

SCISS Stafford regional meeting 5 October 2017

Summary report

Background

Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC), as part of its annual review of work, had identified a possible gap in terms of outreach. Whilst the annual one day conferences held over the last few years have been very successful, it was agreed that they are not always geographically convenient for some delegates and might require an overnight stay with associated costs – even though there was no charge for conference attendance

It was therefore decided to pilot a series of half-day regional meetings in locations accessible within their region by road and rail. For each meeting, a school would be asked to provide a room, and a small sum of money would be allocated by SCISS for the host school to provide refreshments.

SCISS NEAC wanted to attract new people who might be unaware of the work of SCISS, the needs of Service children in Education, and the range of support available. Another main objective was to enable delegates to make contacts which might continue after the meetings and eventually develop into self-sustaining networks.

Hilary Alcock, head of Buntingsdale Primary School in Shropshire, agreed to organise a meeting accessible for colleagues in the West Midlands and borders of Wales. The head of St John's Primary School in Stafford agreed to host the meeting on 5 October 2017. As the meeting was to be held in a primary school classroom, there was a practical limit of 30 places. Response to the invitation was disappointing when the meeting was advertised in the summer term 2017, but all available places were swiftly taken up following further promotion at the start of the new school year.

Evaluation responses

The meeting was attended by 23 delegates and 5 presenters. The meeting was planned, organised and chaired by a member of SCISS NEAC, with an additional member attending in support. 13 delegates (over half) completed and returned evaluation forms on which this summary is based.

Section 1: delegates

Most respondents were based in the geographical area for which the regional meeting was planned: Stafford/Staffordshire (3), Shropshire (5), Wales (2), Wales/West Midlands (2). One respondent was based in Hampshire.

Delegates held a range of jobs/roles in the following areas: Education (4), Welfare (1), Military (3), Governor (2), Charity/voluntary sector (3).

They had heard about the regional meeting by direct invitation from Hilary (6) or via another personal contact (4).

Most respondents (10) had not attended a SCISS event before. Of those who had, one attended the regional conferences (Bristol 2016 and Winchester 2017); one attended the conference at UJC London, 2016). Another remembered attending something a few years ago, maybe an inaugural meeting, but was not sure when or where.

Section 2: content of meeting; relevance; learning; application

The evaluation form presented 5 positive statements about the meeting, asking respondents to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 4-point scale from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*.

Content

There was a high level of satisfaction with the content of the meeting. Of the 13 respondents, the majority (9) strongly agreed that it was relevant to their role, with a further 4 agreeing.

Increased awareness

All strongly agreed (8) or agreed (6) that they had increased their awareness of some of the challenges facing children and young people from Armed Forces families.

Increased knowledge

All respondents indicated that they had increased their knowledge about where to go for further advice and support for Armed Forces children and young people and their families – 7 agreeing strongly, and 6 agreeing.

Useful contacts

All but one respondent had made one or more useful contacts that they would follow up – strongly agreeing (7) or agreeing (4). This was not relevant for one respondent (a school governor) who would go through the head for contacts. Another respondent indicated that he had made no contacts because he was unable to stay for the whole meeting.

Use of learning in current role

The majority of respondents (9) agreed strongly that they would use within their current role what they had learned at the meeting, whilst a further 3 agreed. One respondent does not, on a daily basis, deal with the issues covered and so would not be able to apply the learning in his current role.

Section 3: comments of respondents

The final section of the evaluation encouraged respondents to provide comments under 4 headings. Comments in this section reflected the positive responses in the previous section where most respondents *agreed strongly* or *agreed* with the positive statements about the meeting.

What was most useful about the meeting?

Twelve respondents made comments. Of these, one indicated that the forum would have been extremely useful if the person dealt with these issues on a daily basis. The remaining 11 respondents without exception identified one or more aspect that they had found most useful. The key items identified were:

- networking and personal contacts
- gaining information about SCISS and other people or groups supporting Service children
- increased understanding of the context and issues relevant for service children
- inspiring mood, content and relevance of the meeting.

What could have improved the meeting for respondents and why?

One respondent stated simply: “Nothing, it was a very impressive event”. The other 8 respondents would have liked more time to network and hear more from other participants. There was appreciation of the content of the meeting. One respondent would have liked more focus on reservist soldiers and another mentioned the Naval Welfare Service.

Any aspects or topics in relation to supporting Service children that respondents would like to know more about – e.g., that could be included within SCISS’s annual one day conference programme or regional meetings.

One respondent stated that there was “nothing” additional. A further 6 respondents listed:

- funding - use of service premium, funding opportunities, continuation of ESF
- support - details of existing support groups
- engagement - how to engage hard to reach families
- transition and records - issues when children move between the devolved administrations, system used to collate information about Service children to promote smooth transition.

Further comments

Five respondents made positive concluding comments indicating that the session had been interesting, well organised, useful, and a cost-effective use of time. One respondent would be eager to attend (and help with) any other meetings planned.

Conclusion

Evaluations indicated that delegates would have liked more time to network, but they also valued the content packed into the session, and there is no simple solution to balance these potentially conflicting aspects. As people had taken half a day (more with travel) out of a busy schedule, it was important to give value by providing varied and relevant content. At Stafford, a compromise was achieved by requesting agreement from delegates for the full contact list details to be circulated to all. The main pressure on time at the end of the meeting was that all cars had to be out of the school car park by a set time.

The Stafford regional meeting:

- drew delegates from the target area (West Midlands and Wales)
- attracted new people to the work of SCISS
- enabled delegates to make useful contacts
- provided information relevant to delegates' work
- enhanced delegates' knowledge of Service children, their needs and available support
- was cost effective.

Based on the Stafford event, it does appear that half-day regional meetings can complement SCISS one day national conferences.

Implications and questions for future events

How can we build in time for (optional) informal networking, perhaps at the end?

How can SCISS purposefully develop locality links arising from the meeting?

How can SCISS build on the goodwill generated at Stafford to extend active membership in the area?

Can the area to develop its own independent network, not relying on direct input from SCISS NEAC?

How can lessons from Stafford be applied to other regional events?