

Radio aids for deaf children – policy and practice

Hannah Cooper, Dana Mathewson, Members of the UK Children's Radio Aid Working Group



Introduction

The UK Children's Radio Aid (UKRA) Working Group comprises service providers in health, education and social care as well as hearing instrument manufacturers and voluntary sector representatives. The group was set up in 2004 with the following principle aims:

- To promote the use of radio aids among children and young people
- To promote the knowledge base about radio aids
- To influence the policy framework for the provision of radio aids
- To influence the quality and consistency of radio aid provision and practice
- To raise awareness of the importance of a positive acoustic environment

The National Deaf Children's Society, in collaboration with the UKRA Working Group, publishes the Quality Standards for the use of personal radio aids and these were updated in 2017. A major change to the Quality Standards is that **every deaf child should be considered as a potential candidate for provision with a personal radio aid as part of their amplification package, at first hearing aid fitting (QS1).**

Objectives

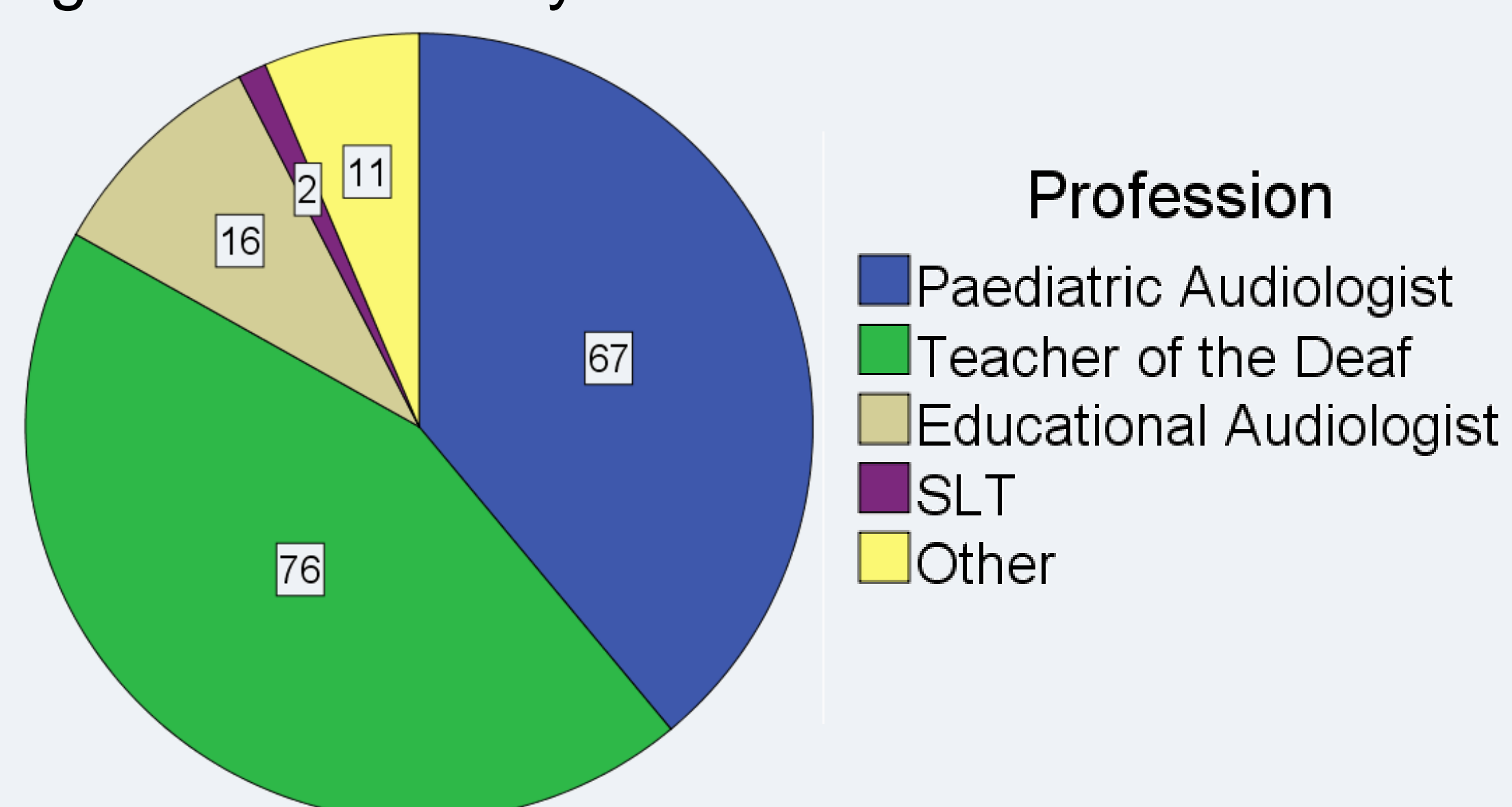
To explore radio aid provision for deaf children in the UK by examining how well the Quality Standards are integrated into professional settings, and what alterations may need to be made for the future.

Methods

An online survey was created using Opinio software. A link to the survey was emailed to professionals working in children's hearing services via various professional lists and forums.

Participants

204 people started the questionnaire. 128 completed all questions. The majority of participants were paediatric audiologists or teachers of the deaf. Professions were grouped according to whether they were education or health based.



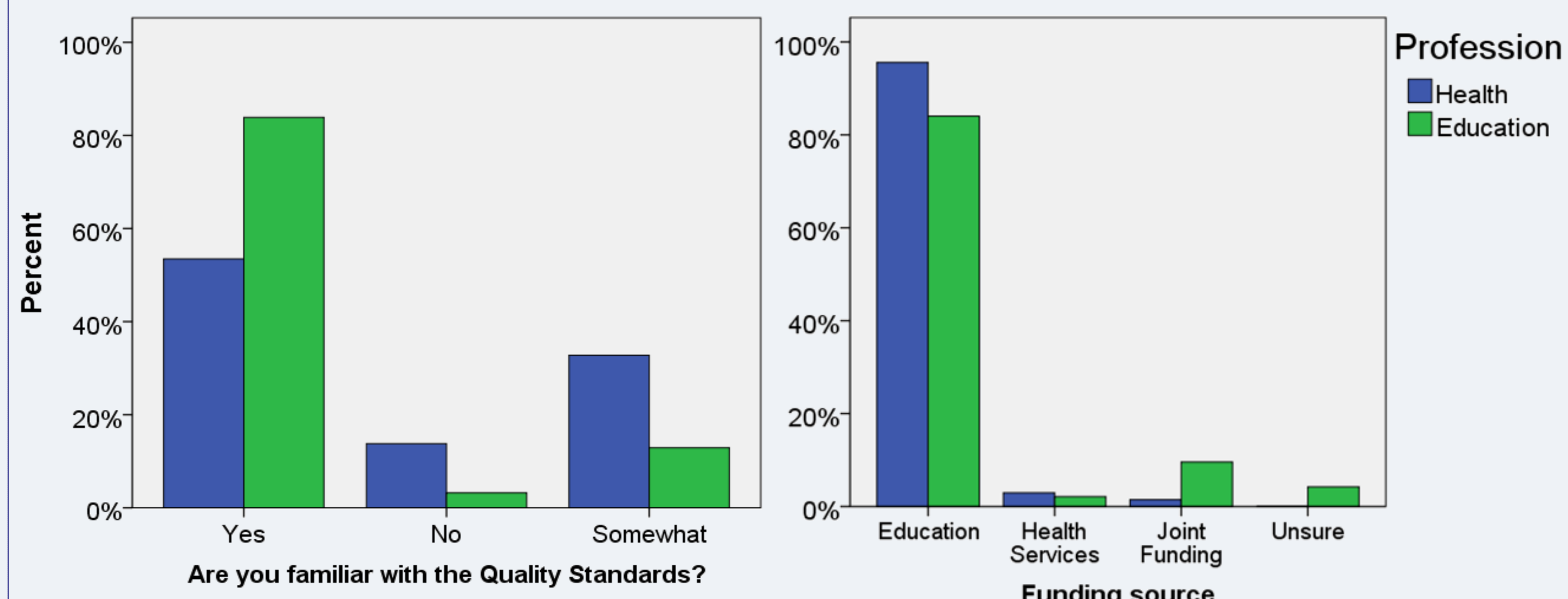
Conclusion

The results of this survey are being used by the UK Children's Radio Aid Working Group to support professionals as they implement the Quality Standards and establish equality of opportunity across the UK.

Results

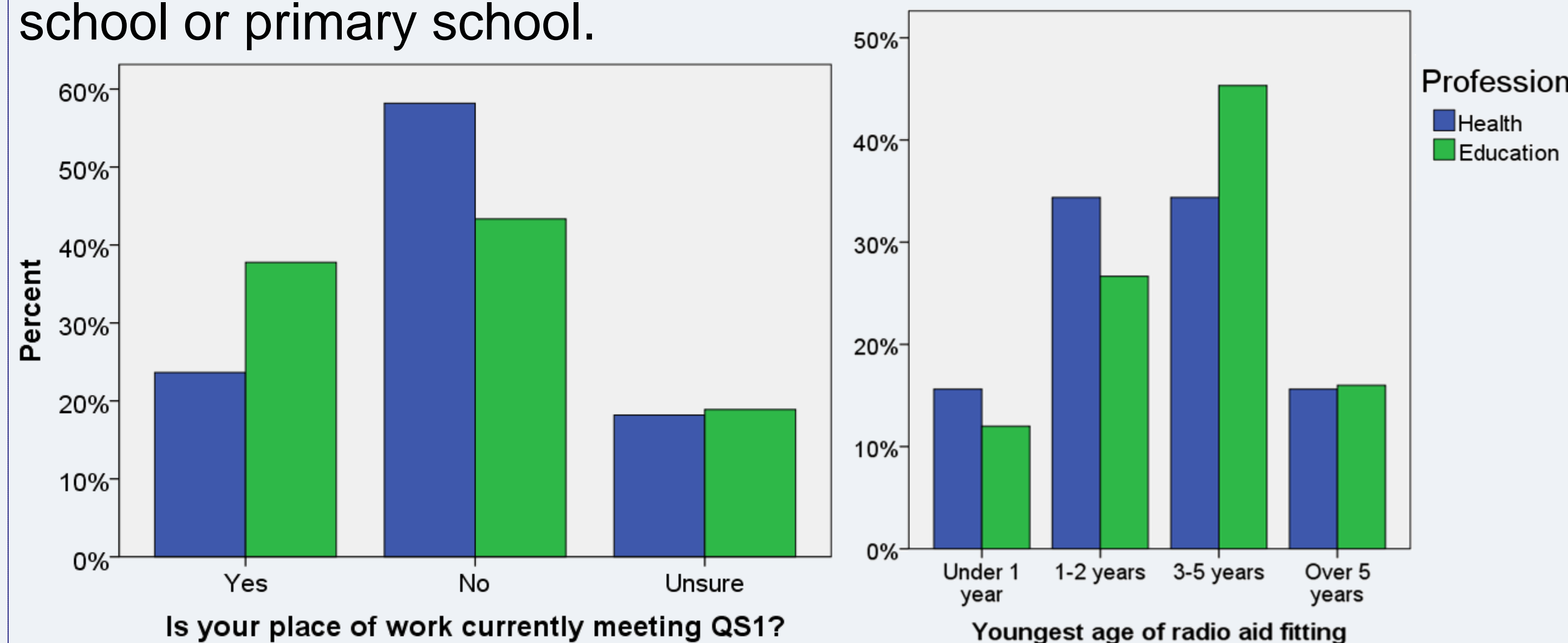
Results presented here focus on awareness of the Quality Standards, funding arrangements, and implementation of QS1.

The majority of radio aid provision in the UK is funded by education services and use is monitored by them. Knowledge of the Quality Standards is high in education services. Professionals working in health settings had less knowledge of the Quality Standards.

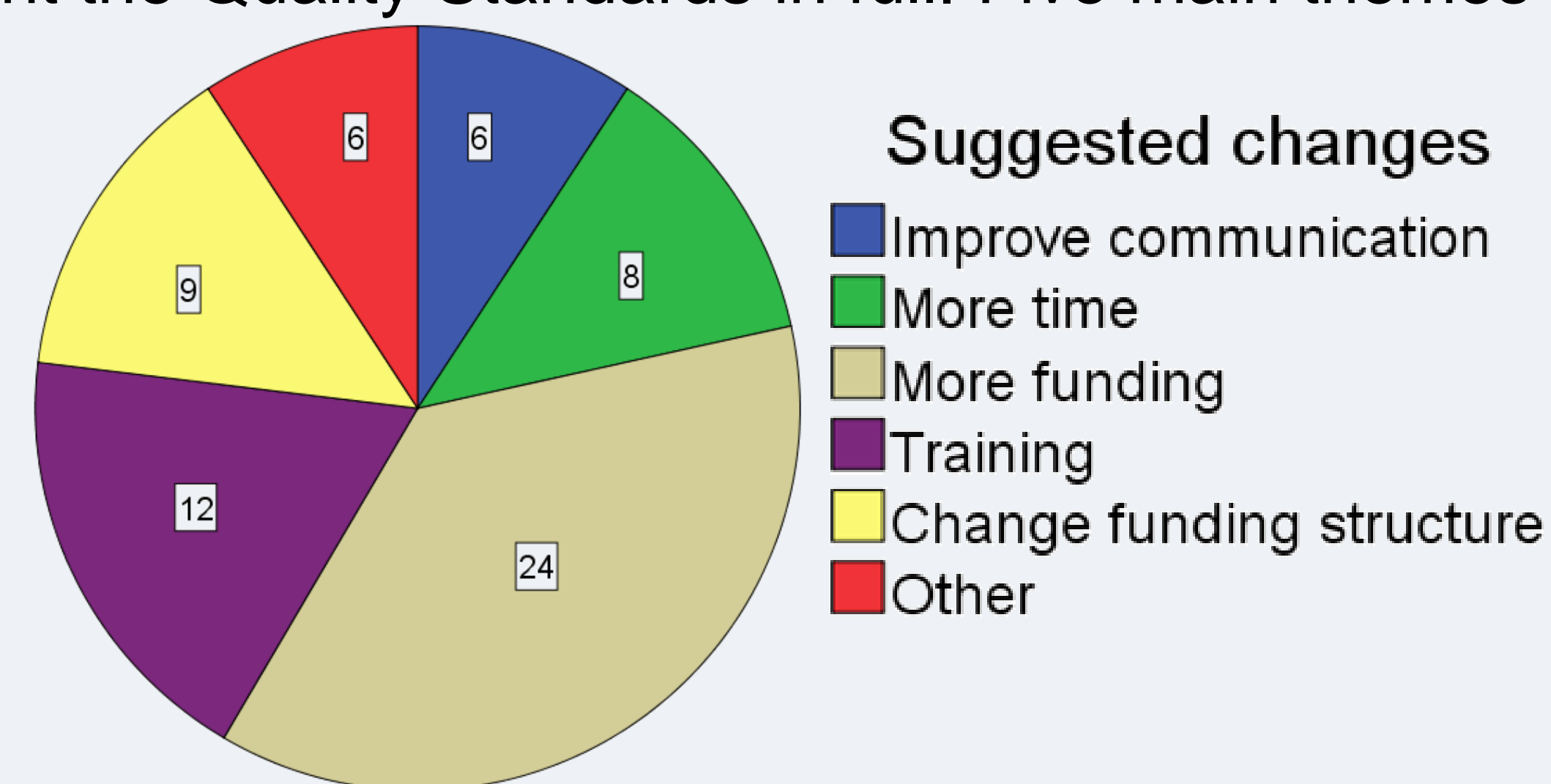


The majority of professionals reported that their service was not currently meeting QS1. Free text responses stated several reasons including lack of funding, lack of available tamper-proofing, and disagreement with this standard.

QS1 implies that a radio aid should be considered for infants who are diagnosed with hearing loss through the newborn hearing screening programme. However, survey respondents indicated that many children are not fitted with a radio aid until they start pre-school or primary school.



Participants were asked what changes would be necessary for them to implement the Quality Standards in full. Five main themes were identified.



Discussion

The UK is unusual in its funding structure for radio aids, with hearing aids provided by the health service and radio aids by education. In countries such as Canada and Australia both elements are provided by health forming a child's complete amplification package. Participants in this survey said that more time and better communication between professionals would help to ensure the Quality Standards were more effectively implemented. Many participants said that additional funding is also necessary to properly meet children's needs and several suggested that a change in funding structure, so that health provides both hearing aids and radio aid, may be beneficial.

UK Children's Radio Aid Working Group