



Cafcass Quality Account 2013-14

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Introduction

This is the first Cafcass Quality Account. It summarises the steps we have taken to improve the quality of our services in 2013-14. We will produce such an account, and be accountable for what we say, every year from now on.

Our professional responsibility is to understand the needs, wishes and feelings of vulnerable children (Cafcass worked with over 140,000 in 2013-14) and to make recommendations for their future to the family court which hears their case. In the process, we try to help children and their families as much as we can.

We are now recognised as a key player in the family justice system. Since early 2011, new cases have been allocated within our two day target. The systems to maintain early allocation have been embedded for several years now. The quality of our work has improved consistently and continuously – the distribution of quality is also much more even throughout England. A stable budget until April 2016 allows us to plan for the period beyond that. This is what we are now doing...



A – What did we do to improve the quality of our practice?

The 'Getting to Good' improvement programme was a key strategic priority, with a first target of 50% of work being graded as 'Good' by September 2013. Each of our 17 Service Areas throughout England had a 'Getting to Good' action plan. The improvements were evidenced by auditing a large sample of casework in April 2013 and September 2013. Audits were carried out independently by the Cafcass National Improvement Service (NIS):

- The audit assessed the standard of casework against our agreed threshold of 'Good' using the Cafcass Quality Improvement Audit Tool.
- The audit was carried out on randomly selected and recently closed case files.

Each of our service areas had a 'Getting to Good' action plan

B – What impact did it have?

The audit results

The September 2013 'Getting to Good' audit showed an increasing quantum of good work in the sample, compared to the April 2013 audit.

This is what our staff had to say about the 'Getting to Good' programme:

"The programme has focussed frontline staff and managers on improving service delivery and provided a consistency of approach in case work and recording. Getting a shared understanding of the threshold of Good has enabled the organisation to make rapid improvements. In addition the move towards a more inquisitorial approach certainly improves the quality of case discussion and promotes reflective practice, and places the child at the heart of our work."

"Our results have promoted a desire to grow as an organisation as well as to improve team performance. It is encouraging to see the performance of our team of public law practitioners rapidly grow from a much lower base in 2012 to what they have achieved in the last round of National Audits where they performed in the top quartile of the organisation."

Service Manager, London

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”

Service
Manager,
London

C – How do we know we did a good job?

Ofsted examined over 500 files in March 2014. Their findings are reported in this quality account. In their words...

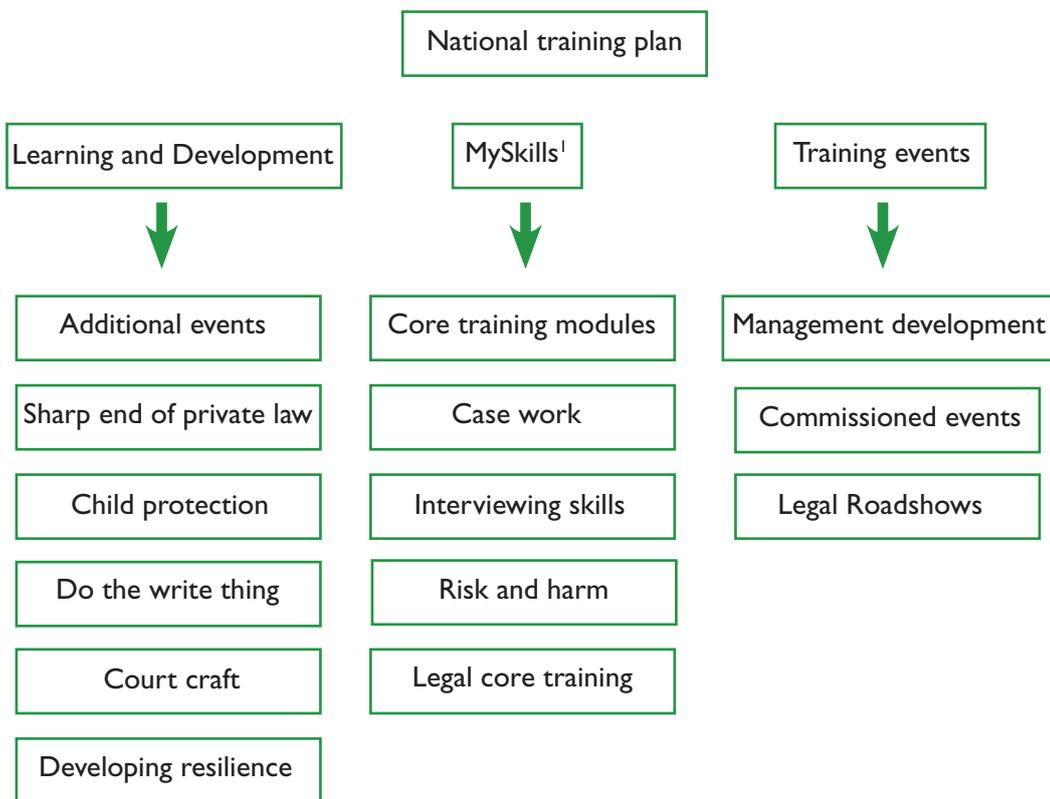
The overall judgement is good . Cafcass leads effective services that meet the requirements for good. It is Ofsted's expectation that as a minimum all children, young people and families receive a service where the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private and public law practice is good.	
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass private law practice with families	Good
The quality and effectiveness of Cafcass public law practice with families	Good
The leadership and governance of the national organisation	Outstanding
The leadership and management of local services	Good

“Cafcass is good at identifying any risks to children and young people and writes good quality letters to the court before the first court hearing.” The quality of letters was something which formed part of the ‘Getting to Good’ audit. The audit was carried out on recently filed reports and recently filed Schedule 2 letters.

“A clear focus for Cafcass over the last 18 months has been improving the quality of practitioners’ work – a key strategic priority. A central strand of this work has been the ‘Getting to Good’ strategy which evidenced progress through two ‘Getting to Good’ audits.”

A – What did we do to improve Learning and Development?

Practice education and coaching has been increased during 2013 and has supported improvements in quality.



The National Improvement Service (NIS) contributed to the improvement and development of practice by providing: individual coaching and training, group workshops, team development days, the quality assurance of reports and information regarding the lessons learnt from Individual Management Reviews (IMRs) (see Glossary).

¹ See glossary for explanation of this and other Cafcass terms.

Equality and Diversity is embedded in our Learning and Development Programme.

1,348 staff were auto-enrolled to The College of Social Work during 2013-14.

Over 95% of our managers have participated in our Management Development Programme which has delivered workshops to 389 attendees.

B – What impact did it have on our employees?

- 95% of all staff have accessed the MySkills portal in the last 12 months.
- 98% of new staff attended core training for new starters.
- 96% of staff who took part in a survey said that the training they attended had at least some benefit, with 56% stating that it was very beneficial.

Staff are supported by quarterly Performance and Learning Reviews (PLRs), with 94% of operational staff having had three or more PLRs during 2013-14. Management Development training was provided across the organisation to improve the consistency and impact of PLRs in early 2014.

“Participants who made a significant use of the training state that it has enabled them to plan and prepare reports which are better suited to their purpose. They are able to write more concisely and to focus more closely upon what the evidence means to the child. As such, their reports have become shorter and have an analytical rather than narrative basis. These are quicker to write and they ensure that the courts can quickly surmise the key issues involved in a case.” (Source: extracted from the National Training Plan Report).

Cafcass staff reported in the Ofsted survey that they have access to a wide range of training, which meets their needs. Children and young people have been involved in the delivery of training and some training was provided by partners such as courts or local authorities.

One member of staff said training improved “the sharp end of practice” while another reported that “[the] culture is both supportive and challenging”. 80% of staff agree or strongly agree that their training needs are met. (Source: Ofsted staff survey)

80% of staff agree that their training needs are met

C – How do we know we did a good job?

Ofsted

“Children and young people with the most complex needs get a service that is specific to their needs.”

“The Cafcass National Improvement Service has been very effective in supporting improvement in the quality and performance of work across the national organisation through its work in service areas providing a mixed economy of approaches including undertaking audits (including ‘Getting to Good’), coaching, training and responding to needs identified by Heads of Service who have then commissioned the Improvement Service.”

A – What did we do to improve Workforce Development?

- We developed new roles to strengthen frontline practice. We currently have 92 Enhanced Practitioners who provide professional supervision to Family Court Advisers, and support staff on some of the more complex cases. We are also developing the Advanced Family Court Adviser role in consultation with The College of Social Work to recognise practitioners with the highest level of skills.
- Our Employee Assistance Programme includes a 'Day 1' intervention service for staff suffering from stress related absence. This service provides bespoke support including confidential counselling to support staff back into the workplace. Other features of our support to staff include a 24 hour confidential advice line, which can provide up to six free sessions of counselling.
- In April 2013, we introduced a Health and Wellbeing Plan for all staff that provides employees with a range of support including access to cash benefits for medical and wellbeing treatments. The plan also provides swift access to advanced diagnostics and treatments.
- To support our aim of attracting, recruiting and retaining the best talent, we have revised our recruitment processes, making use of cutting edge online technology. We have also revised our induction processes for all new starters to ensure that they receive appropriate learning opportunities along with a high level of support from management and colleagues.
- Our Work Place Culture Programme is now in six Cafcass service areas utilising specialist leadership and resilience tools from Robertson Cooper, recognised leaders in workplace wellbeing.
- 85 staff have been accredited as Strengths Coaches.
- Our Learning & Development and Talent Management Strategies provide opportunities for all our staff to develop and contribute to organisational improvement. We have also embedded our Graduate and Apprentice schemes.

...we introduced a Health and Wellbeing Plan for all staff that provides employees with a range of support...

...appropriate learning opportunities along with a high level of management and colleague support are in place for all of our new employees...

...we developed new roles to help frontline practice and to better support Service Managers.

Staff take-up of the Health and Wellbeing plan has been high with 98% of staff now enrolled. The use of the plan continues to grow with almost 2,600 claims made in 2013-14 totalling over £125k in value. Complementary therapies are most popular (38% of claims), which is significant as muscular/skeletal issues accounted for 2,091 lost days in 2012-13.

A reduction in sickness rates over the last five years has increased capacity that is equivalent to over 40 frontline Family Court Advisers, or over 10,000 working days.

The low sickness rates in the organisation have been maintained at seven average working days lost for all staff. These rates continue to outperform the public sector.

Sickness Absence:
Public Sector 7.9 days
Local Government 8.1 days
Health 9.3 days
Cafcass 7.0 days

B – What impact did it have?

We have now embedded our Talent Management Strategy with 82 staff now enrolled on our Emerging Talent Programme, directly supporting staff with high potential.

Staff, team and organisational resilience have been transformed. Notwithstanding a 53% reduction in managers, staff morale has improved.

12 Cafcass Graduates have settled into their roles and are providing a direct contribution to a range of services and developments across the organisation.

Flexible working arrangements are available to a majority of our staff, allowing them to work from home, providing the best possible work/life balance. The Ofsted staff survey found that flexible working arrangements “enabled workers to spend more time with children and families”.

“I feel very fortunate to have joined an organisation where individuals feel valued, where morale is high and there is a real sense of pride in doing the best possible job.” Practitioner, Brighton

“My induction plan was waiting for me on my first day; it was detailed and relevant to my post.” Practitioner, Sussex

C – How do we know the workforce development contributed to a better service?

Ofsted described our approach to wellbeing as ‘exceptional’ as our sickness absence levels continue to be amongst the lowest in frontline social work.

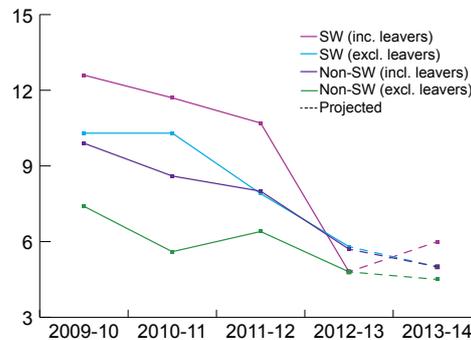
The formal induction process has been positively received by the vast majority of new starters in all roles including agency workers. The results of a survey of new starters tell us that current induction processes are effective and information provided is relevant to each role.

The Ofsted staff survey was overwhelmingly positive with over 1,200 respondents (a 66% response rate). Of these around 80% agreed with positive statements about Cafcass.

Ofsted: “Cafcass staff feel Cafcass is a good place to work and levels of sickness are very low... Cafcass has an extremely comprehensive workforce strategy. It builds on what has been a five-year plan to turn a non-compliant and poor quality workforce into the quality now being achieved. The strategy is centred on the health and well-being of its staff, while continuing to monitor and drive performance, absence, quality and workload. Cafcass has made significant positive strides to invest in their workforce which has resulted in a stable and highly motivated workforce. The Cafcass health and well-being programme is highly effective.”

“Inspectors both saw and heard from staff that they value the expertise of enhanced practitioners in helping them improve quality. Enhanced practitioners are strengths in each service area where they exist. They have had an impact in helping drive improvement in practice.”

Staff turnover has decreased to 10.3% for 2013-14, compared to 15.9% in 2012-13. Greater workforce stability is illustrated by the fact that our Family Court Advisers now stay with us for an average of 6.4 years and our Service Managers an average of 7.8 years, both improving figures.



Reason for leaving	Number of leavers	%
Resignation	129	70.1%
Retirement	37	20.1%
Other	18	9.8%
Total	184	

Ofsted: Cafcass staff feel Cafcass is a good place to work...

A – What did we do to improve the impact of our work on children and young people?

- **The Cafcass Parenting Plan.** We developed an improved Parenting Plan, an interactive tool to help parents (and other family members) to parent co-operatively and safely following separation. The plan helps parents to consider their child's needs, to make practical decisions and to resolve disputes. Child safety and welfare are central to the plan which looks to halt the escalation of disagreements and potential courtroom battles which serve to negatively affect the child.
- **We listened to young people using the FYPJB (Family Justice Young People's Board).** The first conference of the FJYPB was held in 2013. The conference launched the National Standards for child inclusive practice in the family court, setting out eight principles that all agencies and stakeholders in the Family Justice System can sign up to. In launching the standards FJYPB members set out what was important to them in the court system and what they thought everyone should be working towards. Children's Minister Edward Timpson and Family Justice Board Chair David Norgrove confirmed their views that it is imperative children are listened at both a case level and also in terms of informing government decisions.
- **We played a key role in the implementation of government policy to reduce delay for children subject to care proceedings.** Our practitioners, working with courts and local authorities to enact Public Law reforms, have reduced the average duration of care cases. This is important to children, to whom every day matters.
- **We gave staff all the tools they need to do a good job.** Practitioners are provided with appropriate tools, matched to the identified needs in the case, when assessing the impact of domestic abuse, and when ascertaining children's wishes and feelings. The toolkit matrix provides a guide to which tool can be used in which circumstance and for what purpose. Training materials are provided. The tools have been developed to help improve the quality of evidence-informed analysis in our reports.

Working with courts and local authorities, our practitioners completed their work on public law cases several months quicker on average as a result of the Public Law reforms. This reduced delay and anxiety for many children we worked with.

B – What impact did it have?

- Children and young people with the most complex needs get a service that is specific to their needs.
- Family Justice Minister Simon Hughes MP said: “When people separate we want them to do it in the least damaging way for everyone involved, especially children, by avoiding confrontational court battles and using other options when they are suitable. The Cafcass Parenting Plan is another crucial tool in making that happen.”
- When parents need the court to help them decide where they should live or who they should have contact with, children, young people and their families receive a good service.
- Ofsted said:

“In the large majority of work after first hearing... children’s views are expressed well and attention to issues of equality and diversity is good... Inspectors saw examples of very effective direct work with young people which had a good focus on equality and diversity particularly in Birmingham and the Black Country... Issues around contact and cultural issues arising from the child’s ethnicity were sensitively but appropriately explored.”

Children’s views are expressed well and attention to issues of equality and diversity is good.

C – How do we know?

Ofsted said:

“Family Court Advisers have good tools to help their work understanding children’s wishes and feelings and assess families’ strengths and this assists them to write good reports which help the courts make the right decisions for children.”

“Cafcass has supported young people who have been involved in family courts to form the Family Justice Young People’s Board. This Board has been very effective in making sure Cafcass, judges and government listen to what young people think is most important.”

“Most direct work with children and families is well planned and of high quality and the good range of tools available to practitioners are used effectively. These include a range of age-appropriate tools for children and young people to express their wishes and feelings and a child impact tool which enables practitioners to explore with children some of the more distressing things that have happened to them (this was also the case in public law practice). Direct work is age appropriate and sensitive to the specific needs of children, for example those with communication or learning needs.”

A – What did we do to broaden our service user feedback?

We asked adults who had used our service what they thought of it...

Cafcass completed its first national adult service user feedback survey in September 2013. It forms one aspect of the quality programme of the Cafcass Strategic Plan (2013-2015) to gain more feedback.

The aims of the survey were to gather the views of a sample of service users of private law services, and to establish and test a robust and ethical methodology for a telephone survey that, if successful, could be repeated.

We continued to ask children for their feedback locally. We also made use of the FJYPB, who undertook a series of office inspections to make sure the offices were child friendly, easy to find and welcoming for children and their families. This resulted in renovations to family rooms at numerous Cafcass offices.

The Cafcass Complaints Procedure has been revised. It now outlines more clearly the links between the different types of concern and what Cafcass will do to put things right for the service user. There is also an updated factsheet available to make the information easy to understand.

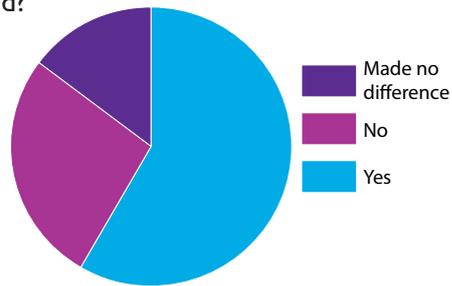
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B – What impact did it have?

Mother F “There were times when things weren’t being put how I wanted, but in reality they were best for my children.”

Father E “Cafcass look out for the child, they’re not just one-sided to the mum or dad. I think it’s a great service. I don’t know if couples would come to an understanding if Cafcass wasn’t there. It’s good to have a Cafcass officer because they inform the parents as well as looking after the child. The service is invaluable. Every case needs it”.

“Do you think that Cafcass’ advice to the court helped it to make a decision that would promote the welfare and safety of your child?”



When asked to consider how well the Cafcass officer understood their child’s needs wishes and feelings and reported them to the court 67% of participants believed it was acceptable, good, or excellent.

C – How do we know?

Survey results

89% of participants rated Cafcass’ service as being adequate or above when asked to rate how we explained the role of Cafcass in the court proceedings.

We will carry out the same survey later this year, and hopefully the one after that, as well as getting local feedback from service users.

Cafcass locally is learning from feedback and complaints. Each service area management team has a focus on the national learning log which brings, into one place, learning across the organisation from a range of sources including Serious Case Reviews, complaints and compliments and case audits. Examples of local action taken in response to feedback are displayed on posters in the office reception and meeting rooms using a “you said – we did” format. This demonstrates that user views are listened to and Cafcass has taken steps to change what is within their control such as nappy changing facilities and providing information about support for those without legal representation. In addition, and in response to user feedback, Cafcass has improved signage within its offices to improve information and directions.

A – What did we do to improve systems and technology?

We continued with our modernisation of programmes

Our IT principle is that it should take no more than three clicks to access information.

A shift to more online work has made us more efficient. This includes the digitisation project, where all our post is scanned at a central point and then distributed to local teams and practitioners, directly into their electronic case files.

New IT equipment is supporting frontline social workers, their managers and local business support staff. Every social worker is provided with a blackberry and either a laptop or a tablet with 4G capability and handwriting recognition; the rollout of this kit followed extensive consultation with staff. The tablet can also be used in direct work with children, to help children to tell their story.

Strengthening our systems

Our management processes were further improved through the launch of our new electronic performance management platform to all managers and staff. As well as supporting a more effective method of data capture and reporting, the new system provides complete transparency to staff regarding their performance and development.

Cafcass is also developing better software by creating a new file and information sharing program (a combination of the two platforms that are currently used by practitioners) called ECMS (Electronic Case Management System) which went live in July 2014. This will greatly support practitioners in their frontline duties. ECMS will reduce the time spent on administration of cases by business support, as currently there is a double entry of case information into both the Electronic Case File (ECF) and the Case Management System (CMS). ECMS will contain personal FCA and team 'dashboards', showing information such as number of reports due, and upcoming hearings – this will reduce time spent contacting the Management Information Systems (MIS) Team to run reports, and will make the information accessible and clear to both practitioners and business support staff to help awareness of deadlines.

The Cafcass Operating Framework is a strengths-based framework, emphasising self-efficacy and self-directed learning.

myWork was launched during 2013-14. This innovative self-regulation tool enables staff to directly access a range of personal information relating to throughput, efficiency, supervision, sickness information and customer feedback directly and confidentially via the Cafcass intranet.

Now available to all Cafcass staff, colleagues can access myWork at any time by clicking an icon via the intranet homepage, which provides them with a range of personal and team data. This is presented in a way to provide a comparison against both team and organisational averages.

myWork enables staff to directly access a range of personal information relating to... efficiency, supervision...

B – What impact did it have?

“It really has given me more autonomy in planning my workload”

Family Court Adviser, London

“For public law cases we used to have to take a separate bag with all of the case files to court. Now with ECF and better access to the network with 4G and wifi we can be fully electronic. It’s definitely made my working life easier”

Family Court Adviser, Derby

C – How do we know?

Ofsted:

“Cafcass has appropriately invested in its IT infrastructure. This has enabled staff to work flexibly and be more productive, for example all paper mail is now digitised and staff can access case records electronically from anywhere and this has contributed to the improvement in case recording.”

Internal Feedback and statistics

66% of Cafcass staff state that their new laptop is saving them time by, for example, enabling them to update records whilst they have been away from the office.

41% of staff have noticed a decrease in the need to print papers prior to a hearing or meeting, and 39% of staff agree that their new device has reduced the need to use paper pads or re-type information into case systems. In particular, one respondent stated that:

“I am able to type my case records as I go along and then quickly transfer them into ECF. Previously I was handwriting and then having to type them up – duplicating my work. I also use OneNote to keep a front sheet of information on each case and this is then immediately to hand when I do home visits and am at court. This is making me much more efficient and I am using a lot less paper – I now just carry a small note book”.

22% of staff agree that the new equipment has improved interactions with service users, including direct work with children. Positive feedback has been received:

“Kids love the tablet, it aids interaction and provides some distraction for them when asking about difficult areas”, with another adding that “Use of the touch screen is very child centred and children enjoy this... it helps engage them in meetings”.

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22% of staff agree that the new equipment has improved interactions with service users, including direct work with children...

41% of staff have noticed a decrease in the need to print papers...

A – What will we be doing over the next year to keep improving the quality of our work?

- Completion of the Ofsted Action Plan
- Next stage of the 'Getting Better and Better' programme (increasing the quantum of 'Good' work, reducing the quantum of 'Not Met' work)
- Improved real time feedback from children and families
- Continue to implement our Equality and Diversity Strategy to ensure that all children achieve a high quality service
- Stronger and more consistent joint working with IROs
- Learning and applying the lessons from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs).

We hoped you found our first Quality Account informative. In 2014-15, we aim to continue to improve the quality of our casework, to deepen engagement with our service users, our staff and the general public, and to develop better and faster technology and systems to support our staff in their work. We are keen to receive feedback for next year.

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Glossary

CMS – The Case Management System is Cafcass’ national database recording the details of cases.

ECF – The Electronic Case file provides practitioners with a single, standard means of managing and controlling their case documents. ECF stores all case documents electronically.

ECMS – a combination of the two platforms currently used by practitioners which is a new file and information sharing programme.

FCA – Family Court Advisers are Cafcass’ professionally qualified social work practitioners who work to safeguard and promote the welfare of children by giving advice to the family courts and providing information, advice and support to children and their families.

FJYPB – The Family Justice Young People’s Board is a non-statutory board with membership largely drawn from those who have direct experience of both Cafcass and the family courts – having either been through divorce or family breakdown, lived in care or been adopted. The role of the Board is to give young people a direct say in the way in which the Family Justice System is run and on the service it provides to children, young people and their families.

‘Getting to Good’ audit – looked at a sample of cases and assessed the quality of the work using the threshold tool.

IMR – Individual Management Reviews of cases where a child has been killed, seriously harmed or died in a way which requires the agencies involved to review the work they did.

MIS – Management Information Service is the team which collects, analyses and reports on performance management information within Cafcass.

MySkills – is the e-learning platform through which Cafcass staff can access both internet based courses and book training sessions provided by Cafcass.

myWork – is an electronic tool enabling staff to access information relating to their work, learning, health and wellbeing and PLR discussions.

NIS – The National Improvement Service supports individuals, teams and service areas to identify and make changes required to drive forward the quality of work done throughout Cafcass.

Ofsted – Cafcass’ inspectorate is Ofsted, which also has responsibility for inspecting other social care and educational organisations. The aim of inspection is to provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the services we provide to children and their families at particularly difficult times in their lives.

PLR – Performance and Learning Reviews are quarterly reviews of staff performance, conducted by line managers.

Schedule 2 (Safeguarding Letters) – are used in private law cases to inform the court of all relevant safeguarding information that Cafcass has obtained during its investigations before the First Hearing.