (both are now part of the National Crime Agency), Missing People or the researchers from the University of Portsmouth. Participants were asked to discuss their police force's response to three hypothetical missing/absent scenarios. The second break out session was organised by role. Call handlers from the six police forces discussed their role together, as did the supervisors and the coordinators. These focus groups were run by the facilitators mentioned above.

The workshops were highly illuminating and served to ensure that the subsequent survey was relevant, asked the most pertinent questions and had 'ecological validity', i.e. that the survey was couched in the right language and allowed respondents to engage with the questions so that their collective answers produced a realistic picture of police practice. Following the focus group, several themes were identified: the decision-making process of risk assessment in cases of 'absent', training of staff, staff confidence, multi-agency work, reviewing procedures of 'absent' cases, and safeguarding measures.

Subsequently, three separate surveys were developed depending on the role of the respondent (call handler, supervisor, and coordinator). It was essential that views from all these groups were gathered in relation to the themes mentioned above. In order to optimise its quality the survey also benefited from feedback from ACPO, CEOP and the Missing Persons Bureau and Missing People. The survey was completed online through SurveyMonkey. The link was distributed to operational staff in the six police forces through so-called gate keepers within each police force. The survey opened on 10 August 2013 and closed on 17 September 2013.

It is important to note that the results presented below are based on staff's personal work experience and beliefs. The scope of this study did not include a review of police records of 'absent' cases. Therefore, it has not been possible to verify the responses given in these surveys and the results should be considered as a 'perception' of practice rather than an established fact.

It is also important to note that variation of practices between police forces was expected. The national guidelines of missing person investigations are not compulsory and accept that each police force has unique needs and demands.

In order to maintain their anonymity, police forces will be referred to as Police Force A, B, C, D, E and F.

3   Results

Below is a summary of the results from the three surveys. Each survey focused on a number of themes relevant to the particular role and responsibilities, as identified during the focus group. Overall, 655 people took part in the study. N.B. Due to conversion of number of respondents into percentages, figures in the tables below may not round up neatly to 100%.

Table 1 presents a summary of responses to the three surveys by members of staff from the six police forces.

	Call handlers	Supervisors	Coordinators	TOTAL
Police Force A	35	34	3	72
Police Force B	0	2	2	4
Police Force C	38	44	2	84
Police Force D	46	102	6	154
Police Force E	99	108	4	211
Police Force F	112	15	3	130
TOTAL	**330**	**305**	**20**	**655**

Table 1: A summary of responses to the 3 surveys by police forces

The summary of responses in Table 1 shows that staff from Police Force E responded the most (32% of overall responses), followed by Police Force D (23% of overall responses). Only 4 participants from Police Force B took part in the study. Therefore, Police Force B will not be included in the results or discussion regarding call handlers and supervisors. Police Force B will be included in the discussion regarding the role of coordinators. The results from the call handlers will be dealt with in the next section, after which the results from the supervisors survey will be presented. Finally, the results from the survey among coordinators are discussed.

3.1   Call handlers

Call handlers deal with the vast majority of missing person reports to the police and they are responsible with gathering "sufficient information to assess the nature of the incident and the level of response that is required, descriptive details of the missing person and any relevant information, including the latest location information that may lead to their early discovery. It is important to note that the extent of detail that is recorded by call handlers will depend on individuals police force procedures" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2).

Overall, 330 participants answered this survey. There were no responses from Police Force B to this survey and therefore it will not be included in the results or discussion.

3.1.1 Demographic information

Rank

	Inspector	Sergeant	Police Constable	Civilian
Police Force A	0	0	26%	**74%**
Police Force C	0	0	26%	**74%**
Police Force D	2%	0	0	**98%**
Police Force E	2%	1%	4%	**92%**
Police Force F	0	0	1%	**99%**

Table 2: Call handlers rank

The results show (see Table 2) some variation in the rank of call handlers between police forces. However, the majority of call handlers who took part in this study were civilians. It is also worth noting that a quarter of call handlers in Police Forces A and C were Police Constables. There were also 7 participants with other ranks/work description.

Work experience

	0–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–15 Years	Over 16 Years
Police Force A	9%	23%	17%	**51%**
Police Force C	13%	16%	21%	**50%**
Police Force D	**67%**	18%	7%	9%
Police Force E	28%	**48%**	6%	18%
Police Force F	**33%**	27%	20%	20%

Table 3: Call handlers work experience (years working for the police)

There is some variation between the five police forces (see Table 3) in terms of years of experience call handlers have been working for the police. Police Force D has the least experienced call handlers; while Police Forces A and C have more experienced call handlers.

	0–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–15 Years	Over 16 Years
Police Force A	12%	27%	21%	**39%**
Police Force C	**39%**	5%	26%	29%
Police Force D	**79%**	9%	7%	5%
Police Force E	36%	**40%**	7%	17%
Police Force F	**38%**	29%	14%	18%

Table 4: Years involved with missing persons investigations

Call handlers also vary in their experience of being involved with missing person investigations (see Table 4). The majority of call handlers from Police Force A have been involved with missing persons investigations for over five years. Police Force C, E and F employ call handlers with policing experience but more mixed experience in missing person

investigations. Police Force D employs call handlers with the least experience in missing person investigations compared with the other police forces.

	0–50	51–100	101–500	Over 500
Police Force A	20%	10%	**47%**	23%
Police Force C	**31%**	23%	**31%**	14%
Police Force D	26%	8%	**38%**	28%
Police Force E	14%	7%	**39%**	**39%**
Police Force F	14%	5%	29%	**52%**

Table 5: Number of missing person investigations staff has been involved with

Given the answers in the tables above, the responses presented in Table 5 are somewhat surprising. The majority of call handlers from all five police forces claim to have vast experience in dealing with missing person investigations. Call handlers from Police Force C have more mixed levels of experience than call handlers from other police forces.

Gender

The majority of call handlers from all five police forces are female. The results range between 60% of female call handlers in Police Force F to 79% of female call handlers in Police Force A.

Age

	20–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	Over 60
Police Force A	11%	20%	**40%**	26%	3%
Police Force C	6%	19%	**47%**	28%	0
Police Force D	**37%**	22%	33%	9%	0
Police Force E	28%	**30%**	**30%**	10%	1%
Police Force F	17%	**30%**	28%	25%	0

Table 6: Age group of call handlers

The age of call handlers is mixed (see Table 6). The majority of call handlers from Police Forces A, C and F are over the age of 40, whereas in Police Force D the majority of call handlers are under the age of 40. The age of call handlers from Police Force E is more evenly spread.

3.1.2   The decision-making process of risk assessment

The vast majority of call handlers (97%–100%) from Police Forces C, D, E and F stated that they follow a set protocol of questions in order to risk assess. However, call handlers from Police Force A were more varied in their responses, and 37% of them stated there was no set protocol.

When asked how many questions they follow the answers were mixed (see Table 7). The majority of call handlers from Police Forces D and E stated that they follow 6–10 questions, whereas call handlers from Police Forces C and F follow 11–20 questions. It is worth noting the variation of answers *within* police forces as that may indicate lack of clarity on police forces' protocol. It is also possible that the call handlers found the survey question confusing.

	0	1–5	6–10	11–20	I don't know
Police Force A	10.5%	**26%**	21%	10.5%	32%
Police Force C	0	0	3%	**94%**	3%
Police Force D	0	0	**67%**	33%	0
Police Force E	0	0	**83%**	17%	0
Police Force F	4%	0	35%	**60%**	1%

Table 7: Number of set questions that call handlers follow

When asked whether call handlers have discretion in the questions they ask the caller (see Table 8), the majority of call handlers from Police Forces A, D and E stated they do, while call handlers from Police Forces C and F do not. It is important to note the variation in responses *within* the police forces as that may indicate lack of clarity on police forces' protocol. It is also possible that the call handlers found the survey question confusing.

	Yes	No	I don't know
Police Force A	**77%**	14%	9%
Police Force C	41%	**56%**	3%
Police Force D	**58%**	42%	0
Police Force E	**52%**	48%	0
Police Force F	32%	**65%**	4%

Table 8: Proportion of call handlers who felt they had discretion in the questions they ask the caller

Furthermore, the majority of call handlers stated that in repeated cases of 'absent' the same protocol is repeated fully every time. The answers ranged between 84% in Police Force C and 100% in Police Forces D and F.

When asked who do call handlers liaise with when classifying cases of 'absent' (see Table 9), most call handlers responded they would liaise with the supervisor (65% overall), followed by a colleague (30% overall) or a sergeant (28% overall). Call handlers stated they would also liaise with a Duty Inspector.

It is important to note that the majority of call handlers from Police Force C (60%) answered that 'absent' classification was not their responsibility. A significant minority (34%) from Police Force F also stated it was not their responsibility.

	A colleague	A supervisor	A sergeant	No	This decision is not my responsibility
Police Force A	52%	**91%**	22%	8%	0
Police Force C	10%	30%	17%	3%	**60%**
Police Force D	42%	**83%**	8%	8%	3%
Police Force E	42%	**68%**	52%	8%	3%
Police Force F	16%	**62%**	24%	5%	34%

Table 9: Proportion of call handlers who would liaise with colleagues when classifying cases of 'absent'

The survey tried to ascertain whether call handlers had immediate access on their screen to see whether a person has been reported 'absent' previously. The majority of call handlers in the five police forces stated they did not, however 31%–47% stated they did have immediate access to that information. When asked how detailed that information was 58% of all call handlers suggested the information was detailed and summarised previous incidents. However, the majority of call handlers from Police Force D stated the information they immediately have access to, was more limited (see Table 10).

	Only previous dates and times	Dates, times and only basic additional information	A detailed summary of all previous 'absent' incidents and their outcomes
Police Force A	8%	23%	**69%**
Police Force C	0	44%	**56%**
Police Force D	37%	**47%**	16%
Police Force E	6%	22%	**72%**
Police Force F	12%	23%	**65%**

Table 10: Level of detail call handlers see on their screens regarding previous incidents of 'absent'

These results may not reflect the true nature of the information available to call handlers. 39 call handlers indicated the word 'immediately' in the question may have caused some confusion. Later in the survey call handlers were asked whether they were able to examine information from previous 'absent' cases (see Figure 1). The vast majority of call handlers (88%) stated they were able to examine information from previous incidents. This ranged between 69% in Police Force D to 96% in Police Forces E and F.
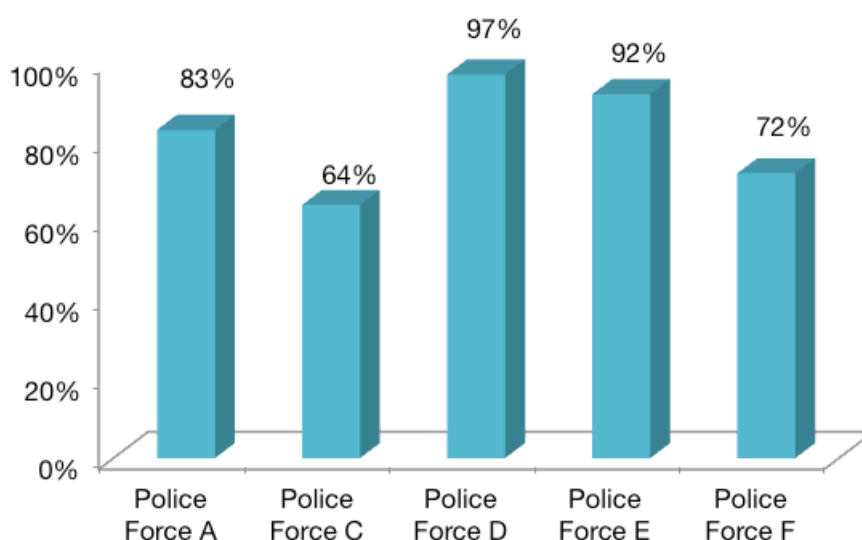

Figure 1: Proportion of call handlers who examine information from previous cases

The qualitative answers offer several explanations to the variation in answers and are worth considering as potential areas that challenge call handlers' access to information about previous 'absent' incidents.

- The IT system does not always work.
- Information may be available only if the same phone number is used to report someone absent.
- The information is available but requires an individual search in the same IT system, which takes time and inclination.
- If the person has been reported absent from the same address there will be information. If they were reported from a different address there will not be any information. This may be particularly relevant in cases of children in care. When they are moved between care homes, information about previous incidents may be lost. This issue is also relevant for children with two home addresses (when parents are divorced) or adults with mental health problems who may spend time in inpatient facilities, etc.

Call handlers were also asked whether they take any of the following actions as part of the risk assessment process. The results are presented in Tables 11–16.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**45%**	32%	14%	9%
Police Force C	**67%**	15%	11%	7%
Police Force D	33%	6%	9%	**52%**
Police Force E	**49%**	20%	13%	18%
Police Force F	**62%**	15%	15%	8%

Table 11: Proportion of call handlers who conduct a minimum check of contact with the 'absent' person

This would include actions such as calling the 'absent' person and trying to speak with them directly or contact the last people they were known to be in touch with.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**74%**	22%	4%	0
Police Force C	**58%**	15%	19%	8%
Police Force D	3%	6%	22%	**69%**
Police Force E	**61%**	23%	3%	13%
Police Force F	**50%**	25%	20%	5%

Table 12: Proportion of call handlers who conduct a minimum check on intelligence data base

This would include actions that can draw from previous individual records or Command and Control system. The search will be based on the name of the 'absent' person. Not all police forces would expect call handlers to perform this action and some police forces would use their intelligence officers or coordinators to perform these checks instead.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**53%**	29%	6%	12%
Police Force C	**54%**	14%	14%	18%
Police Force D	3%	3%	7%	**87%**
Police Force E	**55%**	26%	5%	14%
Police Force F	**47%**	21%	13%	19%

Table 13: Proportion of call handlers who check the case management systems

The case management system is the Command and Control system that records all reports of 'missing' and 'absent' cases. Some police forces will also use other case management systems that are specifically developed for missing person cases, such as COMPACT, SLEUTH or NICHE.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**75%**	8%	17%	0
Police Force C	**61%**	8%	31%	0
Police Force D	0	0	0	**100%**
Police Force E	10%	19%	22%	**50%**
Police Force F	33%	13%	**43%**	11%

Table 14: Proportion of call handlers who check the Police National Computer (PNC)

The PNC is a computer system that is used by the police and other law enforcement agencies. It gives access to national and local data regarding arrests, driving offences, etc. In cases of 'missing', a file is put on the PNC system. However, there is no expectation this will be done in 'absent' cases. The PNC should be checked in cases of 'absent' for information regarding potential for violence, self-harm, prior arrests, etc. This is part of the intelligence check and will be done by a search by the name of the 'absent' person.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**80%**	8%	12%	0
Police Force C	**60%**	8%	32%	0
Police Force D	0	0	12%	**88%**
Police Force E	27%	15%	**39%**	19%
Police Force F	**54%**	11%	28%	9%

Table 15: Proportion of call handlers who check custody

This action refers to a name check to explore whether the 'absent' person is in custody in the local police force area. While the PNC system gives a national overview it is slower to update than the local custody system which may hold a more up-to-date information about the 'absent' person.

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	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**59%**	4%	14%	23%
Police Force C	12%	8%	38%	**42%**
Police Force D	0	0	6%	**94%**
Police Force E	24%	12%	27%	**37%**
Police Force F	4%	6%	22%	**68%**

Table 16: Proportion of call handlers who check Child Protection Orders

Child Protection Orders are a number of orders a local authority can apply for to ensure that children are protected from harm under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989. An emergency protection order (EPO) is an order from the court that allows Children's Services to remove a child from home and grants parental responsibility to Children's Services. The court will only make these orders if it is satisfied that the child is likely to suffer significant harm and that they will be in danger unless they are removed to a place of safety. The emergency protection order lasts for eight days, with a possible extension of a further seven days (Child Protection Service, 2013).

If a Child Protection Order has been issued by a local authority, the police force in that area will be notified. However, if the order has been applied for outside of the police area there may not be a record on the local policing system. In cases where a child is place in a care home outside the local authority, the carer should inform the police such an order has been issued where they make the initial report to the police. Given the IT systems configurations, it may not always be possible for call handlers to view whether a Child Protection Order has been issued and should not reflect on their willingness to gather than information.

The results presented in Tables 11–16 show that call handlers from Police Force D are unlikely to act on any of the above procedures. It is also worth noting that a noticeable minority in most police forces never or rarely act in relation to the procedures mentioned above. A number of call handlers stated that it is simply not their responsibility to conduct these checks. Instead, the checks are conducted by another department. This may shed light on responses from Police Force D in particular.

Call handlers also suggested they would check hospitals.

Call handlers were asked whether they handle reports from care providers differently than reports from a relative. The vast majority of call handlers from all five police forces responded that they do not. These responses range between 74% in Police Force E to 91% in Police Force C. There is important variation as 1-in-4 call handlers in Police Force E say there is a difference in their handling of calls.

33 responses from call handlers explained reasons for this difference, including:

- Relatives require a more sensitive approach than care providers as they are more attached to the person they report.
- Care providers already know the process, whereas with relatives you need to explain it.
- Relatives need more time to answer the questions and often have queries about the absent policy.

- There may be different guidelines or protocols that call handlers have to work with, such as with hospitals.
- Reports from care homes are dealt with quicker as they may be on a daily basis and the details don't change.
- Reports from care homes are dealt with quicker as the care providers usually hold a detailed record on the individuals.
- Care providers already risk assess before they call in.
- Care providers often have insufficient information available so they need more coaxing.

Call handlers were asked whether they had all the supporting information to make these decisions effectively. The majority of call handlers stated that they did. However, there was some variation between police forces with 40% of call handlers from Police Force C stating they did *not* have such information. 1-in-5 call handlers from Police Force E stated they did not have all supporting information. The vast majority (over 90%) of call handlers from the other three police forces stated they did have the supporting information they needed.

Four call handlers explain some of these concerns. Call handlers wish for clarification in the guidelines of 'absent':

- The term 'recent' is not clear and creates confusion, i.e. does it refer to last week or behaviour in the past six months.
- Information needs to be easily accessible rather than having to search through previous reports.

Call handlers were asked how they would classify a case if there was insufficient information to make an effective risk assessment (see Table 17). Overall, call handlers (66%) stated they would classify such a case as missing.

	Absent	Missing	I don't know
Police Force A	16%	**52%**	32%
Police Force C	5%	29%	**66%**
Police Force D	17%	**60%**	23%
Police Force E	5%	**85%**	10%
Police Force F	9%	**65%**	26%

Table 17: Classifying a case where there is insufficient information

63 call handlers provided more detailed information as to what they would do. This includes:

- The call handler will discuss the case with the Duty Inspector and/or Sergeant.
- The call handler will ask the caller to gather more information.
- The call handler will ask the caller more questions.
- The call handler will make judgement based on experience.
- The call handler will deploy an officer to confirm more details.
- The call handler does not make that decision.

Call handlers were asked how long they tend to spend with a caller before making a risk classification in the *first instance* (see Table 18). Call handlers seem to vary in the time they

spend with caller in the first instance. While initially the results indicate call handlers spend 5–10 minutes with a caller, a closer examination of the results suggest that equally call handlers may spend up to 30 minutes or even an hour with a caller. It is also important to note that call handlers from Police Force D all stated they would spend 5–10 minutes with a caller.

	5–10 minutes	11–30 minutes	31–60 minutes	I don't know
Police Force A	**48%**	39%	9%	4%
Police Force C	**32%**	28%	8%	**32%**
Police Force D	**100%**	0	0	0
Police Force E	46%	52%	0	2%
Police Force F	**46%**	40%	2%	12%

Table 18: Time spent with a caller in the first instance

Call handlers were also asked how long they tend to spend with a caller before making a risk classification in *repeated* cases of 'absent' (see Table 19). The majority of call handlers stated they would spend less time with a caller in repeated cases. It is important to note that one call handler from Police Force D stated he/she would spend more time with a caller in repeated cases of 'absent' than they would in the first instance. However, this is not indicative of the overall pattern of behaviour within the police force.

	5–10 minutes	11–30 minutes	31–60 minutes	I don't know
Police Force A	**57%**	35%	4%	4%
Police Force C	**29%**	**29%**	13%	**29%**
Police Force D	**91%**	3%	3%	3%
Police Force E	**54%**	45%	0	2%
Police Force F	**56%**	29%	0	15%

Table 19: Time spent with a caller in repeat cases of 'absent'

Call handlers were asked whether 'absent' and 'missing' were recorded in the same system. Overall, most call handlers (66%) stated that both types of cases were recorded in the same system. However, the results show substantial variation between police forces, with Police Force E stating a clear 'yes' to the question (97%), whereas Police Force A indicating the cases were recorded on different systems. The other three police forces were fairly evenly split in their answers. It is possible call handlers found the question itself confusing and were not sure what the words 'same system' meant.
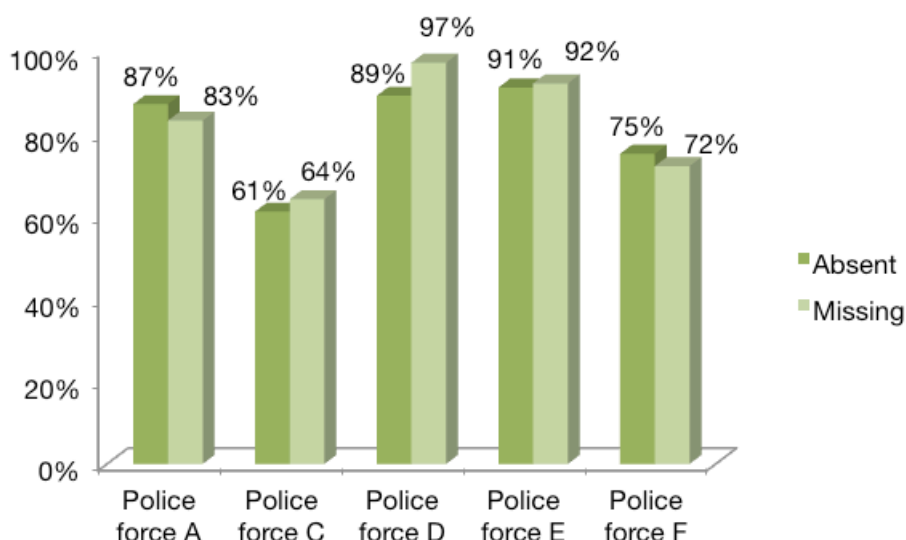
Figure 2: Call handlers recording their rationale when classifying 'absent' and 'missing' cases

Call handlers were asked whether they recorded their rationale when classifying 'absent' and 'missing cases (see Figure 2). The results presented above show that overall the majority of call handlers recorded their rationale. However, there is some variation in practice between police forces. Over a third of call handlers in Police Force C and around a quarter of call handlers in Police Force F do not record their rationale in 'missing or 'absent' cases.

It is important to note that call handlers tended to record their rationale more frequently in 'missing' cases than in 'absent' cases. This is with the exception of call handlers from Police Force F who recorded their rationale slightly less often in 'missing' cases and more frequently in 'absent' cases.

Call handlers were asked to describe the call-back arrangements with the caller (see Table 20). Call-back arrangements are set in order to maintain contact with the caller and be able to exchange new information which may have been gathered in the time since the initial report either by the caller or by the police. Reponses were varied and call handlers were able to answer more than one option.

	We call back at an agreed time	The caller agrees to call back	We call in case the caller fails to call back
Police Force A	26%	**70%**	22%
Police Force C	44%	30%	**59%**
Police Force D	20%	**65%**	30%
Police Force E	**47%**	41%	32%
Police Force F	**70%**	24%	29%

Table 20: Call-back arrangements with the caller

48 call handlers extended their responses and stated that the call-back arrangements may be handled by a different department or the Duty Inspector. Others stated that if the caller failed to call back they will try to call the caller.

In terms of time it would take before a call-back is made, call handlers were evenly split in all options, ranging between 0–15 minutes past the agreed time to over two hours past the agreed call back time. 55% of call handlers stated this was not applicable to them.

When asked who monitors the logs to determine when a call-back is needed most call handlers responded it was the responsibility of the Duty supervisor (41%), followed by the area supervisor. 1-in-4 call handlers stated they did not know who monitors the logs.

45 call handlers also stated that others may be monitoring the logs:

- Control room staff.
- Divisional inspector.
- Sergeant.
- Radio operator.

3.1.3 Safeguarding measures

It was important to ascertain what call handlers consider during their risk assessment process (see Table 21). These issues are also highly relevant to the subject of safeguarding and are therefore worth highlighting.

	Absent person's age	Is their behaviour out of character?	Do they have medical needs?	Have they previously been a victim of abuse?	Have they previously been a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation?	Are they at risk of becoming a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation?	Are they a danger to others?	Are they at risk of self-harm?
Police Force A	100%	100%	100%	**96%**	100%	100%	100%	100%
Police Force C	100%	100%	100%	100%	**87%**	**83%**	100%	100%
Police Force D	100%	100%	100%	100%	92%	**81%**	97%	**83%**
Police Force E	97%	100%	100%	**79%**	**67%**	**73%**	90%	100%
Police Force F	99%	99%	100%	87%	**77%**	**78%**	88%	97%

Table 21: Issues call handlers consider during their risk assessment process

The result shows an overall tendency of call handlers to consider most of these issues. However, the possibility of the person who is being reported as previously being a victim of abuse or child sexual exploitation is not considered as prominently as other issues. There is also variation between police forces, with Police Forces A and D often considering these issues while Police Forces C, E and F less so.

Call handlers were also asked whether they use child sexual exploitation (CSE) vulnerabilities and warning signs as part of the risk assessment process in cases of 'absent' (see Table 22).

This question focused on the use of specific warning signs as part of call handlers' script. A list of these warning signs was published by the Office of Children Commission Inquiry and include:

"Missing from home or care, physical injuries, drug or alcohol misuse, offending, repeat sexually-transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations, absence from school, change in physical appearance, evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking, sites, estranged from their family, receipt of gifts from unknown sources, recruiting others into exploitative situations, poor mental health, self-harm, thoughts of or attempts at suicide" (Berelowitz, et al., 2012, pg. 51).

	Yes	No	I don't know
Police Force A	**74%**	22%	4%
Police Force C	28%	**50%**	22%
Police Force D	42%	**53%**	5%
Police Force E	15%	**57%**	28%
Police Force F	33%	**56%**	12%

Table 22: Use of child sexual exploitation signs as part of risk assessment

Given the findings presented above, it is not surprising that the majority of call handlers in Police Force A consider CSE signs as part of their risk assessment process. However, it is an area of concern that the other four police forces do not do so as regularly. It is also important to note the variation in answers *within* police forces.

23 call handlers also stated they consider other issues such as:

• Suicide.
• Victim of crime.
• Person committing a crime.
• Weather conditions.
• Physical disabilities.
• Mental health issues.
• Have dementia or Alzheimer's disease.
• Any trigger prior to their absence.

3.1.4 Training

Call handlers were asked whether they received training in applying the new classification system.
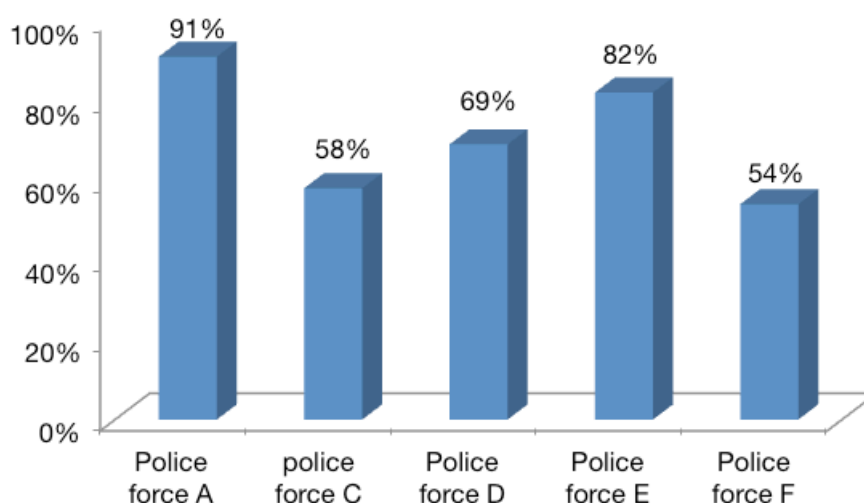

Figure 3: Call handlers training in the new definition of 'absent'

As Figure 3 shows, the majority of call handlers received training in the new definition. However, Police Force C and F showed a higher percentage of call handlers that did not have any training in the new classification.

The most common type of training call handlers received in the new classification system was a briefing, an email or an e-learning programme. Please note that some call handlers received more than one type of training (see Table 23).

	Briefing	Email or e-learning	Training session	Training day
Police Force A	29%	**43%**	38%	29%
Police Force C	**59%**	36%	18%	18%
Police Force D	**64%**	40%	28%	4%
Police Force E	45%	**59%**	10%	4%
Police Force F	**41%**	31%	**41%**	17%

Table 23: Type of training in new definition of 'absent'

Call handlers were also asked whether they received any training regarding signs of child sexual exploitation (CSE) (see Figure 4). Overall, only 1-in-4 call handlers received training in signs of child sexual exploitation. It is important to highlight differences between police forces, as the majority of call handlers in Police Force A received training in signs of CSE, whereas the vast majority of call handlers in the other police forces did not.
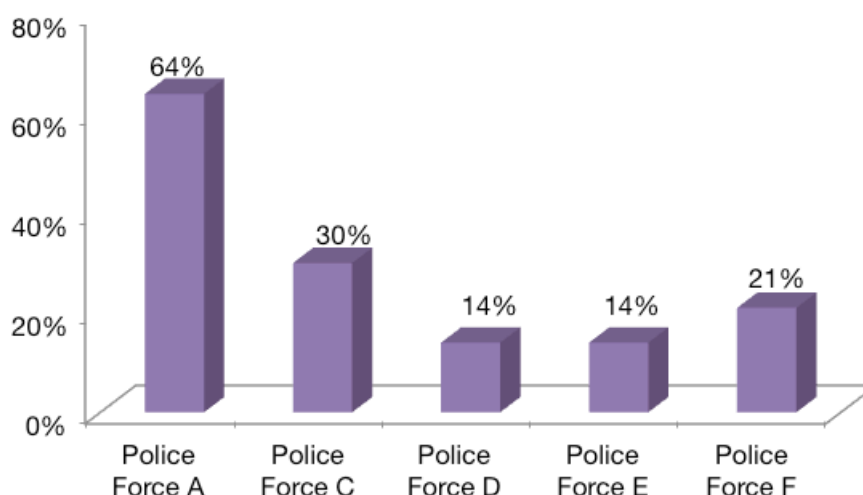
Figure 4: Call handlers training in child sexual exploitation (CSE)

When training for CSE was offered the majority of call handlers received an email or an e-learning programme. Training methods were more varied in this case compared with training in the new classification system. It is worth noting that Police Force E only provided training by email, e-learning programme or a training session (see Table 24).

	Briefing	Email or e-learning	Training session	Training day
Police Force A	19%	**56%**	25%	25%
Police Force C	22%	**44%**	33%	11%
Police Force D	**33%**	**33%**	**33%**	0
Police Force E	0	**89%**	11%	0
Police Force F	29%	24%	**29%**	24%

Table 24: Type of training regarding child sexual exploitation (CSE)

42 call handlers stated that providers of CSE training were:

• The police force itself.
• National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT).
• A civilian trainer.
• Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (CEOP).
• Missing person coordinator.
• Multi-agency safeguarding hub.
• Staff from Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP).

Call handlers were asked whether, similarly to the focus group, they received any scenario training, which may highlight potential problematic areas of practice. The vast majority (ranging between 80%–90%) of call handlers stated they did not receive any scenario training.

The vast majority of call handlers (ranging between 95%–100%) stated that their calls are subjected to quality monitoring.

3.1.5 Confidence

Call handlers were asked whether they thought their training was sufficient (see Table 25). The majority of call handlers expressed interest in receiving further training and a quarter of them stated they considered the training they had as insufficient.

	Yes, I'm happy With the training	Training was adequate but I would like more	Training was insufficient
Police Force A	38%	**46%**	16%
Police Force C	42%	**45%**	13%
Police Force D	32%	**38%**	30%
Police Force E	**39%**	31%	30%
Police Force F	33%	**40%**	27%

Table 25: Call handlers' assessment of their training

Call handlers were asked whether they felt supported by the supervisor/coordinator (see Table 26). The majority of call handlers stated they felt supported to some extent. The majority of call handlers from Police Force A stated they felt 'very supported' by the supervisor/coordinator. It is important to note that this may be due to personal relationships with their colleagues rather than directly linked to the tasks they fulfil.

	Very supported	Supported to some extent	Neutral	Not supported	Rather not say
Police Force A	**54%**	33%	8%	4%	0
Police Force C	35%	**39%**	16%	6%	3%
Police Force D	17%	**50%**	22%	8%	3%
Police Force E	27%	**40%**	31%	1%	0
Police Force F	31%	**33%**	26%	7%	3%

Table 26: Call handlers' assessment of support they receive from their supervisor/coordinator

Call handlers were asked how confident they felt their police force would support their decision making if a person came to harm in an 'absent' case they classified (see Table 27). Overall, 41% of call handlers stated they did not feel confident their police force would support them, and 36% were neutral. Only 1-in-4 of call handlers (23%) expressed confidence their police force would support them. Call handlers from Police Forces A, C and F were somewhat more confident than call handlers from Police Forces D and E.

	Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not confident
Police Force A	0	29%	29%	**42%**
Police Force C	4%	20%	**44%**	32%
Police Force D	0	11%	42%	**47%**
Police Force E	3%	12%	40%	**45%**
Police Force F	9%	22%	30%	**39%**

Table 27: Call handlers' confidence in support from their police force if a person came to harm

Areas of consideration

- There are variations of practice *between* police forces as call handlers in some police forces are not expected to risk assess 'absent' cases, while in other police forces they are.
- There are consistent variations of practices *within* police forces, which may be indicative of lack of clarity in policies and/or expectations from senior management.
- The majority of call handlers follow a set protocol of questions in order to risk assess whether it is the first reported case or in repeated cases.
- The vast majority of call handlers do not handle reports from care providers differently than reports from a relative.
- Call handlers felt supported by their supervisors.
- Call handlers do not always consider the possibility of a person reported to them as having previously been a victim of abuse and/or child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- The majority of call handlers did not receive training in CSE and are not aware of the signs of CSE.
- Call handlers express a need to have more training in the new definition of 'absent' and CSE.
- Call handlers may not have immediate access to information regarding previous incidents of 'absent'. Given the search for the information is time consuming it may hinder call handlers from gaining information from previous incidents that may be relevant to the current situation and risk assessment.
- It may also be useful to store information regarding previous cases by the name of the person being reported rather than the reporting address, in order to maintain information regarding children in care as they are relocated to a new address.
- There is a lack of consistency and possibly clarity as to what checks are expected to be conducted before a risk assessment is completed.
- Call handlers did not feel confident their police force would support them if a person they classified as 'absent' came to harm.

3.2   Supervisors

Supervisors "have an oversight role to ensure that initial assessment of the incident and the level of response is correct. Part of the control room supervisor is to ensure that adequate resources are given to the investigation" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2). Supervisors are required to ensure that the assessment of risk and management of the investigation is conducted correctly. "The risk level for all cases should be checked as soon as is reasonably practical and all actions outlined for investigating officers are properly carried out and recorded. The risk assessment should be considered at every shift changeover as to whether or not it is correct. The first review process by a detective supervisor should take place after 48 hours or sooner if required" (NPIA, 2011, pg. 3).

Overall, 306 participants answered this survey. There were only two responses from Police Force B to this survey and they were not included in the analysis. 94% of the participants were a district or area supervisor and 6% were a control room/call room supervisor.

3.2.1   Demographic information

Rank

	Inspector	Sergeant	Police Constable	Civilian
Police Force A	8.8%	**76.5%**	0%	14.7%
Police Force C	**72.1%**	16.3%	7.0%	4.7%
Police Force D	15.8%	**83.2%**	1.0%	0%
Police Force E	34%	**55.3%**	9.7%	1.0%
Police Force F	**100%**	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 28: Supervisors' rank

The results show (see Table 28) a good deal of variation in rank of supervisors between police forces. In Police Force C and F they are in majority (or in the case of police force F exclusively) of Inspector rank, whereas supervisors in Police Forces A, D, and E are most likely to be Sergeants.

Work experience

	0–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–15 Years	Over 16 Years
Police Force A	0.0%	15.2%	21.2%	**63.6%**
Police Force C	2.3%	9.1%	18.2%	**70.5%**
Police Force D	0.0%	13.9%	35.6%	**50.5%**
Police Force E	1.0%	14.3%	22.9%	**61.9%**
Police Force F	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	**80.0%**

Table 29: Supervisors' work experience (years working for the police)

Across all police forces, supervisors tend to be very experienced and have over 16 years of service within the police (see Table 29).

	0–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–15 Years	Over 16 Years
Police Force A	3.2%	9.7%	29.0%	**58.1%**
Police Force C	13.6%	18.2%	13.6%	**54.4%**
Police Force D	4.1%	21.6%	29.9%	**44.3%**
Police Force E	6.5%	15.9%	27.1%	**50.5%**
Police Force F	14.3%	7.1%	21.4%	**57.1%**

Table 30: Years involved with missing persons investigations

Across all police forces, the good majority of supervisors have over 10 years of experience in their involvement with missing person investigations (see Table 30).

	0–50	51–100	101–500	Over 500
Police Force A	0.0%	11.8%	**61.8%**	26.5%
Police Force C	11.6%	14.0%	**53.5%**	20.9%
Police Force D	7.0%	16.0%	**45.0%**	32.0%
Police Force E	10.4%	14.2%	**53.8%**	21.7%
Police Force F	6.7%	0.0%	**46.7%**	**46.7%**

Table 31: Number of missing person investigations Supervisor has been involved with

The vast majority of supervisors across the five police forces are experienced having been involved with at least 101 missing person investigations (see Table 31).

Gender

The majority of supervisors from all five police forces are male. The results range between 53% in Police Force F to 87% of male supervisors in Police Force D.

Age

	20–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	Over 60
Police Force A	2.9%	20.6%	**61.8%**	14.7%	0.0%
Police Force C	2.3%	32.6%	**55.8%**	7.0%	2.3%
Police Force D	1.0%	42.2%	**52.0%**	4.9%	0.0%
Police Force E	2.8%	**40.6%**	**50.9%**	4.7%	0.9%
Police Force F	0.0%	21.4%	**71.4%**	7.1%	0.0%

Table 32: Age group of call handlers

The five police forces show a relatively homogeneous picture in terms of the age of supervisors (see Table 32). In all police forces they are in majority between 41 and 50, which is in accordance with their years of service in the police and their level of experience with missing persons.

Overall, the typical supervisor is male aged between 40 and 50, either an Inspector or Sergeant, with at least 11 years of experience and having been involved with at least 100 missing person investigations.

3.2.2   The decision-making process of risk assessment

Similarly to call handlers, the majority of supervisors indicated that a set protocol of questions is followed for the purposes of risk assessment. However, in Police Force A the proportion of 'don't know' answers was 34.8%, which may indicate that these supervisors are possibly less closely involved with the initial risk assessment process.

When asked how many questions they follow the answers were mixed (see Table 33). The majority of supervisors from Police Forces D, E and F stated that within their police force 6–10 questions are asked, whereas call handlers from Police Force C follow 11–20 questions. Police Force A is split between 1–5 and 11–20 questions. It is worth noting the variation of answers *within* police forces as that may indicate lack of clarity on police forces protocol. It is also possible that supervisors found the survey question confusing.

	0	1–5	6–10	11–20
Police Force A	0	**35.7%**	28.6%	**35.7%**
Police Force C	0	0	2.6%	**97.4%**
Police Force D	1.8%	14.0%	**49.1%**	35.1%
Police Force E	2.9%	8.8%	**66.2%**	22.1%
Police Force F	0	0	**100%**	0

Table 33: Number of set questions that call handlers follow

When asked whether the same protocol is repeated every time in cases of 'absent' the majority of supervisors said 'yes', but the number of 'don't know' answers is noteworthy (see Table 34). It is possible that the supervisors found the survey question confusing or that this answer is suggestive of a lack of clarity within police forces. These percentages are lower than indicated by the Call Handlers, see above.

	Yes	No	I don't know
Police Force A	**56.5%**	4.3%	39.1%
Police Force C	**97.4%**	0%	2.6%
Police Force D	**66.2%**	15.4%	15.4%
Police Force E	**72.7%**	7.8%	19.5%
Police Force F	**66.7%**	11.1%	22.2%

Table 34: Supervisors' answers to whether the same protocol is repeated fully every time in cases of 'absent'

Supervisors were asked whether they take any of the following actions as part of the risk assessment process. The results are presented in Tables 35–40. For more information about the aim of these actions please see page 16–18.

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**61.9%**	28.6%	4.8%	4.8%
Police Force C	**54.1%**	29.7%	8.1%	8.1%
Police Force D	**45.2%**	33.9%	14.5%	6.5%
Police Force E	**55.8%**	29.9%	13.0%	1.3%
Police Force F	**88.9%**	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%

Table 35: Proportion of supervisors who conduct minimum check of contact with 'absent' person

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**71.4%**	19%	9.5%	0.0%
Police Force C	**37.8%**	32.4%	18.9%	10.8%
Police Force D	**40.3%**	30.6%	24.2%	4.8%
Police Force E	**57.1%**	26.0%	15.6%	1.3%
Police Force F	**66.7%**	11.1%	22.2%	0.0%

Table 36: Proportion of supervisors who conduct a minimum check on intelligence data base

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**57.1%**	19%	23.8%	0.0%
Police Force C	**34.3%**	**34.3%**	20.0%	11.4%
Police Force D	**44.1%**	28.8%	18.6%	8.5%
Police Force E	**67.1%**	19.7%	10.5%	2.6%
Police Force F	**77.8%**	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%

Table 37: Proportion of supervisors who check the case management systems

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**85.7%**	4.8%	9.5%	0.0%
Police Force C	27.0%	24.3%	**32.4%**	16.2%
Police Force D	**48.8%**	19.4%	17.7%	14.5%
Police Force E	**43.4%**	11.8%	40.8%	3.9%
Police Force F	**66.7%**	11.1%	22.2%	0.0%

Table 38: Proportion of supervisors who check the Police National Computer (PNC)

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**71.4%**	9.5%	14.3%	4.8%
Police Force C	**27.0%**	**27.0%**	**27.0%**	18.9%
Police Force D	**43.5%**	22.6%	22.6%	11.3%
Police Force E	**54.5%**	22.1%	18.2%	5.2%
Police Force F	**88.9%**	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 39: Proportion of supervisors who check custody

	Always	In most cases	In some cases	Never
Police Force A	**40.0%**	20.0%	35.0%	5.0%
Police Force C	5.4%	13.5%	**64.9%**	16.2%
Police Force D	22.6%	16.1%	**46.8%**	14.5%
Police Force E	21.1%	13.2%	**48.7%**	18.4%
Police Force F	12.5%	**50.0%**	37.5%	0.0%

Table 40: Proportion of supervisors who check child protection order

The results presented in Tables 35–40 show that a high minority of supervisors from all five police forces are unlikely to act on the above procedures. Furthermore, the *majority* of supervisors from Police Forces C, D and E do not tend to check child protection orders. However, supervisors from Police Force F do check custody. It is also important to note variation in practices *within* police forces.

These results may be explained by some of the 13 comments supervisors made in relation to this question. A good number of further actions to be considered were mentioned. They include:

- Check with hospitals.
- Check homeless shelters.
- Check social media.
- Check with mental health teams.

In addition it was commented that "child sexual exploitation (CSE) is always considered but not specifically included in our 16 questions".

A further comment reads:

> "A lot of missing/absent reports are found before the paperwork is completed. To be more accurate, we get the report, we speak to the informant and gather the relevant data and do the relevant checks, including physically looking for them, and often find them. Only if these attempts are unsuccessful, do we do loads more work to get a better and more in depth picture of the person and their circumstances to allow us a better idea of how to locate them. If we did all the work with the initial report, we wouldn't have enough officers to deal with everything else. We try to use very limited resources as effectively as we can so that we can deal with as many jobs as we can, and each to the best of our ability. We can't give every job 100%, as we would have nothing left for the huge number of other jobs we need to deal with."

Supervisors were asked, how often do they agree with the original risk assessment of 'absent' (see Table 41). Clearly, the most common answer given is 'most of the time', and this is the case for all five police forces.

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never	I'd rather not say
Police Force A	0.0%	**95.5%**	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Police Force C	2.6%	**84.2%**	13.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Police Force D	1.6%	**77.4%**	14.5%	3.2%	0.0%	3.2%
Police Force E	4.0%	**86.7%**	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%
Police Force F	0.0%	**77.8%**	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 41: Supervisors agree with initial classification of 'absent' cases

Supervisors were asked what happens when there is insufficient information to make an effective risk assessment (see Table 42). Supervisors in all five police forces were likely to classify the case as missing.

	Absent	Missing	I don't know
Police Force A	10.0%	**70.0%**	20.0%
Police Force C	4.3%	**73.9%**	21.7%
Police Force D	6.8%	**86.4%**	6.8%
Police Force E	8.6%	**75.9%**	15.5%
Police Force F	16.7%	**83.3%**	0.0%

Table 42: Risk assessment in cases where there is insufficient information

59 Supervisors extended their answers and explained that in cases where there is insufficient information they would:

- Not classify and try and obtain more information.
- Re-task the log to ensure the basic 16 questions are asked so they can make an informed assessment.
- This decision is taken out of their hands.
- Even without an effective risk assessment information known on an individual the supervisor will decide how the case will be classified.

3.2.3 Safeguarding measures

It was important to ascertain what supervisors consider during their risk assessment process. These issues are also highly relevant to the subject of safeguarding and are therefore worth highlighting.

	The Absent person's age	Is their behaviour out of character?	Do they have medical needs?	Have they previously been a victim of abuse?	Have they previously been a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation?	Are they at risk of becoming a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation?	Are they a danger to others?	Are they at risk of self-harm?
Police Force A	91%	100%	96%	96%	91%	96%	**86%**	91%
Police Force C	100%	100%	100%	97%	**85%**	**85%**	100%	100%
Police Force D	95%	100%	97%	**91%**	95%	100%	95%	95%
Police Force E	99%	100%	99%	**83%**	**80%**	**82%**	99%	99%
Police Force F	100%	100%	100%	100%	**89%**	100%	100%	100%

Table 43: Issues supervisors consider during their risk assessment process

The result shows (see Table 43) an overall tendency of supervisors to consider most of these issues even more frequently than call handlers. However, the possibility of the person who is being reported as previously being a victim of abuse or child sexual exploitation is still not considered as prominently as other issues. There is also variation between police forces, with Police Forces A, D and F often considering these issues while Police Forces C and E less so.

Other issues supervisors stated they may consider are:

- Recent history.
- Any written or stated messages by the reported person indicating actions they may take.
- A possible trigger, such as bereavement, being made redundant, break up in a relationship, financial worries, etc.
- Weather conditions.
- What actions have been taken by the reporting person to locate the person they are reporting.
- History of substance misuse.
- Risk of honour-based violence.
- Time since they were last seen.

As acknowledged by ACPO (2013), safeguarding is the cornerstone of police policy in relation to 'absent' and 'missing' cases. An element of safeguarding is taking actions to enable all children to have the best outcomes (Working together to safeguard children, 2013). In cases identified as high risk supervisors should notify supervisors responsible for the area in which the investigation is to take place (NPIA, 2011, pg. 2). Therefore, supervisors were asked from 'absent' cases they review, whether they escalate cases where harm is identified for an investigation/intervention.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Police force A	**45.5%**	40.9%	4.5%	9.1%
Police force C	**62.9%**	28.6%	5.7%	2.9%
Police force D	**42.1%**	36.8%	14.0%	7.0%
Police force E	**52.8%**	36.1%	9.7%	1.4%
Police force F	**100%**	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 44: Escalate where harm is identified for an investigation/intervention

The results presented in Table 44 show that most supervisors state they would escalate an 'absent' case where harm is identified. However, a minority in all the police forces say they would rarely or never do so.

3.2.4 Review of 'absent' cases

To the question, at what point does the initial review typically occur, the answers were as follows. The level of variation *within* and also *between* police forces may reflect a diverse practice, both within police forces and between police forces (see Table 45).

	N/A	After 6 hours	After 8 hours	After 24 hours	There is no time limit	When new information comes in
Police Force A	9.5%	14.3%	9.5%	0.0%	**52.4%**	19.0%
Police Force C	0.0%	**35.5%**	19.4%	6.5%	25.8%	25.8%
Police Force D	5.2%	8.6%	17.2%	27.6%	**29.3%**	19.0%
Police Force E	3.2%	23.8%	19.0%	3.2%	28.6%	**30.2%**
Police Force F	0.0%	**33.3%**	**33.3%**	0.0%	22.2%	11.1%

Table 45: Time before initial review

When asked at what point does the follow up review occur, the answers are as below (see Table 46). As before, this may be taken as an indication that practices in this regard vary both within and between police forces.

	After 6 hours	After 8 hours	After 24 hours	There is no time limit	When new information comes in
Police Force A	5.3%	10.5%	26.3%	**52.6%**	10.5%
Police Force C	15.6%	**43.8%**	9.4%	31.3%	15.6%
Police Force D	10.9%	25.5%	**34.5%**	23.6%	12.7%
Police Force E	11.3%	**49.3%**	14.1%	22.5%	12.7%
Police Force F	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%	**33.3%**	22.2%

Table 46: Time before a follow up review

42 supervisors explained when the initial review will take place and 36 supervisors discussed when the follow-up review will take place. The responses were fairly similar and are summarised below.

- The case is initially reviewed by the Sergeant when the initial report comes in.
- There is no set time limit. Inspectors may put different time scales on different cases.
- The time of a review depends on workload.
- A review takes place at the start of each shift, every 9 hours.

Supervisors were asked whether they reviewed individual cases of 'absent' (see Figure 5). The majority of responses were affirmative, but the percentages range from 52.2% in Police Force A to 88.9% in Police Force F.
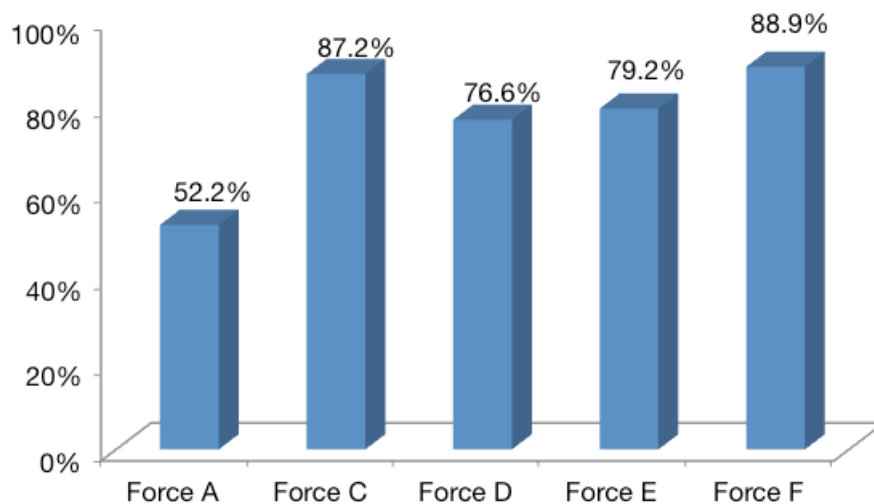
Figure 5: Supervisors review 'absent' cases as part of their role

Supervisors were asked whether in repeated 'absent' cases they are able to examine information from previous incidences (Figure 6). The majority of supervisors responded positively with percentages varying from 69.8% for Police Force D to 100% for Police Force E. In other words, up to 17%–30% of supervisors in four police forces do not examine previous incidents. This may have impact on the risk assessment process.
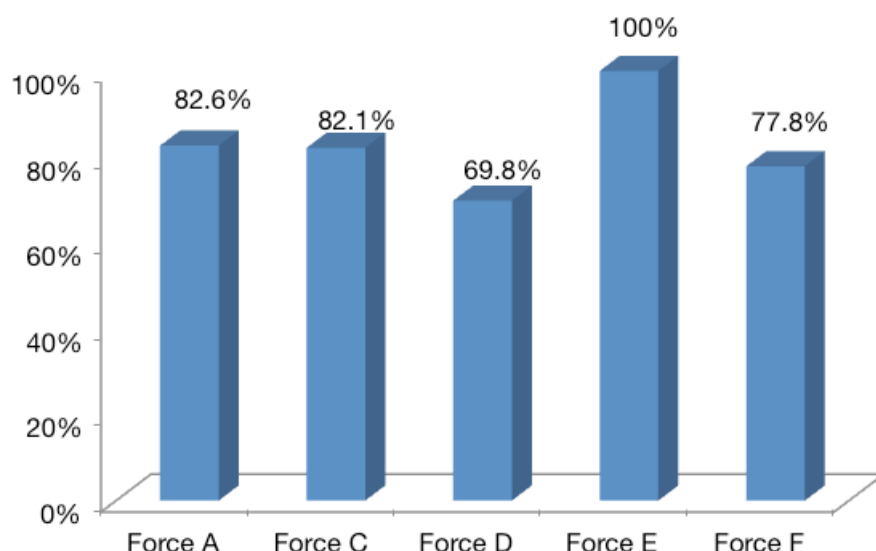
Figure 6: Supervisors ability to examine information from previous 'absent' cases

The majority of supervisors said that they had detailed information to undertake this review; Supervisors in Police Force D stated their information was limited to 'dates, times and had only basic additional information'.

Supervisors were asked how often they liaised with a missing person coordinator (see Table 47). This relationship is deemed important because a missing person coordinator is tasked with liaising with other agencies and thus would need to be familiar with ongoing cases. The vast majority of supervisors stated they never liaised with the coordinator. It is important to note that the practice in Police Force F is different as supervisors and coordinators liaise on a more regular basis.

	On a daily basis	On a weekly basis	On a monthly basis	Never
Police Force A	0%	0%	18%	**82%**
Police Force C	8%	8%	31%	**53%**
Police Force D	2%	5%	18%	**75%**
Police Force E	5%	4%	9%	**82%**
Police Force F	0%	**44%**	33%	22%

Table 47: Supervisors liaising with missing person coordinators

Supervisors asked whether they recorded their rationale in reviewing 'absent' and 'missing' cases (see Figure 7). Overall, the majority of supervisors do record their rationale. However, there is a tendency to record rationale in cases of 'missing' and slightly less so in cases of 'absent'. There is also some variation in practice between police forces, with Police Forces A and D less likely to record their rationale in cases of 'absent' than the other police forces.
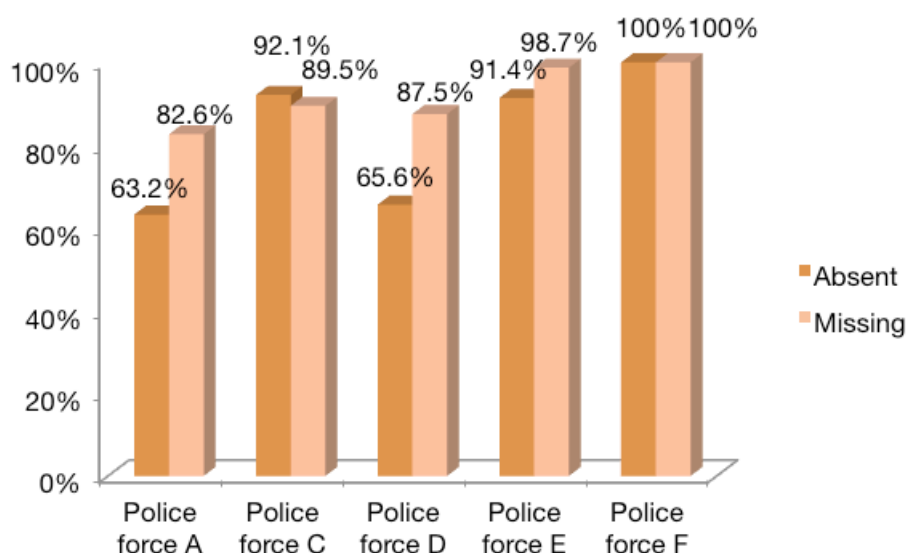
Figure 7: Supervisors recording their rationale in 'absent' and 'missing' cases

Supervisors were also asked whether they knew how many 'absent' cases in their area have been reclassified as 'missing' in the past month. The answers are provided below (see Table 48).

	0	1–5	6–10	11–25	26–50	51–100	I don't know
Police Force A	4.8%	28.6%	0.0%	4.8%	4.8%	0.0%	**57.1%**
Police Force C	0.0%	13.2%	26.3%	2.6%	5.3%	0.0%	**52.6%**
Police Force D	10.7%	26.6%	3.1%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	**56.3%**
Police Force E	10.4%	28.6%	7.8%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	**50.6%**
Police Force F	0.0%	**33.3%**	11.1%	**33.3%**	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%

Table 48: 'Absent' cases reclassified as 'missing' in the supervisors area

It is noteworthy that for four of the five police forces, the majority answer is 'I don't know'. Respondents did have the opportunity to give examples of such reclassifications. The most frequently listed reasons for reclassification were:

• The length of time spent as absent, in particular when that time period became out of character.
• New information had come to light which may involve a re-appraisal of the risk of CSE, or other risks.
• On two occasions a respondent argued that a reclassification suited a risk-averse organisation, or risk-averse management.

3.2.5 Training

Supervisors in most police forces indicated in a majority that they did receive training in applying the new classification system, with percentages ranging from 59.2% in Police Force E to 78.9% in Police Force C. Only in Police Force F did a minority of supervisors indicate that they received this training, 33%. When asked what type of training the answers were as follows. Do note that more than one type of training could have been received (see Table 49).

	Briefing	Email or e-learning	Training session	Training day
Police Force A	33.3%	**50.0%**	0.0%	16.7%
Police Force C	29.2%	**70.8%**	12.5%	12.5%
Police Force D	19.0%	**66.7%**	23.8%	0.0%
Police Force E	29.3%	**68.3%**	22%	12.2%
Police Force F	66.7%	**100%**	0.0%	0.0%

Table 49: Training in applying the new classification system

Supervisors were asked whether they received any training regarding signs of child sexual exploitation (CSE) (see Figure 8). Overall, in four out of five police forces the answer in majority is a 'yes'. Only Police Force E reflects a one in three supervisors saying that they have received this training.
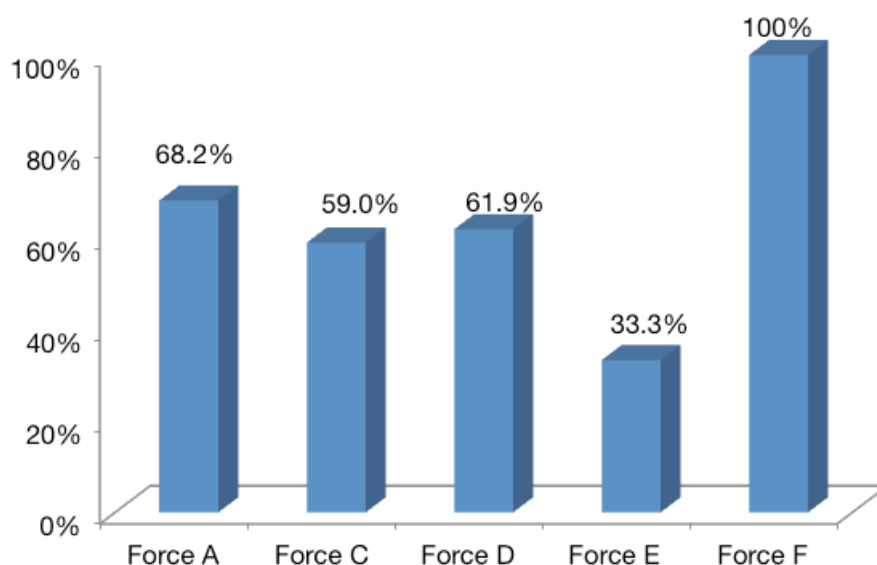
Figure 8: Training in child sexual exploitation (CSE)

The question, did you receive any scenario training, brought mixed responses. All but one police force answered in majority 'yes' with percentages varying from 90.9% (Police Force A) to 55.6% (Police Force F). The exception is Police Force E, where 16% reporting having received scenario training.

3.2.6 Confidence

Supervisors were also asked whether they thought their training was sufficient (see Table 50). Only in Police Force F did supervisors in a majority say that they were happy with the training they received.

	Yes, I'm happy with the training	Training was adequate but I would like more	Training was insufficient
Police Force A	30%	**40%**	30%
Police Force C	**48.7%**	23.1%	28.2%
Police Force D	**37.0%**	31.5%	31.5%
Police Force E	**36.5%**	27%	**36.5%**
Police Force F	**66.7%**	22.2%	11.1%

Table 50: Assessment of supervisors training

Supervisors were asked how confident they felt their police force would support their decision making if a person came to harm in an 'absent' case they classified (see Table 51). Overall, 41% of supervisors stated they did not feel confident their police force would support them, and 36% were neutral. Only 1-in-4 of supervisors (23%) expressed confidence their police force would support them. This may not relate completely to missing person investigations but other issues as well.

	Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not confident
Police Force A	4.5%	31.8%	**36.4%**	27.3%
Police Force C	2.8%	22.2%	36.1%	**38.9%**
Police Force D	1.6%	12.9%	**58.1%**	27.4%
Police Force E	1.3%	17.3%	**42.7%**	38.7%
Police Force F	22.2%	22.2%	**33.3%**	22.2%

Table 51: Confidence in the police force's support should a person they classified as 'absent' come to harm

Areas for consideration

- There are consistent variations of practices *within* police forces which may be indicative of lack of clarity in policies and/or expectations from senior management.
- The majority of supervisors take action in areas of safeguarding. However, a significant minority of supervisors do not.
- Supervisors often agree with the original classification of 'absent'.
- When there is insufficient information supervisors will either classify the case as 'missing' or not classify it until they gather more information.
- Supervisors will consider key risk factors. However, they are less likely to consider whether the person was a victim of abuse or a victim of CSE.
- Supervisors in most police forces did not liaise with missing person coordinators. However, supervisors in Police Force D liaised with coordinators on a regular basis.
- Most supervisors did not know how many 'absent' cases were re-classified as 'missing' in their area, in the past month. The majority of supervisors in Police Force F were aware of these cases.

- Most supervisors received training regarding CSE (except for Police Force E). However, 30%–40% of supervisors in Police Forces A, C and D did not receive such training.
- A third of supervisors stated their training was insufficient with the exception of Police Force F where most supervisors were happy with their training.
- Overall, supervisors were not confident their police force would support them should an 'absent' person come to harm.

3.3 Missing person coordinators

The approval by ACPO for the introduction of the new 'absent' definition was conditional on the role of a missing person coordinator, or someone performing this function, existing in police forces. The ACPO guidance (2013, pg.10) states "It is also beneficial if the role is co-located with the child sexual exploitation coordinator". The coordinator is required to collate information on all instances of absence and missing, ensuring records for individuals from children's and other care homes can be distinguished and reviewed.

This will provide the necessary information for them to investigate the circumstances, identify locations where the individual was found, and review repeat occurrences, in order to identify trends and risk of harm. "Consideration must be given to children missing education, persistent absence from schools, and Youth Offending Service data on absconding and breaching to build a picture of local absence and missing trends. Their work should inform strategies for interventions to reduce the incidence of missing and absence, assist with identifying priorities for further safeguarding work, and provide a basis for on-going engagement with relevant partners to ensure an effective collaborative response is being received from all agencies. The role should include liaison with other agencies and care providers" (ACPO, 2013, pg. 10).

Overall, 20 participants answered this survey (ranging between two participants from Police Forces B and C and six participants from Police Force D). This was expected as there are only a handful of missing person coordinators (or someone performing this function) in each police force. Responses were gathered from the **six** police forces that were invited to take part in this study. Given the low response rate and the risk of exposing the identity of participants most of the results will be presented as at an aggregate level and will not include a comparison of practices between police forces.

3.3.1 Demographic information

Rank

The results presented in Figure 9 show that the majority (60%) of coordinators are Police Constables, followed by civilians (30%).
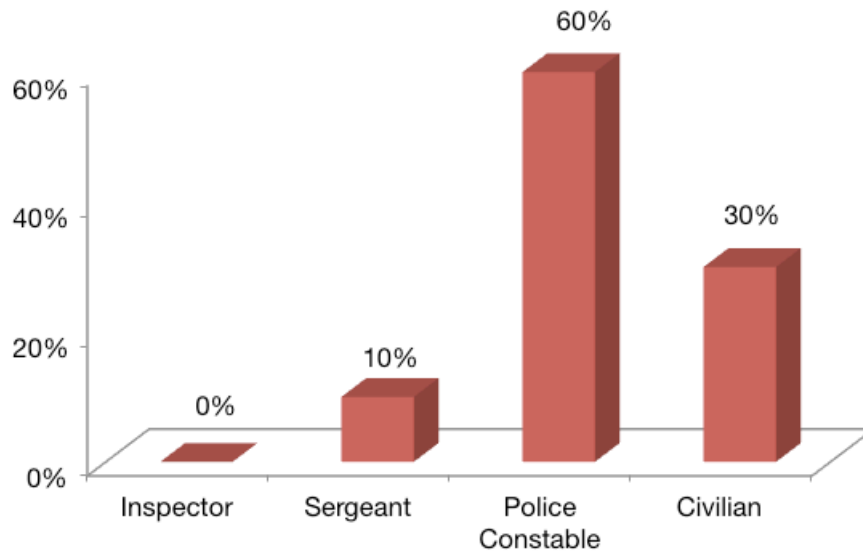
Figure 9: Rank of missing person coordinators

Work experience

The majority of coordinators have been working for the police for over five years and over half of participants have been working for the police for over 16 years (see Figure 10).
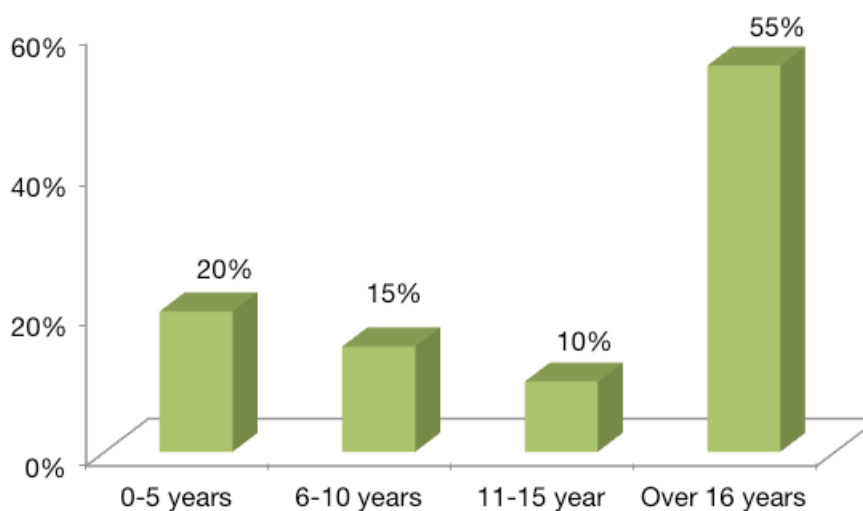
Figure 10: Years working for the police

The majority of coordinators have been involved with missing person investigations for only five years or less (see Figure 11).
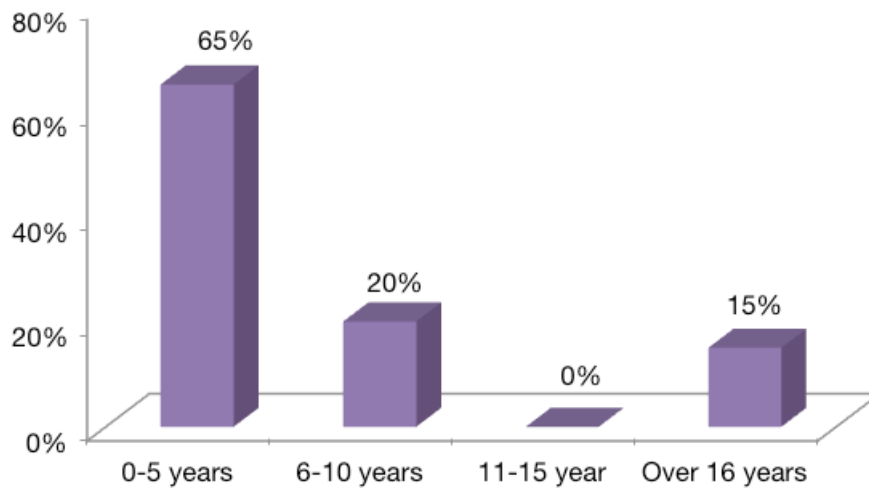
Figure 11: Years of involvement with missing person investigations

However, the vast majority (90%) of coordinators state they have been involved with hundreds of missing person investigations (see Figure 12).
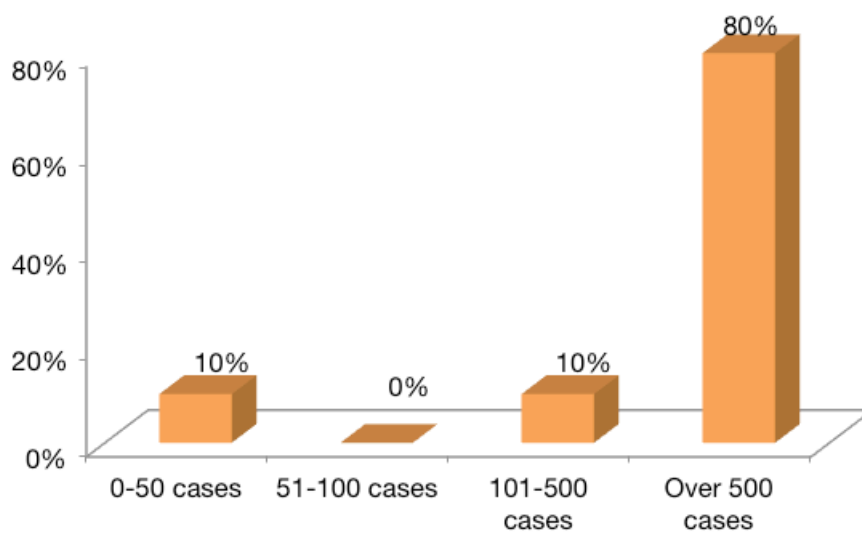
Figure 12: Number of missing person investigations coordinators have been involved with

Gender

The majority of coordinators (63%) are female and 37% are male.

Age

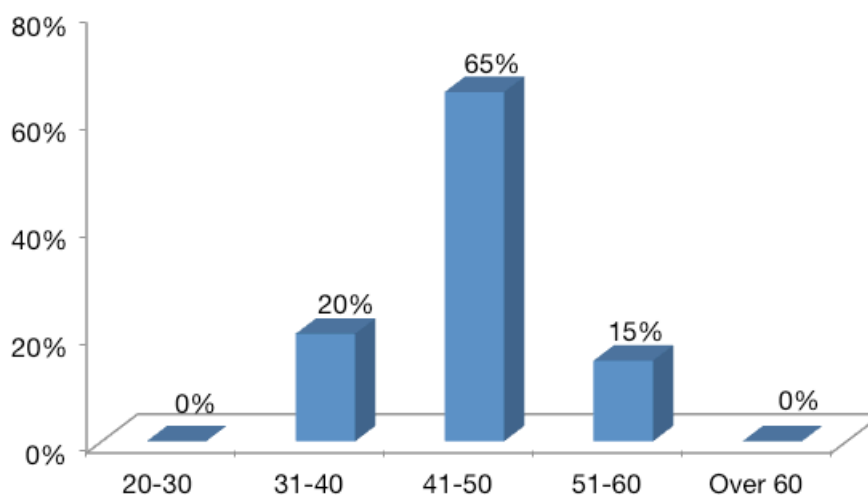The majority of coordinators (80%) are over the age of 40 (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Age of coordinators

3.3.2 The decision-making process of risk assessment

Coordinators were asked what issues they consider as part of the risk assessment process (see Table 52). The vast majority of coordinators, if not all, stated they do consider the factors listed below. This differs slightly from the responses of call handlers and supervisors.

Issue	%
Their age	**100%**
Is their behaviour out of character?	92%
Do they have medical needs?	92%
Have they previously been a victim of abuse?	92%
Have they previously been a victim of CSE?	**100%**
Are they at risk to be a victim of CSE?	**100%**
Are they a danger to others?	92%
Are they at risk of self-harm?	92%

Table 52: Issue to consider when risk assessing

3.3.3 Review of 'absent' cases

60% of coordinators stated they review individual cases of 'absent' while 40% stated they did not. It is important to note that 80% of coordinators in Police Force D stated they did not review individual cases of 'absent'.

84% of coordinators stated they were able to examine information from previous 'absent' cases. The majority of coordinators stated there was either no time limit for the initial review or that a case was reviewed when new information came in (see Figure 14). Answers were slightly more varied in relation to the follow up review with equal number of coordinators stating the follow up review will take place after eight hours or that there was no time limit. Overall, the majority of coordinators stated that the follow up review will take place when new information came in.
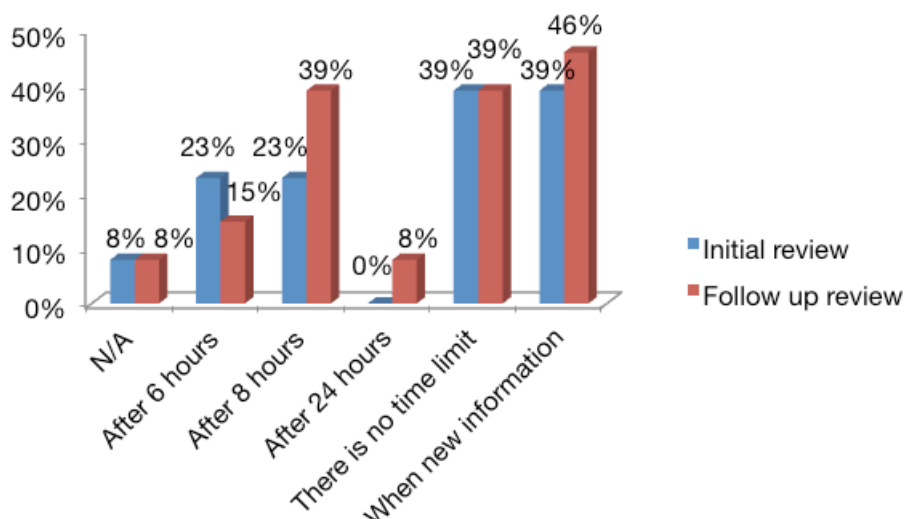
44

Figure 14: Time for initial and follow up reviews of 'absent' cases

Coordinators were asked how many cases of 'absent' were reclassified in the past month as 'missing' (see Figure 15). It is important to highlight that 44% of coordinators did not know the answer to this question.
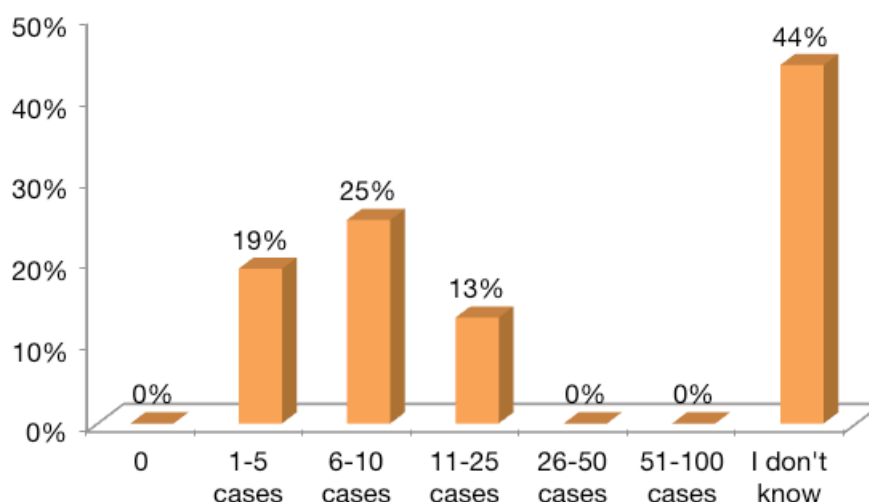

Figure 15: Cases of 'absent' to be reclassified as 'missing' in the past month

12 coordinators identified reasons why 'absent' cases may be re-classified as 'missing':

• When the behaviour became out of character.
• When contact could not be established.
• When new risks were identified.
• When the person was incorrectly classified in first place.
• When a person has been 'absent' for longer than 24 hours.
• When a person has been 'absent' for more than 72 hours.
• PNC checks have identified warning markers such as risk of CSE or self-harm.

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3.3.4 Safeguarding measures

Coordinators were asked what they did to improve safeguarding outcomes and/or prevent further reports of 'absence' (see Table 53). Overall, the majority of coordinators are regularly involved with activities aimed to improve safeguarding outcomes and/or prevent reports of 'absence'.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Share information with relevant agencies	**92%**	0%	8%	0%
Consider strategy discussion with relevant agencies	**75%**	8%	17%	0%
Liaise directly with care providers to adjust care packages	**58%**	33%	8%	0%
Submit intelligence reports where necessary	**67%**	17%	8%	8%
Escalate where harm is identified for an investigation/intervention	**75%**	17%	8%	0%

Table 53: Actions taken by coordinators to improve safeguarding outcomes and/or prevent further reports of 'absence'

While most coordinators seem to be very active in these activities, coordinators in Police Force D are, for the most part, rarely involved with these activities.

3.3.5 Multi-agency work

Coordinators were asked what was the threshold for multi-agency action (i.e. more than one agency are working together in a planned and formal way) in cases of 'absent' in their police force. The majority of coordinators responded that it was three incidents in 90 days (73%). 27% of coordinators stated their force does not have a threshold. Four coordinators also stated other possible thresholds:

- Five incidents per month for individuals and seven incidents per month for premises.
- Three incidents in 30 days.

When asked whether they were involved with multi-agency work regarding repeated cases of 'absent' 63% of coordinators stated they were involved, yet 37% stated they were not involved in multi-agency work. It is important to note that all coordinators from Police Force D stated they are *not* involved with any multi-agency work.

Coordinators were also asked how many multi-agency meetings they attended each month in relation to cases of 'absent' (see Figure 16). It is important to note that all coordinators from Police Force D stated they do *not* attend any multi-agency meetings.
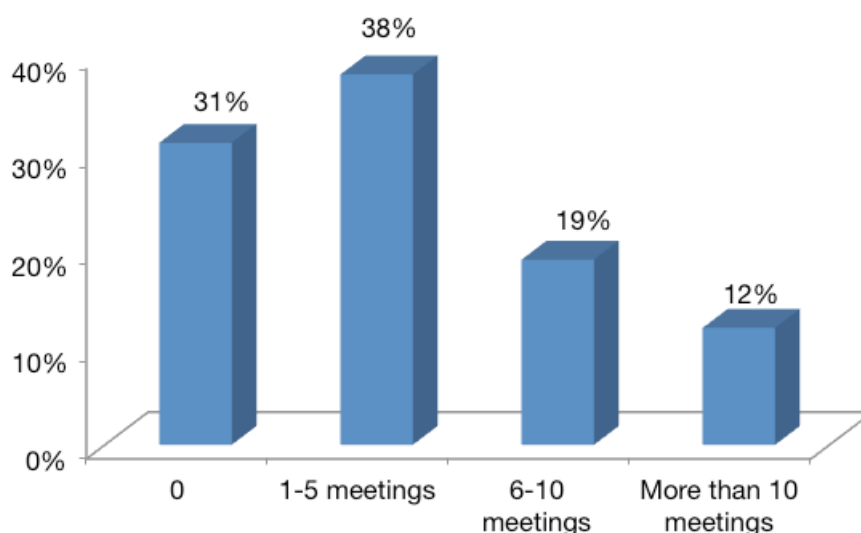
Figure 16: Number of multi-agency meetings coordinators attend per month

Coordinators were asked what agencies they liaise with in cases of 'absent' (see Table 54). Given the responses from coordinators in Police Force D above, they also responded 'Never' to liaising with most of the agencies listed below, with the exception of social services which most of them liaise with rarely (60%) or regularly (20%), child care providers in their area (ranging between regularly (25%) to never (50%)) and Ofsted (25% rarely and 75% never).

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Social services	**69%**	6%	19%	6%
Child safeguarding panel	0%	**43%**	14%	**43%**
Placements panels	0%	14%	29%	**57%**
CSE meetings	**53%**	13%	0%	33%
Child care providers in your area	**60%**	13%	7%	20%
Adult care providers in your area	7%	7%	29%	**57%**
Child care providers outside your area	13%	27%	27%	**33%**
Adult care providers outside your area	0%	7%	29%	**64%**
Residential mental health services	0%	27%	27%	**46%**
Local hospitals	0%	20%	**40%**	**40%**
Central referral units	27%	13%	20%	**40%**
Ofsted	7%	14%	29%	**50%**

Table 54: Agencies coordinators liaise with in cases of 'absent'

While there is some variation in practice between the police forces, the low number of participants prohibits any accurate comparisons. Overall, coordinators tend to liaise regularly with social services, child care providers in their area and attend CSE meetings. They are also likely to liaise occasionally with child safeguarding panels.

Three coordinators also listed other agencies they may liaise with:

- Barnardo's.
- No Limits.
- Education.
- Missing People.
- Street Pastors.
- Drugs/Alcohol support agencies.
- The Children's Society.

11 coordinators explained that the purpose of involving these agencies:

- To share information regarding safeguarding and child protection concerns.
- To ensure strategies are in place especially around CSE concerns.
- To ensure placements are meeting a young person's needs and if this isn't apparent that steps are being taken to amend Care Plans.
- To make referrals for additional support if required.
- To collate intelligence.
- To monitor and/or identify any patterns or trends.
- To identify push/pull factors and possibility of child trafficking.
- To identify where improvements in systems can be made.
- To inform Ofsted prior to un-announced inspections.

The majority of coordinators (81%) stated that they briefed other agencies in relation to the 'absent' classification. Agencies that coordinators briefed are listed below:

- Social services (100%).
- Child care providers in your area (85%).
- CSE meetings (69%).
- Child safeguarding panel (46%).
- Child care providers outside your area (46%).
- Adult care providers in your area (39%).
- Central referral units (23%).
- Ofsted (23%).
- Residential mental health services (15%).
- Local hospitals (15%).
- Placement panels (8%).
- Adult care providers outside your area (8%).

Other agencies coordinators briefed include:

- Education services.
- Children's society.
- Drugs/alcohol charities.
- Homeless charities.
- Adult safeguarding panels.
- Children's mental health services.
- Youth offending services.

Coordinators were asked whether the new 'absent' policy changed their workload (see Figure 17). It seems that the majority of coordinators (69%) do not see a substantial change in their workload since the introduction of the 'absent' policy. However, 1-in-4 coordinators state their workload is now higher.
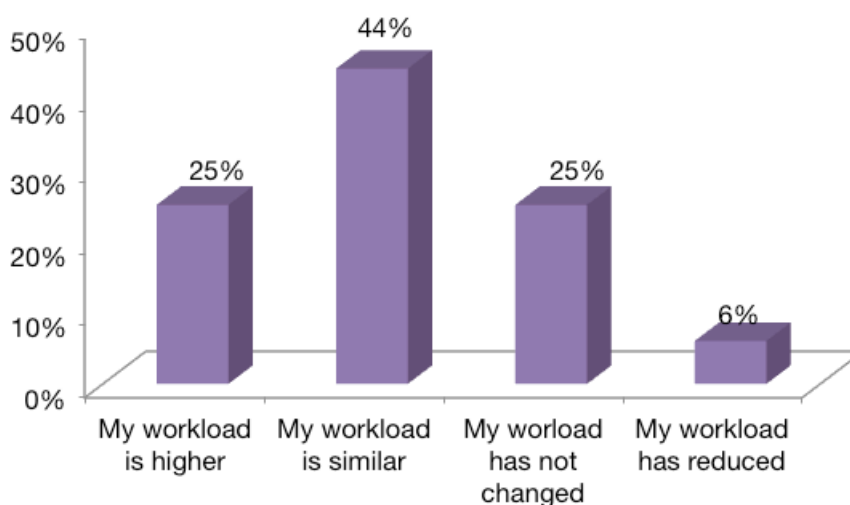

Figure 17: Change in workload since the new 'absent' policy

3.3.6 Training

For the most part, coordinators received training (in somes cases more than one type) in applying the new classification system (83%). The training tended to consist of a briefing (54%), e-learning (39%), training day (23%) and a training session (15%).

The majority of coordinators also received training in CSE (80%) which consisted of a training session (62%), training day (39%), and a briefing and e-learning (23%).

The training was provided by:

- Local Authority Trainer.
- In-house police force.
- In-house Child Exploitation Team.
- County council.
- UK Missing Persons Bureau.
- Barnardo's.
- Catch 22.

66.7% of coordinators received scenario training and the majority of coordinators consider the training they received sufficient (57%). 36% of coordinators consider the training they received as adequate but would like to receive more.

44% of coordinators provide training of 'absent' as part of their work. They tend to train:

- Call handlers (67%).
- Police Constables (83%).
- Other agencies (83%).

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Coordinators provide training in the form of:

- Training session (71%).
- Briefing (57%).
- E-learning (43%).
- Training day (0%).

Areas for consideration

- Coordinators consider the risk of a person being a victim of abuse and/or CSE more often than call handlers and supervisors.
- The majority of coordinators take action to improve safeguarding outcomes and/or prevent reports of 'absent'.
- The majority of coordinators received training in CSE.
- Practices of review of 'absent' cases by coordinators vary substantially between police forces, with 80% of coordinators not reviewing 'absent' cases as part of their role in Police Force D.
- Almost half (43%) of coordinators did not know how many 'absent' cases were reclassified as 'missing' in their area in the past month.
- Coordinators in Police Force D do not tend to take action to improve safeguarding. They are also unlikely to be involved with multi-agency work and do not tend to attend multi-agency meetings.
- Coordinators tend to liaise regularly with social services, child care providers in their area and attend CSE meetings. However, they rarely or never liaise with other partners such as placements panels, adult and child care providers outside their area, adult care providers in their area, residential health services, local hospitals and Ofsted.
- Coordinators also tend to brief social services, child care providers in their area and CSE meetings, but unlikely to brief other partners.
- 44% of coordinators provide training of 'absent' as part of their role.

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About the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons

The Centre for the Study of Missing Persons (CSMP) is a specialist research centre within the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, at the University of Portsmouth. The Centre was founded in April 2012, in partnership with the charity Missing People, to accommodate the growing interest in the field of missing persons. It aims to provide a clear focus for research, knowledge transfer and educational provision to academics, professionals in this community and relatives of missing people. The Centre also aims to function as a one-stop knowledge resource which researchers and other interested parties can access, and use to communicate and exchange knowledge about missing persons.

For more information about the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons please see: **www.port.ac.uk/centre-for-the-study-of-missing-persons**

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