

[Article taken from SEBDA News, Issue 6, 2005]

The Survey of SEBDA Membership Opinion: 'Keep going - louder!' *Ted Cole reports.*

Many thanks to the many of you who took the time to share your views with me via the membership survey form. Given that the research by Sheffield Hallam University informing the new DfES NPSLBA training programme, only achieved a 10% return rate, our survey was gratifying and suitably robust in research terms. Some sections of the survey probably give a fuller sample of opinion on the concerns of the wider behavioural field in Britain than the government-sponsored survey (I hope to feature the latter more fully in the next SEBDA News).

The findings were very gratifying and gave real encouragement to SEBDA Executive and myself to build our Association for the future. Reproduced below are the key findings along with a selection of member opinions. Of course, the many complimentary things said are unlikely to turn our sometimes greying (and I like to think, down-to-earth) heads - we know that there are things we can do better and with your help, we will strive to develop your Association along the lines you have suggested. Key issues have already been incorporated into a revised Business Plan for SEBDA.

Key findings from the survey:

- 41% of active members (in November, 2004) replied from a range of professions and different kinds of employment agencies, although over 90% work in or in support of educational services.
- 85% are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with SEBDA membership; 13.2% are 'quite satisfied'.
- 90% say the SEBDA international journal 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' is 'very useful / interesting' or 'useful/interesting'.
- 86% say 'SEBDA News' is 'very useful/interesting' or 'useful/ interesting'
- 90% see SEBDA representation of our field to government, regional and local bodies as 'very important' or 'important'.
- Responses, by those who attend/ have access to SEBDA conferences and professional development days were very positive.
- Members believed that SEBDA needed to
 - a. continue with what it already did well;
 - b. become bigger and better known;
 - c. expand its services (publications, support and professional development programme
 - d. develop its regional/ local services and support.
- The web-site was appreciated but its content and links should be expanded. Useful pointers were given to how this should happen.
- About half the respondents do not use the web-site.
- Many members were wary of increases to membership subscriptions (particularly individual members) although some saw the need or would accept modest increases if linked to wider and improved services.
- Many suggestions were made for themes/topics for professional development days and for speakers.
- Respondents preferred to meet during the working week but over a quarter accepted that Saturday meetings might be more practicable.
- Over 100 respondents offered to write articles for SEBDA News on a wide range of topics (we shall be contacting you).

- Issues of greatest concern to members were:
 - e. how to create more inclusive mainstream schools (sympathetic and responsive to the needs of children with SEBD / less likely to resort to premature exclusions)
 - f. worsening behaviour, particularly violence;
 - g. more complex children's difficulties needing more emotional support;
 - h. challenges presented by multi-agency/ inter - disciplinary working;
 - i. shortage of resources;
 - j. the need for better staff training;
 - k. better strategies and support from local authorities;
 - l. worries over false abuse allegations and Child Protection issues;
 - m. recruitment difficulties;
 - n. staff stress in very difficult working conditions.

The questions emerging for the future were:

1. Could training events and local support group meetings be held closer to where people lived and worked? There were comments to this effect from all regions of the country from Northern Scotland to Devon, from E Anglia to S Wales.
2. Could SEBDA develop more fully in Scotland to better reflect the Scottish context?
3. Could our events be made more affordable?
4. Could our events be advertised more fully and earlier?
5. Could the range of events and training be increased?
6. Could the web-site be improved further? The recent revisions to the web-site were noted but there were some calls for (a.) easier navigation (b.) far more content in both the open and the restricted part of the site; (c.) keeping the web-site up-to-date; and (d.) using the web-site as a regular source of updating and communicating with members.

We are planning big developments for the web-site. How far we can expand our regional and local meetings and training offer will depend in part on our ability to afford another member of staff - a Development Officer - to work alongside the Director. We are searching for funding. Increasing membership subscription through growing the number of members is the second obvious strategy to enable expansion of services. These are matters on the next SEBDA Council agenda.

Praise for the Association - a selection of quotes

From English South East

[SEBDA] 'Makes us all realise we are not alone'

'SEBDA conference always brilliant and newsletter informative and well presented. Not really looked further than this apart from interesting articles in journal. Above has raised awareness of what I need to look out for!! '

From Greater London

'Keep going – louder.'

From Midlands

'I feel you very much have your "finger on the pulse" of issues that matter to those hands on with our children'

'Sebda News is very informative'

From Northern England

'Roadshows are excellent – relevant and refreshing.'

'Conference – excellent/chance to share area of expertise/skills. Re-assurance own LEA online – or if not identifying areas to target. Speakers/thinking at cutting edge of SEBDA. Personal support – going in right direction! Meeting and greeting with the 'converted'/believers!'

'You present a summary of current issues effectively to very busy practitioners. You question policies and suggest alternatives. You give useful websites etc. which saves an enormous amount of time when researching issues. Review of books – excellent.'

'Conferences and journal are excellent.'

From Scotland:

'Events are always interesting as is newsletter and journals.'

'Good at keeping me informed about current and new thinking.'

'You are doing an excellent job – keep plugging away'

'The access you provide to current thought and good practice in the field is second to none. I find it particularly interesting/rewarding to attend SEBDA events and see and hear first hand those leading edge researchers and thinkers who publish.'

From West Country

'Journal very useful to PRU involvement in research.'

From Wales

'Excellent articles and executive summaries which give a feel for contents. Up to date information when there are significant changes from government etc. More Welsh guidance (in English!) would be useful.'

From Northern Ireland

'You have your finger on the pulse of SEBDA issues and respond knowledgeably and professionally to all relevant government initiatives, enquiries etc.'

'I think the newsletter is great – keeps people well informed as to what is happening and the range of courses is excellent.'

From abroad

'Newsletter is very useful, valuable resource; yearly conferences and EBD Journal assets to celebrate.' (Malta)

'You are already a first class organisation (Canada)

Issues that concern members most

There were 211 responses to the question 'What issues at work concern you most?' These came mainly from England but views were expressed from across the four home countries with a few thoughts from abroad (e.g. easier access for our overseas members to our conferences). Table 1 summarises themes arising from a study of the open-ended responses, some of them quite lengthy. Many respondents expressed strong feelings, sometimes hinting at great stress and underlining the need for greater support and appreciation of people working with the most difficult young people under far from ideal situations.

Table 1: Issues of greatest concern to SEBDA members, rank ordered from most frequently to least frequently mentioned (Scottish views excluded).

<i>Area</i>	<i>More detailed description</i>
School inclusion of children with SEBD	Shortcomings of mainstream schools in relation to the inclusion of challenging pupils/those with SEBD, related to teacher attitudes (against those with SEBD) and to a lesser extent lack of training/capacity of staff to cope. Inappropriate use of TAs to deal with SEBD pupils ; lack of support for SEBD in mainstream
Worsening behaviour & violence	More difficult behaviour, particularly increasing violence towards staff and between children (with 4 responses focusing on bullying; 1 noting increasingly difficult Y8s and y9s); impact of drugs and alcohol consumption ; young not sharing accepted social values
Premature resort to exclusions/resistance to re-inclusion	Head teachers resort to temporary and permanent exclusions too soon - unfair to the children - particularly those with SpLDs . How to reward low -excluding schools . Heads of m'stream schools resist those ready for re-inclusion . Need for research on avoiding exclusion of 4-7 year olds
Multi-agency working	The difficulties of achieving effective multi-agency working . Lack of social service support for SEBD in schools . Communicating by teachers to other professions who can help . Moving towards children's departments
Resource issues	Lack of funding/resources (includes comments from Northern Ireland and Channel Islands)
Staff training	More and better training needed, particularly for student and NQTs in understanding behaviour and responding appropriately and confidently to SEBD . Train staff to see that behaviour links to teaching and learning . Difficult to find appropriate training in SEBD .Need for formal LSA training.
More complex needs	Children (often of a younger age) had more complex needs in need of specialist support that often was not there (e.g. from CAMHS)
Emotional 'curriculum'	Allow more space for supporting/developing the well being and emotional intelligence of children in school (noting the 'E' in EBD); SATS and NC is inappropriate for SEBD
Allegations and Child Protection issues	Continuing worries about false allegations and over-reactions/lack of understanding of CP professionals
Local authority policy and practice	LEAs exert undue pressure on some schools to accept pupils against the school's wishes/judgement or to exceed the school's official numbers. LEAs can lack suitable provision, reflecting lack of strategic policies.One-size-fits all PRU difficulties. Poor EOTAS provision. Lack of understanding of SEBD by LEAs, Ofsted,HMI (
Staff stress	The need for greater support and understanding to underpin the emotional well-being of stressed staff
Staff recruitment	It is difficult to recruit and maintain good quality careworkers, TAs

	and sometimes teachers
Working better with parents	Tackling poor parenting through training; helping parents with their own mental health difficulties; ethnic minority parents needing help
Time	Lack of time to do job as wished (e.g. time to communicate with colleagues to co-ordinate approaches)
Physical restraint issues	Need for specific physical restraint training. Need for strategic approach to this issue
Paperwork	Increased form filling, bureaucratic procedures
Early intervention	Better and fuller pre-school intervention needed . Early ID of mental health problems.
Role change	PRUs and BSS are challenged when LEA wants to change their existing role

Views from Scotland

The Scottish responses to this question are studied below:

Table 2: Concerns of Scottish members of SEBDA: 'Top 4' issues

1. Shortcomings in mainstream in relation to SEBD (lack of understanding and training; unwillingness to persevere with challenging children)
2. Restraining children
3. Supporting staff (particularly after difficult incidents)
4. Stress in workplace
Other concerns: Dealing with disruption, management of anger and violence (in primaries as well as secondary schools), girls in SEBD schools, keeping up-to-date with changing guidance e.g. to do with disability; LAC children; having time to network.

These concerns are enlarged in the following comments from Scottish members:
'Other teacher's attitudes to pupils with SEBD and the lack of commitment by authorities to these pupils' needs'

'Effect of various acts – children's rights, freedom of information – on safety of staff/children and on perception of children re boundaries'

'Pressure to accept and start SEBD pupils without adequate planning. The number of SEBD pupils "dumped" in mainstream with an inexperienced auxiliary. This is supposed to be a solution to the problem.'

'Staff peer support systems lacking. Teaching and social services staff working to different contracts!. Stress in the workplace.'