

The Driving Excellence in Auditing for Social Care survey: What have we learnt?

By Ed Watkinson



About QCS

QCS (Quality Compliance Systems) is the leading digital provider of compliance management.

At its core, the **QCS Compliance Management System** is your digital hub for quality compliance and knowledge. We make compliance management easy so you can focus on what matters most – delivering quality care.

With policies, procedures, and compliance toolkits shaped to your business, you can be safe in the knowledge with **QCS Policy Centre** your business will always be up to date with any changes to legislation, regulation and best practice. Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated regularly by our team of leading compliance experts, saving you time and hassle. Instant updates are delivered digitally, 24/7, via QCS Policy Centre and **QCS App**, helping you and your team to focus on delivering quality care.

[Learn more about QCS](#)

Contents

1	The Importance of Auditing in Social Care	8
2	Enhancing Quality Assurance: Navigating the CQC Audit Landscape	10
3	Finding the Balance: How often Should Audits be Conducted in Social Care?	12
4	Embracing Digital Transformation: Is the Social Care Sector Ready for Digital Audits?	14
5	Conclusion	17

Introduction from Nikki Walker

We are thrilled to present the findings of the **Driving Excellence in Auditing for Social Care** survey, a journey undertaken with the aim of understanding and embracing the vital significance of auditing in this sector. This report shares the voices and perspectives of over 3,000 respondents from diverse social care services, highlighting the pressing need for information and support in this critical area.

Committed to positive change

At Quality Compliance Systems (QCS), we are dedicated to addressing these needs, our vision is to enable everyone to deliver great care and we have unwavering commitment to nurture positive change within the social care sector. Embracing the challenges and opportunities that emerged from this survey with genuine empathy, we strive to develop products and solutions to meet the sector's ever-evolving demands.

Your views matter

Our journey of understanding and collaboration began in November 2021 with a workforce survey, offering deep insights into the values and aspirations of care staff. With over 200 respondents, we gleaned invaluable knowledge and created and shared resources that can benefit everyone in the sector.

Last year, we embarked on yet another significant piece of work, seeking the opinions of the sector regarding the incoming CQC regulations, a pivotal issue that deeply resonates with everyone involved.

At QCS, we are fully committed to embracing the insights from your feedback to ensure we prioritise what matters most to you, our valued partners in this journey.

Our aim is to support the effective use of auditing, empowering you to deliver outstanding care.

We hope you enjoy reading this report and find it informative and insightful.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Walker'.

Nikki Walker, CEO, QCS

Executive Summary

We all know how important undertaking audits is for any service, and that we need to complete them to evidence good practice, continuous improvement and increasingly to show the regulator and other stakeholders how self-aware and focused on the provision of a quality service we are.

At QCS we decided that as audits are such a wide ranging and evolving subject area, we wanted to seek the views of people on the range of audits used, who completes them, how well technology is embedded, what would make things easier for you and what are the risks with audits and the actions resulting from them.

As a result, in May 2023, QCS released a survey about auditing, and we have been amazed by the response and are delighted that over 3,000 people from a range of care services let us know their views. This shows us that there is a real appetite for information and support in this area and with such a large sample we have been able to develop a rich picture of how audits are used and what you see as the challenges.

Auditing is seen by over 98% of people as an important activity

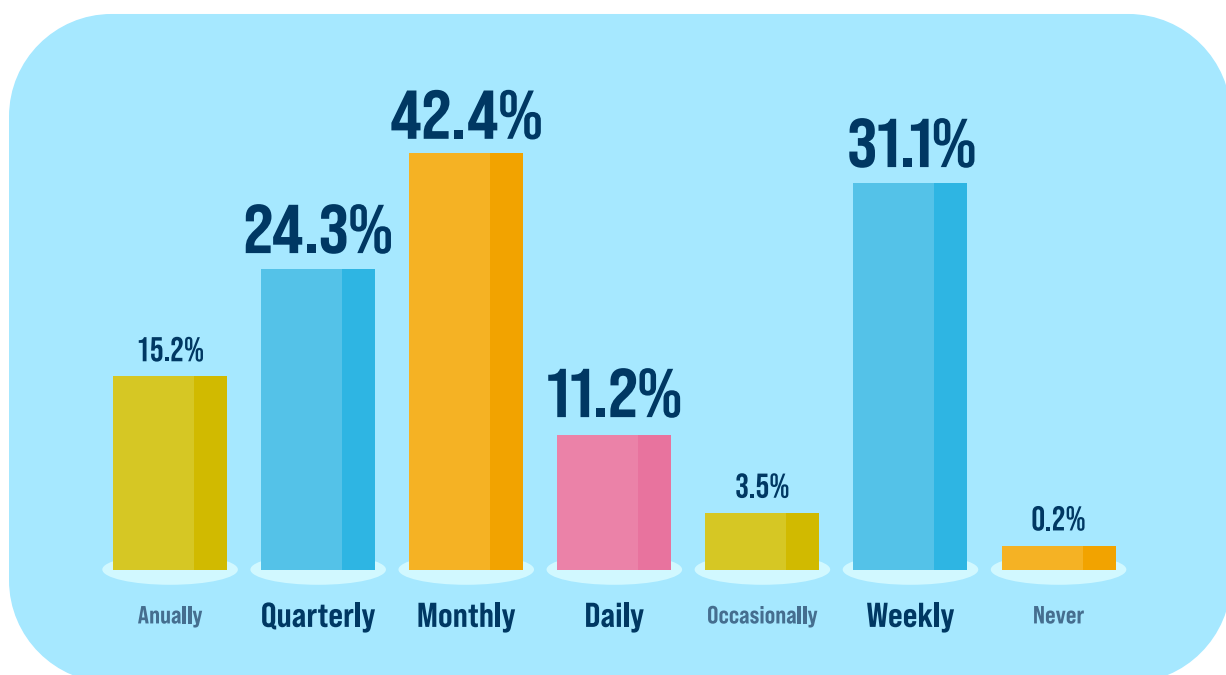


QCS has analysed the results and it is encouraging to see that auditing is seen by over 98% people as an important activity to demonstrate ongoing quality assurance, and it is also reassuring that there is a clear understanding of what the consequences may be if audits are not completed or actioned effectively. But the survey also showed us that there are concerns and blockages in how they are planned, delivered and actioned. It also revealed an appetite for more digitisation of audits. Technology is being embraced by a workforce that can see the benefits of using it, and the opportunities it presents to free up time to provide person centred care, and not just a way of recording that care has been provided.

However, it was notable that people thought there were risks associated with digital audits, and there were many concerns raised about the security and confidentiality of information when audits were completed, shared and stored digitally.

It is encouraging that the social care workforce seems to be ready to embrace technology and can see the benefits of using electronic audits. Now it is over to providers to ensure that any audits developed are secure, adaptable, easy to use and support improved outcomes. QCS will use the results of this survey to inform, guide and ensure all our audits address the concerns and obstacles highlighted in the survey.

Survey Highlights



There was a wide range of how often audits are completed, but most (42.4%) are completed monthly

It does appear that audits are embedded into normal practice with only 3.7% of respondents stated that audits were occasionally or never done

- Most audits are completed by management, with only 13.8% completed by other staff. This is perhaps understandable, but could be an area to focus on in the future and finding ways to empower all staff to be involved and to take responsibility for auditing
- Half the people that responded stated that one of the main barriers to completing audits is the lack of time and staff to do them. So, it is evident that a major focus area will be to make audits efficient and fit in with normal workflow patterns, make them seamless, and normalise the activity to not be an 'add on', or something that must be done in addition to everything else
- The survey shows that currently there is a reliance on email with 57% of respondents saying that this was the way information was shared, in addition, 40% used word documents to complete the audits and 48% of actions because of an audit were shared by memo or a written report. These processes are beginning to feel slightly outdated, and systems need to be more clearly embedded to allow the audit process to be much more of a flow from beginning to end
- Where audits are completed electronically, the responses really did highlight the benefits for the person doing the audit, the organisation and the people using the service. It was felt that electronic audits were more efficient, accurate and actions and outcomes were more easily tracked and monitored
- With the new CQC Single Assessment Framework over 90% of respondents were to some degree concerned about how the results of the audits would be able to be shared to provide assurance that quality was being monitored and improved. This was despite that fact that over 80% of respondents were using the CQC provider portal. This variance is a concern and QCS are going to drive and support the use of easily shareable electronic audits, but there is a challenge for CQC to instil confidence in their systems and to work with providers to allay fears and concerns
- For digital audit software respondents, it was very clear that any offering must be customisable, easy to keep up to date, able to be used on a mobile device, integrated with other systems and able to send alerts and reminders when actions have slipped or when another audit is due
- Respondents also stated that any system had to be easy to use, cost effective, secure and customisable to meet ongoing requirements

It is obvious that there is an appetite for electronic, online digital audits – but there are concerns. This desire tinged with fear is to be expected with any developing technology. At QCS the drive will be to answer the questions people have and provide products that meet a need, to ultimately remove the fear and add to the desire to change and improve the lives of people using services.

The results

The Importance of Auditing in Social Care

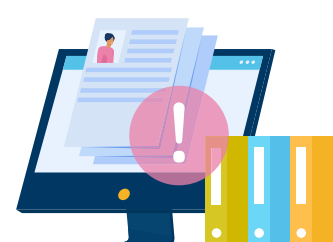
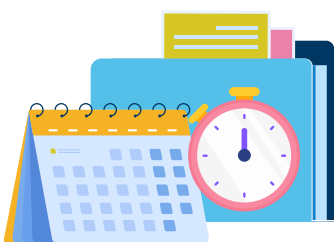
Although a clear majority recognised the importance of audits to a varying degree - around 54% of respondents stated that the completion of audits was extremely, or very important, this is reassuring and shows that audits are seen by most people as a central way of monitoring quality and embedding improvement.

But this figure could be higher, and in fact...

the survey did show that nearly 16% of people only saw audits as 'slightly important' and a further 1.5% as 'not important at all'.

This begs the question if audits are not seen as important by this significant number of people in social care, how are they evidencing quality, and how are they able to provide assurance that outcomes for people using services are improving over time?

The survey may provide some further insight into this with 31% of people saying that audits were time consuming,



with over 50% reporting that audits were difficult to track and implement and nearly 50% stating that there were issues with having the necessary resources to complete the audit.

This shows that there are difficulties in the way audits are currently conducted, and the issues with their design, accessibility, format and process may be leading to a lack of 'take up', rather than a lack of desire to implement them.

These 'bumps in the road' that may be preventing a wider use of audits are going to have big consequences for services, as there is an increasing need to provide and share evidence with regulators and others with a vested interest in the service. By making audits part of people's workflow, increasing their ease of use, refining the content of audits to be more focused and clearly relating them to the care and support provided to people that use services audits will be seen as more accessible, useable and beneficial.

The responses to the survey did indicate a wide range of audits were currently completed by respondents, with care planning, health and safety, safeguarding, medication and infection control all being seen as important by over 30% of people. This is to be expected especially considering the impact of COVID-19 and the need to provide assurance that all health and safety issues are being managed effectively. If there was an area that had less traction than other audits, it was recruitment and workforce management.

At QCS we feel that all audits are important, but as a service you need the option to prioritise and to develop your own audits to address specific areas relevant for you.

Recommendations:

- Understanding of the need for audits is shared across the whole team, so everyone at the service is engaged and aware of the importance of audits and will be willing participants in the process
- Audits need to be seen as something 'done together' for the benefit of people using services as opposed to something that is 'done to' people
- Audits need to be arranged so they align with staff workflow, so they are not seen as an addition
- The results of audits need to be shared widely, and staff encouraged to take responsibility for actions highlighted
- There needs to be flexibility in how audits are used, with targeted and focused areas to be looked at, rather than a generic template that may not be seen as fully relevant

Finding the Balance: How often Should Audits be Conducted in Social Care?

The survey showed that most audits were completed monthly, but with a wide variance from daily to annual completion. The most reassuring aspect was that only

0.2% of respondents stated that audits were never done at their service.

It is important that audits are done on a flexible basis and when they are needed, rather than because a date on a calendar says they should be done. This would ensure that resources are used effectively, best value is assured from time spent on audits and people can clearly see the purpose for them.

So, the question of how often they should be completed is a difficult one, but it is suggested that services need to look at the evidence for where audits need to be completed. For example, if the environment looks dirty then there should be a focus on infection control; if there are medication errors then a medication audit should be a regular occurrence; and if there are a lot of new admissions or people's needs are changing there should be an increased focus on care planning audits.





Audits are used to provide evidence that services are aware of issues and are monitoring and addressing any concerns. With the increasing focus of CQC on gathering evidence remotely – from services themselves and from others with an interest in the service, it is important that all notifications are reviewed and if there are themes within them – such as falls, allegations of abuse or complaints, then audits are completed to provide assurance that ongoing monitoring is taking place.

This identification of audits where they are most needed will ensure a more efficient use of resources, will encourage them to be included within workflow and benefits will be seen as they will be addressing a clear and topical need.

Another limit, or barrier, to the frequency of audits may be the lack of people to conduct them. The survey indicated that over 80% of audits were conducted by management of some description. Hand in hand with the importance of flexibility in scheduling, services should consider flexibility in who conducts the audit. If audits were simple to complete, used mobile apps, were aligned with workflow and based on fact rather than opinion then there is no reason why, with appropriate training, a wider range of staff couldn't be involved. The manager, or person with responsibility for the area being audited could still analyse the results and allocate actions, but it would share the workload and encourage the development of staff and the wider responsibility for quality.

So, on the face of it a simple question, but there are a lot of variables to consider. The survey has highlighted that flexibility is needed in all aspects of auditing, systems will need to support services with auditing and ensure that resources are effectively used and benefits for people using services are realised.

Recommendations:

-  Audits need to be undertaken when and where the evidence shows that they need to be done, not because it is the first of the month
-  A wider range of staff should be responsible for conducting audits, not just the manager
-  Services should review how audits are completed, and whether technology can be embraced to support a more 'user friendly' way of auditing
-  The range of audits completed should be reviewed, and an honest decision reached about the value of specific audits undertaken, and whether resources could be more effectively allocated

Enhancing Quality Assurance: Navigating the CQC Audit Landscape

One of the main challenges highlighted in the survey was difficulty in aligning audits with the regulatory requirements. We feel this is perfectly understandable especially as the regulatory world can move so quickly and be reactive to external forces for example throughout the COVID-19 pandemic things seemed to change on a weekly, or even daily basis.

In addition, as you will already know the CQC is going to be rolling out their new Single Assessment Framework later in the year and a key part of this framework is that they are going to be relying less on undertaking site visits and are going to be more focused on receiving evidence about the quality of the service directly from services themselves, or from others with an interest in the service.

The flexibility of audits will also be very important, and the need for audits to reflect the new Quality Statements, so evidence provided to CQC will be specifically focused to what they need to see to assure them of the ongoing quality and safety of the service being provided.

As a result of the upcoming CQC changes, the indications are that auditing is going to become more important as a way of providing evidence to CQC.

However, some concerns were raised in the survey about sharing information with 45% stating that they were encountering difficulty in sharing the results of audits with stakeholders, and 55% either extremely, or very concerned about the ability to share the results of audits with CQC.

However, 55% stated that one of the benefits of digital audits was the ability to share with stakeholders. This on the face of it looks like conflicting evidence, but if looked at together it implies that digital auditing is a positive step towards being able to share information with a wide range of people, simply and easily, but there are real concerns with the technological relationship with CQC.

Concerns were raised about digital security, and the need to ensure that confidentiality was maintained when sharing information.

At QCS we will share these concerns with CQC and share any response or assurances we receive from them to help allay the concerns that the survey has raised.

We would also encourage services to join the CQC 'citizen lab' which is an online forum where CQC ask questions and conduct surveys. It is an opportunity to share views and be listened to by CQC. The link to join this important forum can be found [here](#).

At QCS we are always proactive and ensure that any regulatory changes are shared with you, reflected in policies and tools are developed to support you to focus on supporting people to be healthy and happy.

Recommendations:

- Services should review how audits are recorded, and how actions are identified and shared
- Information about the new CQC Single Assessment Framework should be shared, and the content of audits aligned to what evidence CQC will be looking for in the future
- Services should endeavour to be 'inside the tent' and be engaged with the CQC and contribute to their thinking, rather than ignoring the upcoming changes and managing the impact in a reactive way

Embracing Digital Transformation: Is the Social Care Sector Ready for Digital Audits?

The survey indicates an even split between audits that were completed using word documents, spreadsheets and pen and paper and those that were completed using a mobile app or specific digital audit software.

If this survey was conducted before COVID-19 it is felt that the results would have been very different, with the pandemic pushing services into more remote ways of working and using electronic solutions. I am confident that if this survey was conducted in two years' time most audits would, be completed using a software management system.

Social care has traditionally been behind the curve on the uptake of technology, and the feeling that being person centred and providing care does not sit well with electronic processes.

It is widely felt that Artificial Intelligence will be much more widely used, and we will all be part of this revolution, and no one knows where this will take us.

The survey did demonstrate that people could really see the benefits of digital auditing, namely that they were more easily planned and organised, more accurate, more easily tracked, actions monitored more clearly and that the results were easier to share with stakeholders.

So, with digital auditing there is a real sense that the market wants it, there is a confidence in their use (especially for people that are already using them) and the box is open and there is no going back to pen and paper.

The survey indicated that there was still a high prevalence of traditional method of assigning and sharing the results of audits, using word documents, email, meetings, spreadsheets etc. Building in efficiency in the assigning, completion and sharing of actions is important to ensure that audits work well and are embedded into business as usual.

Embracing more digital methods can potentially streamline processes and engender real time analysis and action monitoring rather than relying on more 'clunky' ways of working that are dependent on people being in the same place at the same time.

The survey asked respondents to rank what they would like to see in a digital auditing system, and the results were very interesting.

Most people wanted to see an option of customisable templates, to allow the audit to be changed to reflect what was important to them. This is a very reasonable and understandable priority and indeed reflects 'person-centred care' for the service. Digital audits must be flexible and meet the providers requirements. Respondents also valued the ability to do audits in real time and use handheld technology to do this. This would support a wide range of staff to be involved, and not make it the preserve of a manager with a desktop in their office.

Another focus raised was the need for the system to be able to assist and guide the scheduling and completion of the audit and be able to share the results of the audit with stakeholders as necessary. There were some concerns raised about digital auditing with 88% of respondents stating that they were confident with digital auditing, but 12% expressed concerns and most of these were surrounding security of information, and how confidentiality could be maintained.

There were other concerns around connectivity and what to do if data was not entered correctly, how to assure the quality of the data, how you balance a digital audit with the provision of person-centred care, the training of staff in the use of digital audits, cyber security threats and loss of data, poor algorithms that might skew the results of findings.

As can be seen there are concerns, and they are completely understandable. But, if systems are developed that are tested, made to be simple to use, easy to share and secure

then I can only see the future being more digital and audits being a central element of improving care for people.

Recommendations:

- Services need to be forward thinking and look at how technology can support the auditing process
- How information from audits is stored and shared needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is managed in a secure way that supports confidentiality
- Services need to review current processes and see how they can be more proactive and pragmatic in how technology can support improved outcomes for people

Conclusion

QCS would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the survey. The level of engagement reflects the importance of auditing, especially the future of auditing as we move into a more tech enabled world.

The responses indicated that there was a wide acceptance of the importance of conducting audits, but how they were completed, who completed them, the ability to share results, the relationship with CQC and security issues were seen as concerns.

It is recognised that auditing is an important activity, but the survey has shown us that to maximise the positive effects of auditing we need to develop more flexible and pragmatic tools to undertake audits. These audits should be done by a wider range of staff, not just the manager. It is understood that if responsibility is shared then the outcomes for the service will be much improved especially as it will engender a 'whole service approach' to improvement.

There are also challenges with how audits are completed, and how we ensure that social care moves forward in how technology is embraced, this is going to be especially difficult considering the historically slow uptake of technological solutions in social care, and the feeling that tech and person- centred care do not support each other and make for uneasy bedfellows.

As can be seen this survey has asked a lot of questions and has stimulated thinking and ideas for how we move forward, and I'm sure in the future we can use auditing to focus on showing benefits and improved outcomes for people using services, not just purely to satisfy the needs of managers, owners, commissioners and regulators.

The results of this survey will be used by QCS to help inform and guide future developments around audits, and we will ensure that responses to the concerns are considered into any products we produce and share with you.

About the author

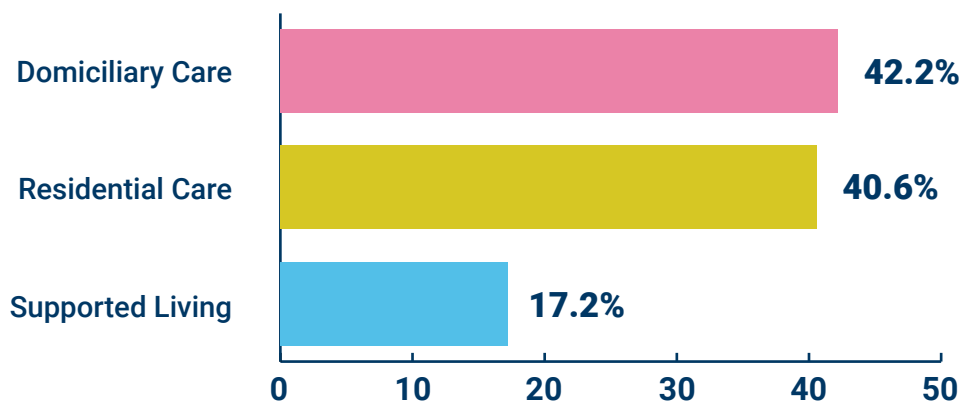


Ed Watkinson
Residential Care & Inspection Specialist

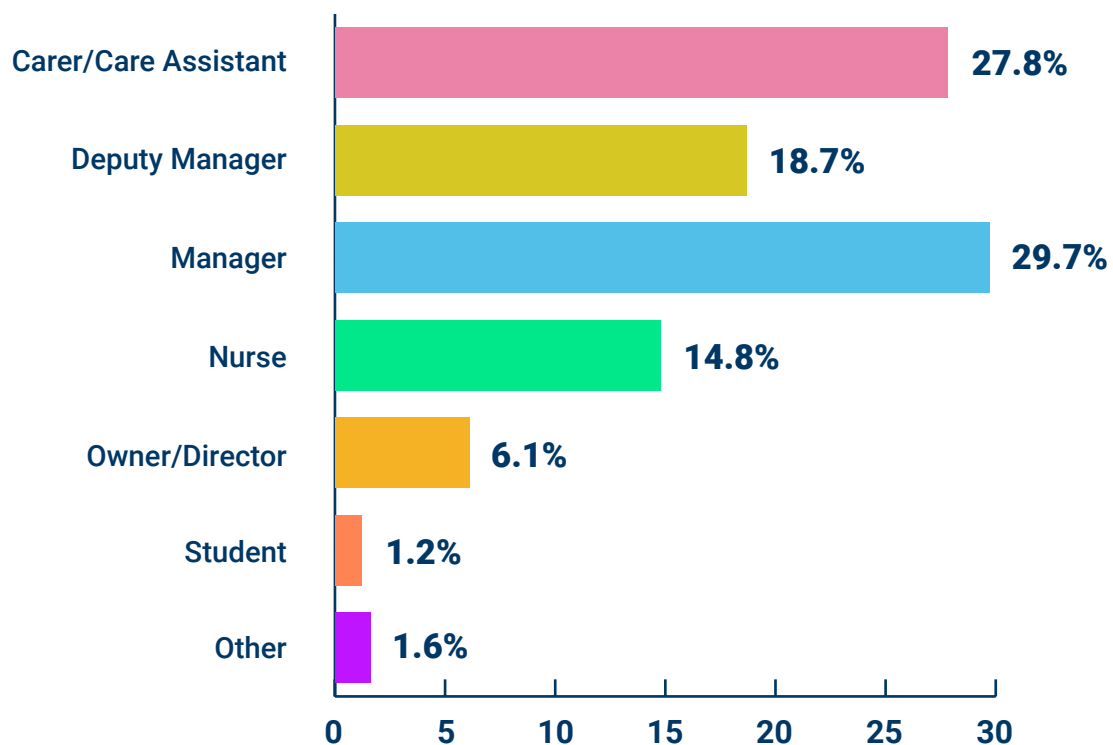
Meet Ed Watkinson, a seasoned Residential Care & Inspection Specialist with a wealth of experience in the care sector. His diverse background encompasses roles such as care assistant, registered manager, area manager, care manager, and senior commissioner. Ed has served in various esteemed positions, including Planning and Commissioning Manager at Buckinghamshire County Council, Methodology Developer and Regulatory Inspector at the Commission for Social Care Inspection, and Regulation Manager for Barchester Healthcare. Today, he actively contributes as a freelance writer for QCS, sharing his valuable insights with the community.

Survey Data and graphs

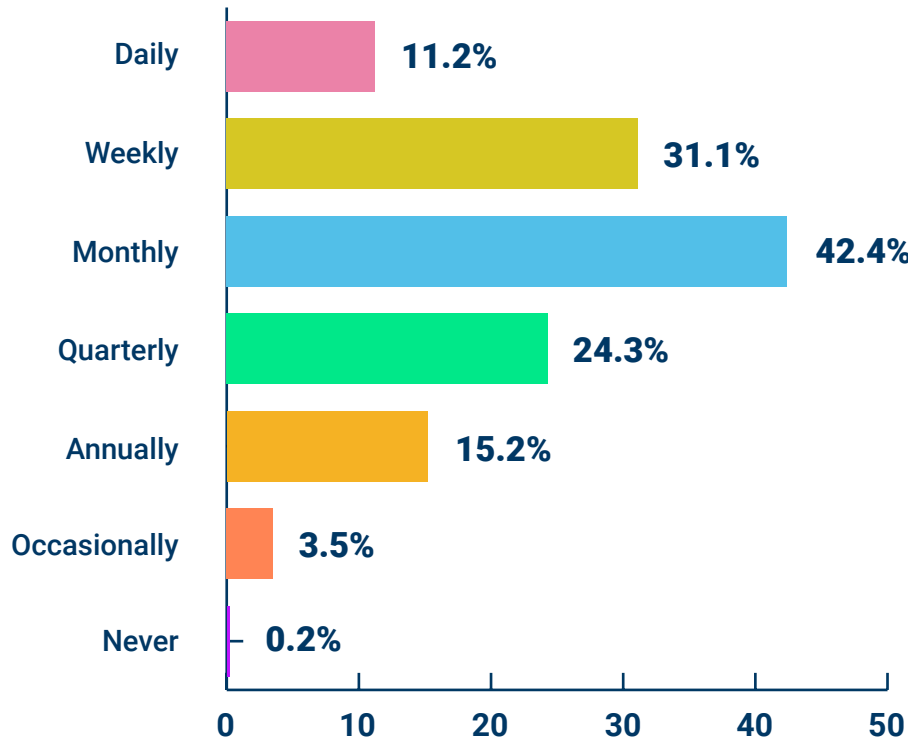
More than 3000 people responded to our survey from across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.



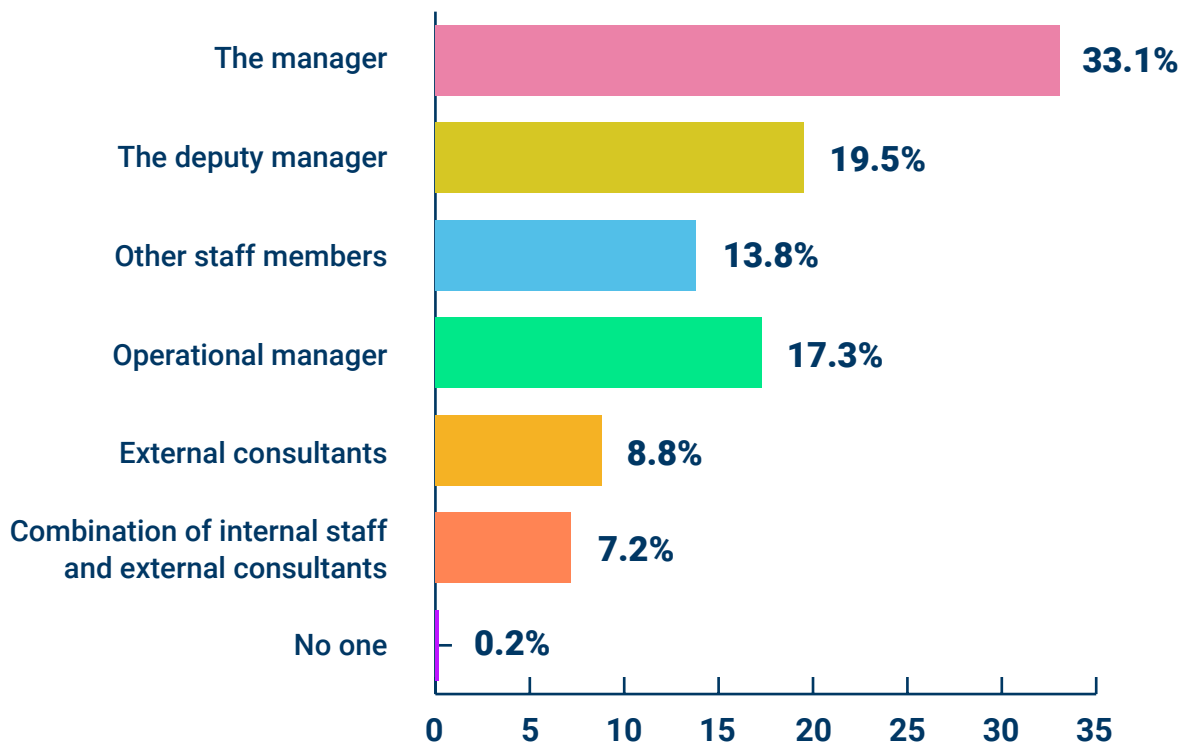
What is your current role?



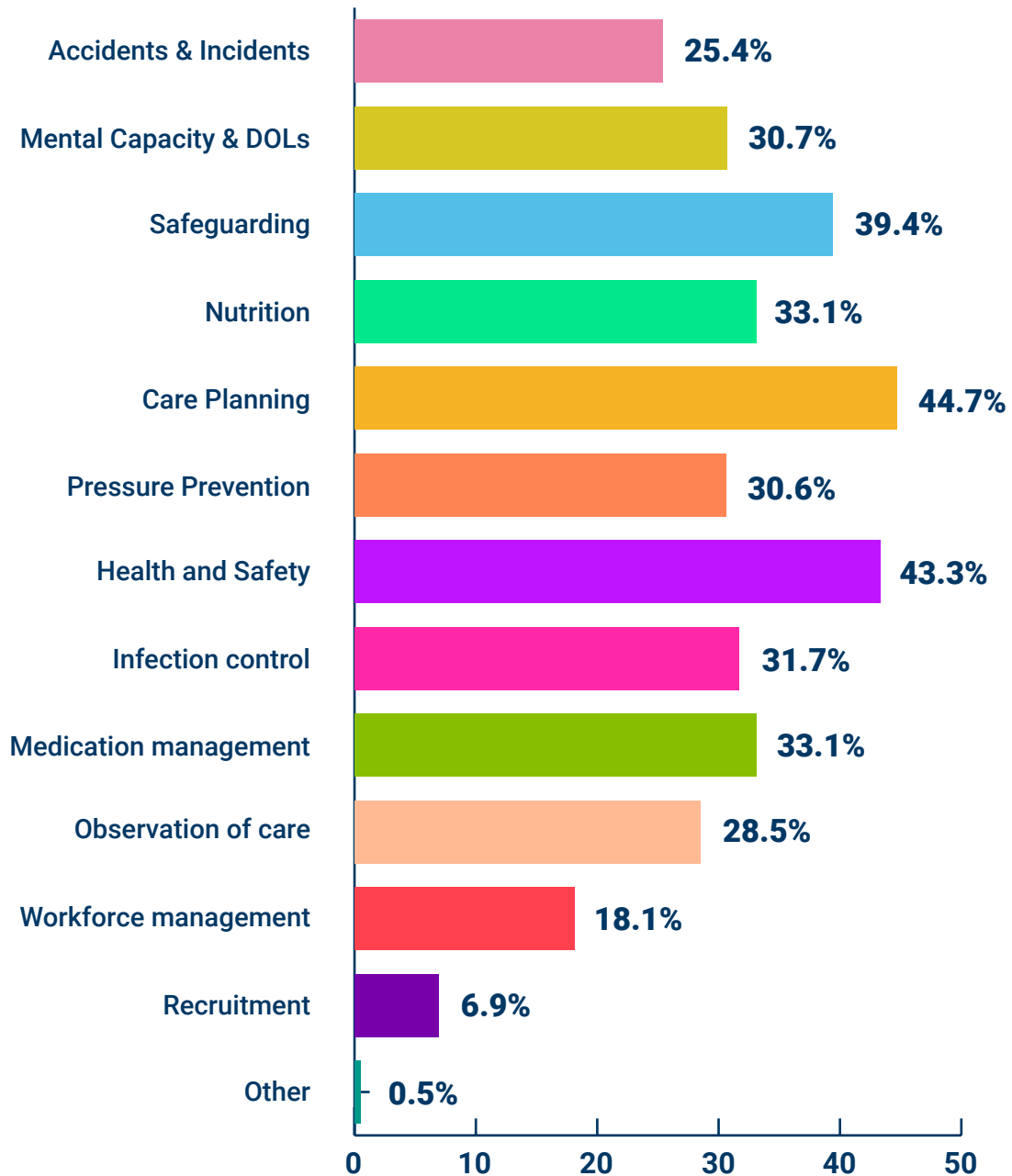
How often are audits conducted in your organisation?



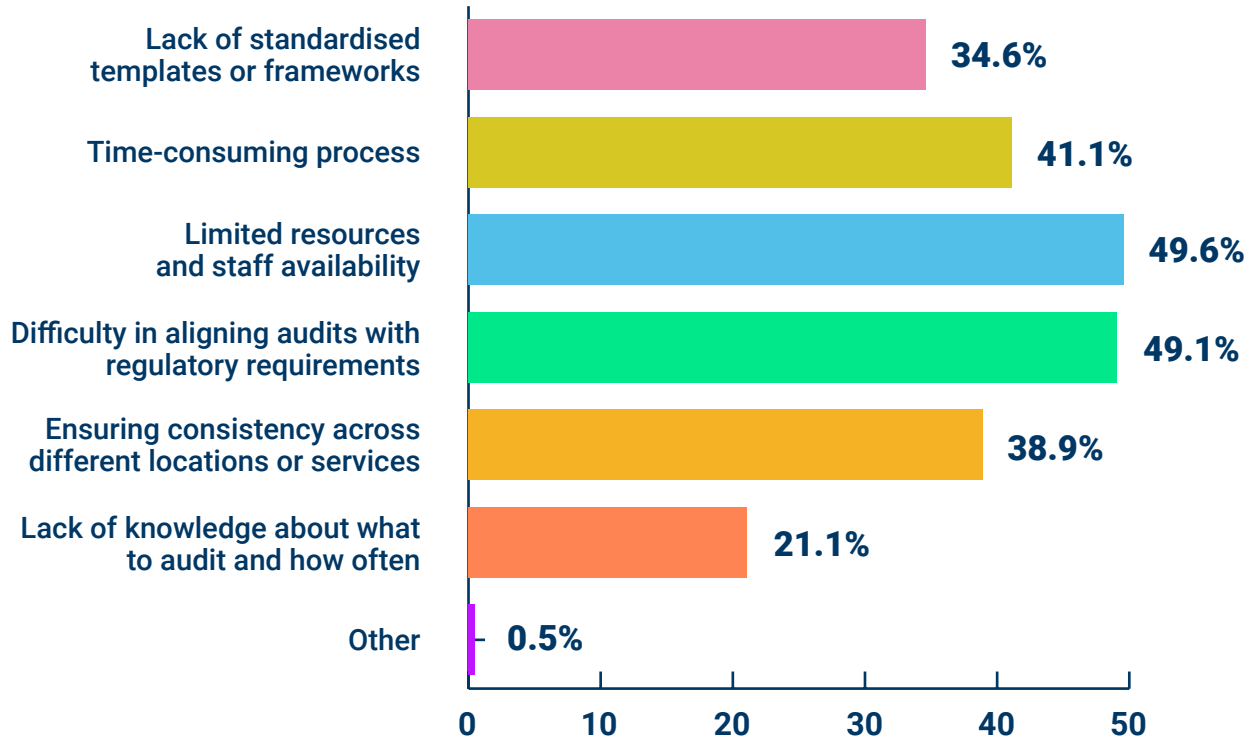
Who holds the primary responsibility for conducting audits in your organisation?



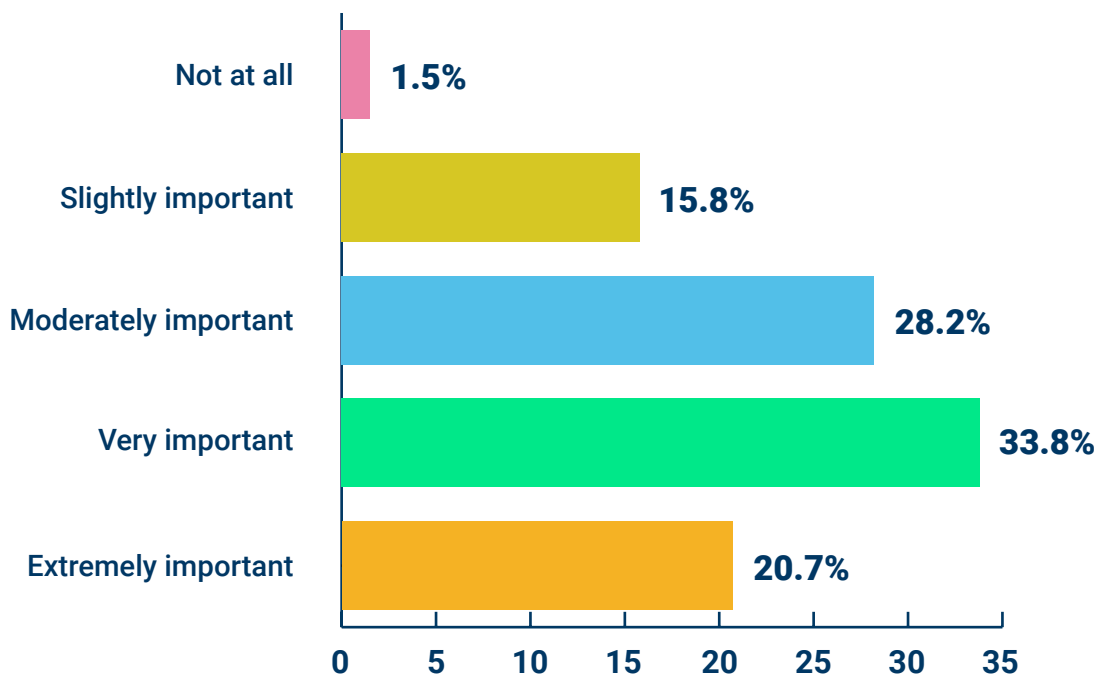
Which types of audits do you find most important for your organisation?



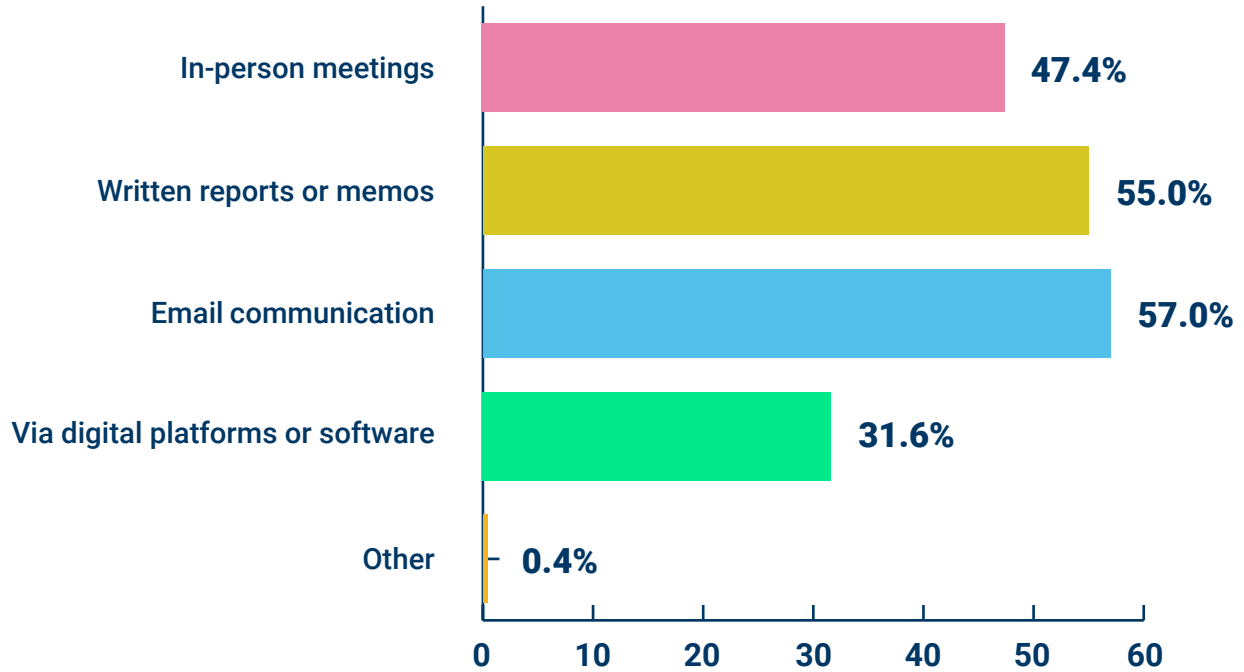
What are the main challenges you face when creating audits?



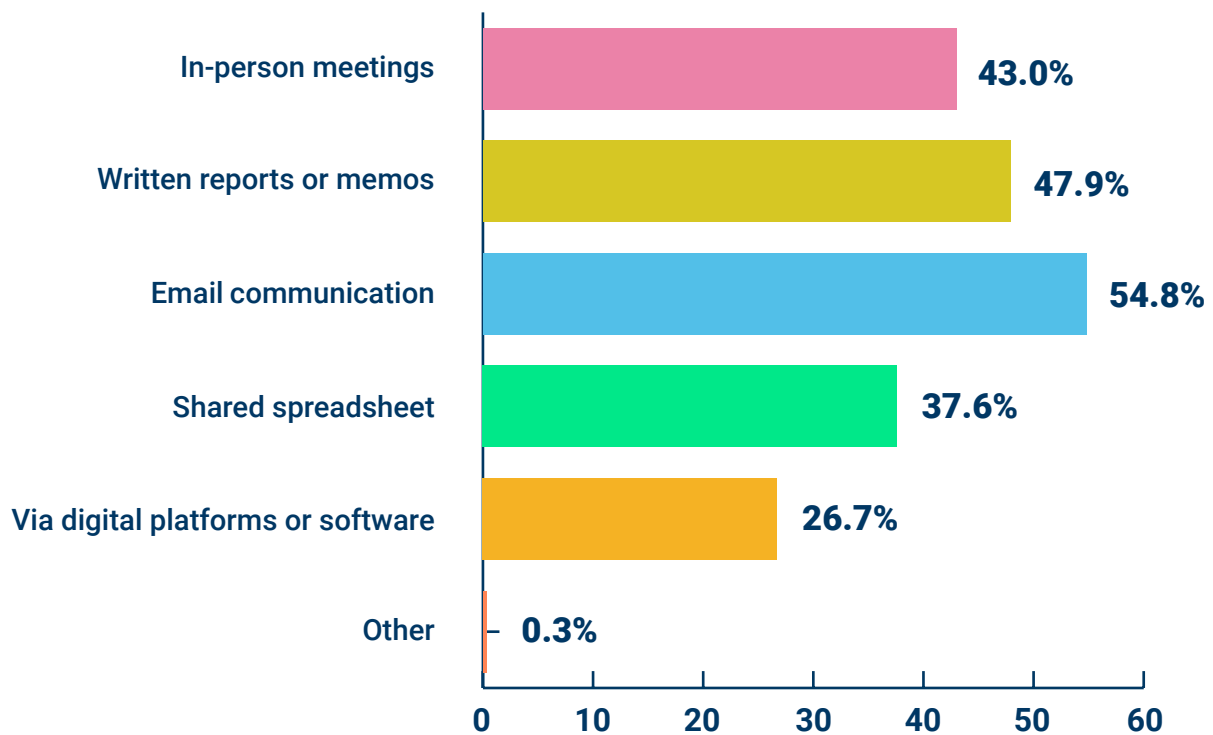
How important are audits for your organisation?



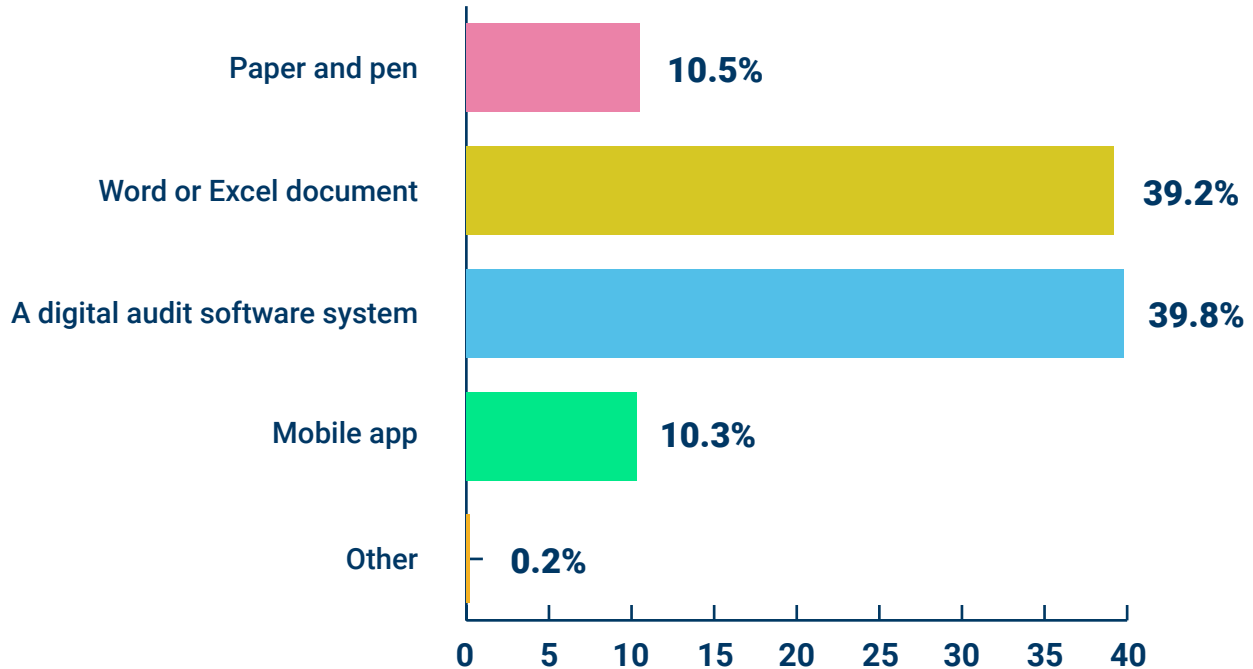
How are audit findings communicated with the team?



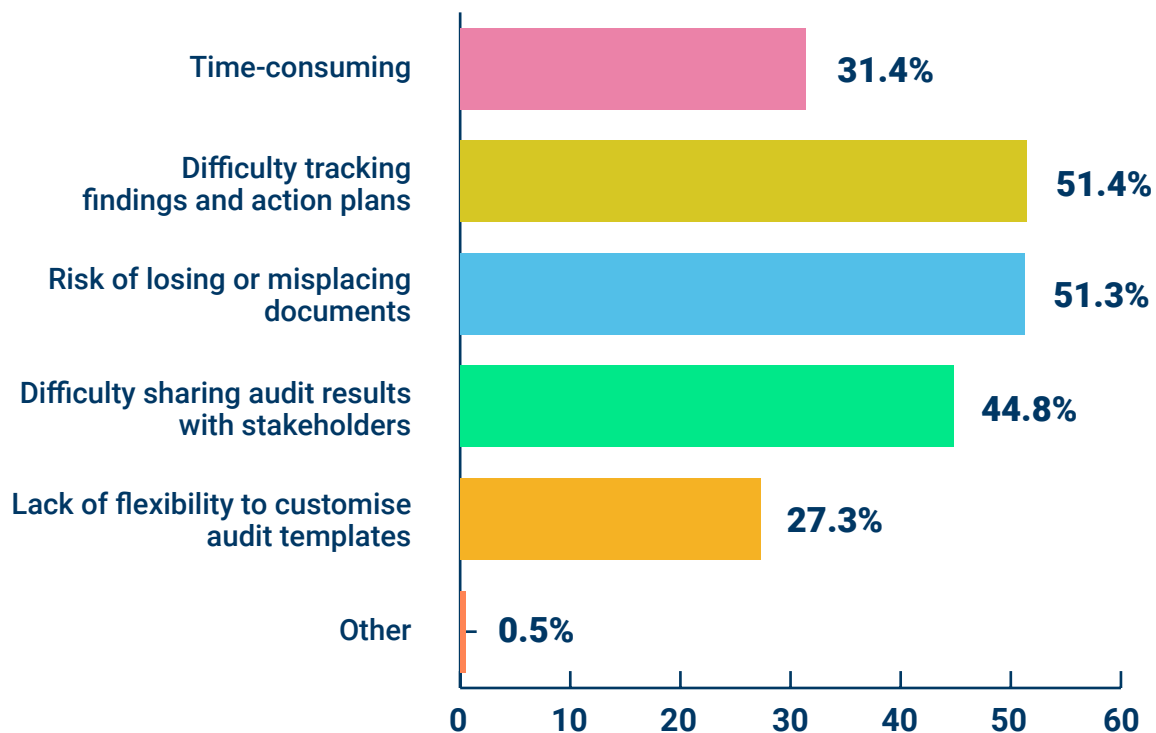
How do you assign and track actions arising from audits?



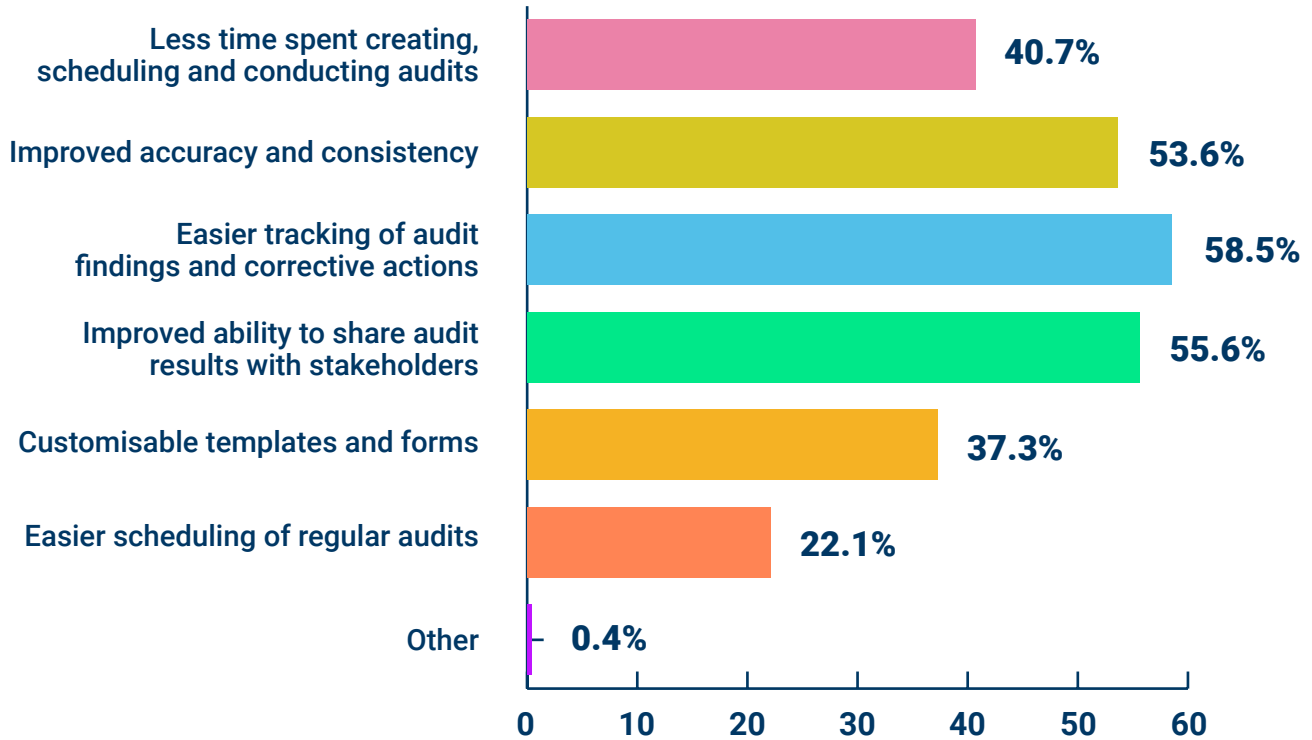
How are audits currently conducted in your service?



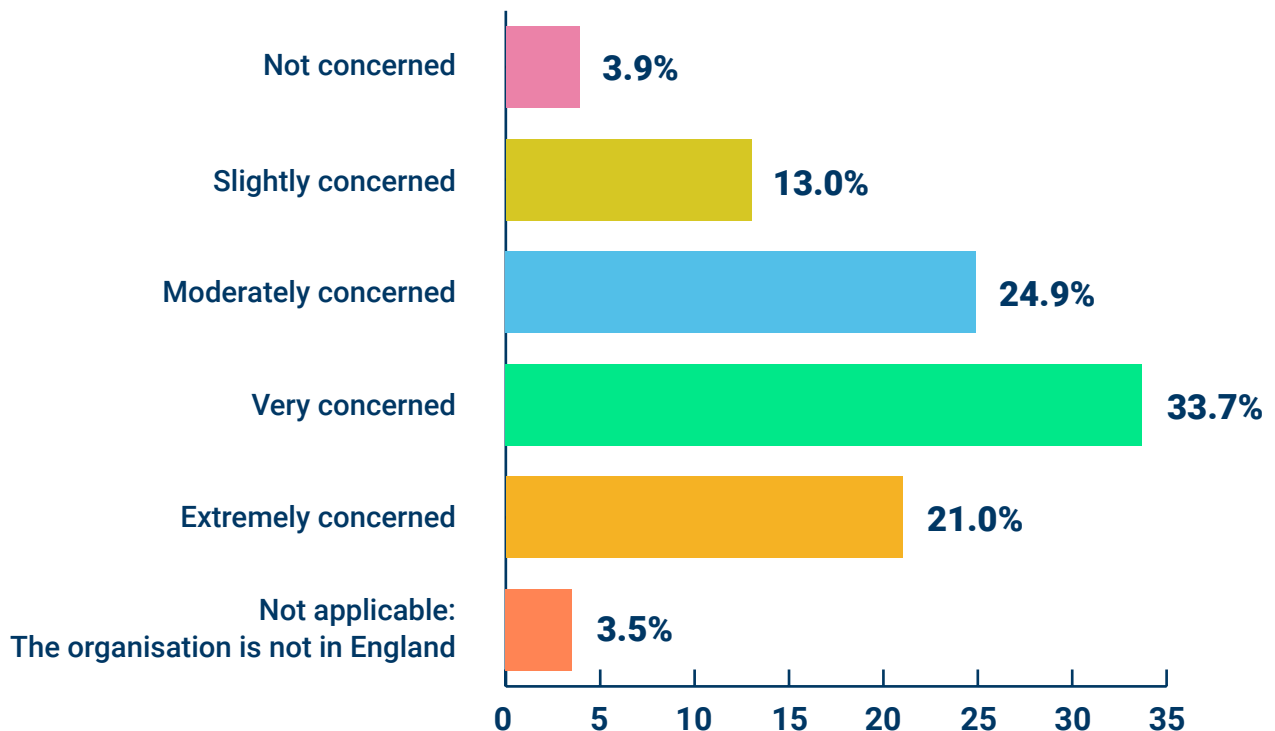
What challenges have you experienced with conducting audits at your service?



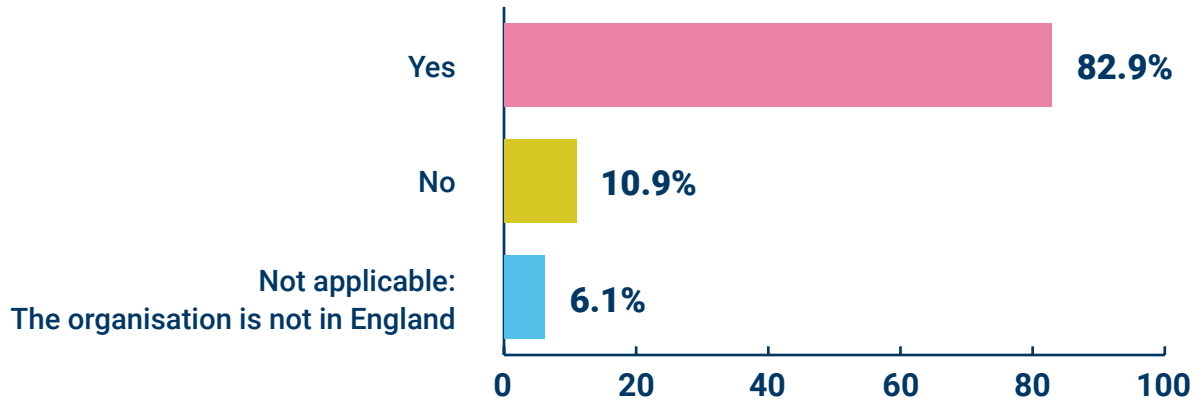
What do you think are the benefits of using a digital audit software system?



If your business is in England, how concerned are you about how you will be able to share your audit outcomes and action plans digitally with CQC under the new Single Assessment Framework?



If your business is in England, are you currently using the CQC portal in your service?



What features would you like to see in a digital audit software? (Rank the following in order of importance from 1 - 7, with 1 being the most important and 7 the least)

	Rank
Customisable audit templates	1
Access on mobile app	2
Real-time reporting and analytics	3
Automated scheduling and notifications	4
Integration with other systems	5
Email notification of missed/due audits	6
Timeline of audits due	7

What factors are most important to you when selecting digital audit software? Please rank from 1 - 6, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least.

	Rank
Ease of use	1
Cost	2
Security and data privacy	3
Customer support and training	4
Customisation options	5
Integration capabilities	6

Do you have any concerns or reservations about the use of digital audits?

