



**‘IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF  
SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS’ THROUGH  
SUPPORT AND TRAINING:  
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION**

September 2014

Marian Brandon  
Pippa Belderson  
Sue Bailey

Centre for Research on Children & Families  
University of East Anglia



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks are due to Kevin Ball from the NSPCC for facilitating data collection, supporting the study and his always helpful responses to our queries. We are also indebted to Gillian Downham from Sequeli for designing the partnership evaluation forms and to Lisa Hewitt-Craft from Action for Children for providing evaluation data on the Action Learning Sets.

We would like to thank all the participants in the programme who took part in the evaluation, and in particular those who generously gave their time and experience to take part in the focus group and interview element of the study.

### **Authors**

Professor Marian Brandon, Dr Pippa Belderson and Sue Bailey are members of the Centre for Research on Children and Families in the School of Social Work at the University of East Anglia.

### **Disclaimer**

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the DfE, the NSPCC, Sequeli or Action for Children

## CONTENTS

|                   |   |    |
|-------------------|---|----|
| Executive Summary |   | i  |
| PART 1            | Introduction  | 1  |
|                   | Context   | 1  |
|                   | Evaluation aims and methods                           | 2  |
| PART 2            | Participant profile and views on programme elements   | 4  |
|                   | The core two-day training event                       | 4  |
|                   | Evaluation of the ‘taster workshops’                  | 14 |
|                   | Evaluation of the seminar for LSCB chairs and members | 25 |
|                   | Action learning sets                                  | 30 |
|                   | Mentoring   | 32 |
| PART 3            | Impact of the programme                               | 34 |
| PART 4            | Conclusions   | 44 |

## APPENDICES

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Training Materials and LSCB Commissioning Materials |
| 2 | Project team End of Project Report                  |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### CONTEXT

Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) take place after a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. The prime purpose of a SCR is for agencies and individuals to learn lessons to improve the way in which they work both individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Amid concerns that the previous approach to undertaking Serious Case Reviews was not resulting in learning being shared and embedded as effectively as it could be, the Government has sought to address a number of issues<sup>1</sup> including:

- Training for those engaged in conducting SCRs to improve the skills of reviewers;
- The recruitment of new reviewers;
- Assuring the quality of SCR reports, incorporating sound analysis and clear written English;
- Transparency of the review process and publication of SCR reports.

(Note that Working Together 2013 refers only to 'reviewers', making no distinction between the chair of a Serious Case Review and the author of the report).

Following a Government consultation on these issues, the Department for Education (DfE) funded a national training programme during 2013 and early 2014, designed and delivered by a consortium led by the NSPCC, and including Action for Children and Sequeli (a not for profit training organisation). The key aims of the programme were to offer training and support to improve the quality of Serious Case Review reports by helping independent reviewers produce reports which were well written and could be understood easily by professionals and public alike, provided a sound analysis in order to avoid the risk of recurrences, and were suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted. It was anticipated that training would be provided to at least 50 individuals likely to be involved with SCRs in the near future, and that a number of new reviewers, from a wide range of backgrounds, would be attracted to the role.

The elements of the programme which were evaluated are outlined below:

- A two day core training module, delivered on four occasions from May 2013 to February 2014 and reaching 77 individuals in total.
- Five half-day taster workshops, each covering a different methodological approach to conducting a SCR, were delivered between June-November 2013, with each workshop being delivered twice.
- A one-day seminar for Commissioners, specifically designed for Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB) Chairs, Board members and Business Managers, held in March 2014, and repeated once.
- Four Action Learning Sets in different parts of the country. These sets were designed to follow-on from the two-day programme, and/or the taster workshops, and were intended to provide an opportunity for those conducting or commissioning SCRs to come together and share issues, develop ideas and explore solutions with other set members.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Government response to the consultation on statutory guidance to safeguard children (March 2013), HM Government, London.

## EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODS

An independent evaluation of the training programme was undertaken by a team led by Professor Marian Brandon at UEA. The study aimed to build a profile of those who participated and to seek their views about the delivery of the various aspects of the programme. A further aim was to assess the extent to which the training had helped enable participants to produce quality SCR reports. The evaluation methodology incorporated:

### 1. Questionnaires

- Analysis of 71 *participant profile questionnaires* completed by those who attended the two day core training (basic information about demographic characteristics, professional characteristics, review experience, background discipline).
- Analysis of 75 *course feedback questionnaires* completed by participants in the two day core training, eliciting views of this.
- Analysis of 121 *evaluation questionnaires* completed by those who attended the ‘taster workshops’ about the various methodological approaches.
- Analysis of 46 *course feedback questionnaires* from the two seminars for LSCB chairs and members.
- Analysis of 14 *feedback questionnaires* completed by participants in the Action Learning Sets (data provided and analysed by Action for Children).

### 2. Focus group

- A focus group was conducted with six participants at the end of the second day of the first of the 2-day training sessions. The focus group sought participants’ views of the challenges they face in report writing and their immediate views on the utility of the two day training programme.

### 3. Interviews

- Interviews were sought with a sub-sample of participants who had participated in the core two-day training (participants were also given the option of responding in writing if they preferred). The interview schedule sought to further explore views about the challenges involved in writing a quality report ready for publication and the extent to which the training and other support offered by the programme had helped. In total, 18 participated in this aspect of the study, with seven interviews undertaken and 11 written responses received.

**Note:** For the purpose of this evaluation no views were sought from those who designed, delivered or managed the programme. An end of project report produced by the NSPCC on behalf of the whole team is available at Appendix 2.

## FINDINGS

These findings are framed around the original set of aims for the programme. Although some of these issues relate to the wider SCR context, and may have been beyond the scope of the current training programme, they are nevertheless important to bear in mind in designing any future programme of support.

### AIM:

**PROVIDE THIS SERVICE TO AT LEAST 50 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE LIKELY TO BE LEADING SCRS OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS; IDENTIFYING AND ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUALS TO TAKE PART IN THE PROGRAMME.**

- The aim of reaching at least 50 people was achieved (and indeed exceeded). All the courses were over-subscribed and, with just under 200 individuals initially wishing to book, many were disappointed at not receiving a place. There is clearly an appetite for information and support.
  - In total, 77 individuals attended the core two-day training event, which was offered on four occasions in different locations.
  - The five ‘taster workshops’, each exploring a different methodological approach to conducting SCRs, and each repeated on a second occasion, attracted 136 participants in total. Individuals could attend more than one workshop, so there were fewer than 136 different individuals attending these half-day sessions. Some of those attending the ‘taster’ sessions had been unable to secure a place on the two-day core course.
  - Two separate one-day seminars for LSCB Chairs and members attracted 55 participants.
  - A total of 22 participants attended the Action Learning Sets (although attendance at these dropped over time).
- Whether the programme has achieved the aim of these individuals becoming **‘likely to be leading SCRs over the next two years’** is less certain. From a commissioner’s viewpoint, there remains a struggle to find suitable authors (often a case of ‘who you know’). Having taken part in the programme, novice authors were unsure how to overcome this obstacle, gain credibility and actually get commissioned.
- Interviews revealed a growing reluctance among many of those who participated in the programme to be involved in SCRs, and this was raised by those with substantial experience and those new to SCRs alike. This did not appear to be directly connected to the experience of the programme but rather to wider fears and concerns. These included a sense of uncertainty and perceived lack of clarity about what is wanted from a SCR, coupled with anxieties about potential adverse publicity which could damage their future careers. The implication here is that (despite the contrary intention of the programme) there may be a reducing pool of individuals willing to take on the work and a consequent detrimental impact on the quality of SCRs produced.

**AIM:**

**ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE FROM A WIDE RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO SCR REVIEWS.**

- The participant profile questionnaire for 71 of the 77 who attended the two day training showed is summarised below:
  - **Demographic profile:** In total, 61% of participants in the two-day core training were female. Nearly all of those who attended (97%) were over 40 years old, with the majority of these (55%) being in the 51-60 age category.
  - **Professional background:** About half (52%) of the participants were from a social work background, while others had a professional background in law (14%), health (9%) or the police (15%). A small number of those who attended the programme had a background in a combination of these areas (for instance, nursing and social work).
  - **Review experience:** There was broad range of past reviewing experience: 27 attendees had previously authored an overview report for a Serious Case Review, 37 had authored Individual Management Reviews for Serious Case Reviews (referred to as IMRs, these were a requirement in Working Together 2010 but are no longer a requirement following Working Together 2013), 46 had authored another type of review report, such as a Domestic Homicide Review report, and 11 had no previous reviewing experience. However, many individuals had authored more than one type of report. In total, 43 (61%) had experience of the child SCR process, either as an IMR author, overview report writer or both.
- There was a wide range of professional backgrounds and substantial reviewing experience among participants in the programme. The opportunity for transferrable learning was welcomed by all. The minority new to SCRs reported that they learned lots and benefited from the chance to hear from experienced reviewers. While some of the more experienced participants enjoyed the opportunity to refresh and build on existing knowledge and devote 'thinking space' to the issues, others felt disappointed by what they judged to be a somewhat basic level of training.
- Meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge for the programme. Planning for future delivery of the programme would benefit from considering how best to cater for this range of experience.
- There was some concern expressed that attending the two day course, or indeed the whole programme, could not provide a sufficient basis for somebody with no prior experience to gain sufficient knowledge and skill to write a competent report.

**AIM: TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS OF INDIVIDUALS SO THAT THEY CAN PRODUCE SCR REPORTS WHICH MEET THE DFE REQUIREMENTS:**

***-provide a sound analysis of what happened in the case and why, and what needs to happen in order to reduce the risk of recurrence;***

***-written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and the public alike;***

***-suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted, for example they will not contain personal data which needs to be protected.***

- The evaluation sheets submitted by participants in all elements of the programme show that overall, the response was very positive (for example, 86% indicated they had found the two-day course a useful foundation). Of particular value was:
  - ***The opportunity for discussion***, and a chance to network and to share experience and perspectives was found to be the most helpful aspect of the course. Or as one participant put it, what was most valuable was *“the information that was shared”*. Hence the interactive parts of the training were felt to have worked especially well. Some would have welcomed even more time for discussion.
  - ***The training materials and LSCB commissioner materials***, with a near consensus that these were well structured, relevant and helpful (96% of those who attended the two-day course said the course materials were helpful). Furthermore, interviewees revealed that the materials had since been widely disseminated and were thought to be a valuable resource to draw upon. Note that the training and LSCB commissioner materials are attached at Appendix 1.
- In keeping with the positive feedback from the initial evaluation questionnaires, most of the 18 interviewees felt their attendance had been worthwhile, either that they had learned more or that the programme had reinforced their existing knowledge and confidence about making a sound analysis. They also valued the time it gave them for reflection and some also made mention of the value of ‘unlearning’ old ways. Others commented on the way the training had helped them to think differently and more analytically about the purpose of a review and its conclusions and to move away from *“ticking a box to say something has been done”* and the need for a *“root and branch systems change after a Serious Case Review”*.
- However, in contrast, the interviews also revealed a degree of frustration among some participants about what they perceived as the relative superficiality of what could be covered, and that although the programme had been enjoyable, they learned little that was new. Although participants were realistic about what was achievable, some wanted more time spent on models of review and some were frustrated that they had not been able to attend workshop sessions devoted to this.
- There was a degree of confusion about the extent of flexibility in carrying out a review, particularly among the less experienced reviewers. Being confused about methodological

approaches was also thought to apply to Chairs of LSCBs who commission reviews. Good support was felt to be needed for LSCB chairs so that the SCR report could be presented to an informed audience.

- A number of the interviewees were interested in developing or had begun to use a hybrid methodology and felt that attending the programme had helped crystallise their thinking around this and encouraged them to 'find their own way'.
- There was a mixed response as to whether the programme had helped attendees to be better able to produce reports which are **written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and the public alike**. Many felt that this was not addressed in any great depth and that it would have been useful to have been provided with a clear example of a report which was thought to have achieved this aim. There was also a suggestion that writing skills should feature more prominently on any future course as this is fundamental to the success of a report.
- In terms of **producing a SCR suitable for publication**, the programme was thought to have been helpful in developing this skill, and a number of interviewees commented that it had changed their approach and attitude around this. Some described how they felt more confident about writing without the need for redaction, and that the training material had provided a useful resource to refer to about how to approach and then construct a SCR for publication.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE CLARITY FOR PROVIDERS AND COMMISSIONERS ABOUT WHAT A GOOD REPORT LOOKS LIKE AND HOW IT COULD AND SHOULD BE USED.**

- A recurrent theme in the interviews was a desire for clarity from the DfE on this issue. The programme partnership had requested examples of good SCRs from the DfE, but none had been provided. Interviewees accepted that lead reviewers have been given much greater licence but were uncomfortable with the absence of clear guidance in the context of such a high profile and important task. To address this, there were suggestions that more concrete examples could be given on the programme and case materials could be improved or better utilised. There were pleas for more practical examples, less theory.
- It was acknowledged that providing examples to emulate would not be straightforward as no two reports or situations are the same and the degree of transferability from one situation to another is problematic. Moreover, there are also the difficulties of satisfying the various audiences, each with their own demands and agendas. Part of the confusion was the perception of a dissonance between the systems learning approach and public statements from Ministers which were perceived to be more about blame than learning.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE ON-GOING SUPPORT TO INDIVIDUALS AS THEIR SKILLS DEVELOP**

- The programme originally intended to incorporate a telephone mentoring system for independent reviewers. However, funding for this form of support was withdrawn because of low take-up. On a more informal basis, it was felt that the programme had nonetheless contributed towards establishing better peer support networks.
- The Action Learning Sets were not always well attended, and one regional set was cancelled due to low take-up. However, they appeared to be very well received by those who did participate: with those (14) who completed evaluation forms indicating that they felt more confident after taking part. These findings are reinforced by evidence from the interviews. The groups were thought to have been well facilitated and some interviewees felt this to have been the most valuable element of the entire programme, providing much needed in-depth discussion with peers about real issues faced by authors.
- It was surprising that there was lack of interest in the peer support and the telephone mentoring elements of the programme, as when specifically asked about further support or training that was required, participants often cited the need for peer support and professional supervision. This was viewed as something that would not only improve the quality of reports, but would also help to address the challenges for individual reviewers around the emotional impact of dealing with distressing material and the often isolating nature of the work.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE QUALITY ASSURANCE TO COMMISSIONERS OF SCRS**

- Although each element of the programme might have touched upon how one might gain scrutiny of practice and reporting, the programme did not, in itself, provide anything more around quality assurance.
- Concerns were also expressed by interviewees that consultancies were creaming off revenue for quality assurance, and that some of the taster workshops had functioned as a commercial exercise whereby a particular consultancy attempted to persuade those who attended to 'buy in' to their brand.

## **CONCLUSION**

The programme was successful in achieving its aim of providing training to over 50 individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, including those who were new to SCR reviews. Although meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge, in general, the feedback from participants was very positive. Most felt that they had either learned more or that the programme had reinforced their existing knowledge and confidence about making a sound analysis and producing an SCR ready for publication. Especially valued were the Sequeli training materials, which were considered well-structured, relevant and helpful (these are available at Appendix 1). The opportunity for networking and sharing of experience that was integral to all aspects of the programme was also welcomed. A need for more formalised on-going support, especially peer support networks, was expressed.

The programme took place at a time of transition for SCRs, and participants remained unsure about a number of matters. Among these was the need for more clarity about what constitutes a 'good report' (including clear case examples), the degree of flexibility over methodological approaches, and how to go about getting commissioned. This context of uncertainty, coupled with fears about the consequences of producing a 'bad report' appeared to be contributing to growing reluctance, among both new and established authors, to actually take on the work. These are challenges that may need to be considered and addressed in any future programme. Nevertheless, overall, the training was highly regarded and there are hopes among participants that it will continue.

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

### THE CONTEXT

Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) take place after a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. The prime purpose of a SCR is for agencies and individuals to learn lessons to improve the way in which they work both individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Amid concerns that the previous approach to undertaking Serious Case Reviews was not resulting in learning being shared and embedded as effectively as it could be, the Government sought to address a number of issues<sup>2</sup> including:

- Training for those engaged in conducting SCRs to improve the skills of the reviewers;
- The recruitment of new reviewers;
- Assuring the quality of SCR reports, incorporating sound analysis and clear written English;
- Transparency of the review process and publication of SCR reports.

Following a Government consultation on these issues, the Department for Education (DfE) funded a national training programme during 2013 and early 2014, designed and delivered by a consortium led by the NSPCC, and including Action for Children and Sequeli (a not for profit training consortium). The key aims of the programme were to offer training and support to improve the quality of Serious Case Review reports by helping reviewers to produce reports which were well written and could be understood easily by professionals and public alike, provided a sound analysis in order to avoid the risk of recurrences, and were suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted. It was anticipated that training would be provided to at least 50 individuals likely to be involved with SCRs in the near future, and that a number of new authors, from a wide range of backgrounds, would be attracted to the role.

Face to face training consisted of a two day core training module, delivered on four occasions from May 2013 to February 2014 and reaching 77 individuals in total. Five half-day taster workshops, each covering a different methodological approach to conducting a SCR, were delivered between June-November 2013, with each workshop being delivered twice. In addition there was a one-day seminar for Commissioners, specifically designed for LSCB Chairs, Board members and Business Managers, held in March 2014, and repeated once.

The final aspect to the training was the establishment of four Action Learning Sets (ALS) in different parts of the country. These sets were designed to follow-on from the two-day programme, and/or the taster workshops, and were intended to provide an opportunity for those conducting or commissioning SCRs to come together and share issues, develop ideas and explore solutions with other set members. The NSPCC provided an end of project report on behalf of the whole team<sup>3</sup> which outlined how the project was implemented, and detailed the attendances at the various events (see Appendix 2).

---

<sup>2</sup> The Government response to the consultation on statutory guidance to safeguard children (March 2013), HM Government

<sup>3</sup> End of project report: improving the quality of children's Serious Case Review (March 2014), NSPCC

## **EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODS**

An independent evaluation of the training programme was undertaken by a team led by Professor Marian Brandon at UEA. Professor Brandon was the lead author of four consecutive biennial reviews, commissioned by the DfE, of all English Serious Case Reviews conducted between 2003 and 2011.

The independent evaluation aimed to report on the overall success of the training and support programme. The study aimed to build a profile of those who participated and to seek their views about the delivery of various aspects of the programme. A further aim was to assess the extent to which the training had helped enable participants to produce SCR reports that meet the central criteria for the programme.

The remit of the evaluation was to gather the views of the ‘consumers’ rather than those who were involved in designing and delivering the programme. Although in some respects this limits the scope of the study, it does reinforce the status of the evaluation as wholly independent of the programme providers.

The evaluation methodology incorporated:

### **1. Questionnaires**

- Analysis of 71 *participant profile questionnaires* completed by those who attended the two day core training (basic information about demographic characteristics, professional characteristics, review experience, background discipline).
- Analysis of 75 *course feedback questionnaires* completed by participants in the two day core training, eliciting views about the two-day training.
- Analysis of 121 evaluation sheets completed by those who attended the ‘taster workshops’ on the various methodological approaches.
- Analysis of 46 *course feedback questionnaires* from the two seminars for LSCB chairs and members.
- Analysis of 14 *feedback questionnaires* completed by participants in the Action Learning Sets (data provided and analysed by Action for Children)
- Questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 18.

### **2. Focus group**

- A focus group was conducted with six participants at the end of the second day of the first of the 2-day training sessions. The focus group sought participants’ views of the challenges they face in report writing and their immediate views on the utility of the two day training programme.

### **3. Interviews**

- Interviews were sought with a sub-sample of participants who had participated in the core two-day training. The interview schedule sought to further explore views about the challenges involved in writing a quality report ready for publication and the extent to which the training and other support offered by the programme has helped. The structure of the schedule followed a similar format to that used for the focus group.
- *Interview recruitment:* All participants who attended the two day training courses were contacted by email to invite them to participate further in a telephone interview, with two further reminder emails sent to those who did not initially respond. Respondents were also given the option of responding in writing to a schedule sent by email, if this was more convenient for them. In total, 18 participated in this aspect of the study, with seven interviews undertaken and 11 written responses received. (Note that, for the sake of simplicity, all participants in this element of the evaluation are referred to as 'interviewees' in the report regardless of the form of their response).
- Interviewees came from a range of professional backgrounds -nine had a social work background, two were from health, three from the police and four were legally qualified. A range of previous SCR experience was also represented within the interview sample, which comprised participants who had substantial past experience as well as those who were new to the area.
- The interview and focus group material was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## PART 2: PARTICIPANT PROFILE AND VIEWS ON PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

### THE CORE TWO-DAY TRAINING EVENT

#### THE CONTENT

The programme for the two day training was agreed with the DfE, as were the supporting materials (included at Appendix 1). A representative from the DfE attended and spoke at each course. In the words of the trainers 'It was a key feature that adherence to the principles contained in Working Together 2013 would result in a systems review which would be sufficient to satisfy the DfE'.

#### THE EVALUATION

Two separate evaluation sheets were completed by participants attending each course:

1. **Participant profile questionnaire:** 71 of 77 (92% response rate) attendees at the two-day training events completed a questionnaire to obtain basic information about demographic characteristics, professional background.
2. **Course feedback questionnaire:** 75 course feedback questionnaires, seeking views about the two-day training (97% response rate).

The numbers of completed evaluation forms received for each location are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: TWO DAY TRAINING: Questionnaire response by regional course**

|              | Participant profile questionnaire | Training course evaluation form |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Leeds        | 18                                | 17                              |
| London       | 17                                | 21                              |
| Leicester    | 18                                | 19                              |
| Watford      | 18                                | 18                              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>71</b>                         | <b>75</b>                       |

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

#### Demographic characteristics

The basic demographic characteristics of those attending are displayed in Table 2, below. In total, 43 (61%) participants were female and 28 (39%) male. Nearly all (97%) were over 40 years old, with the majority of these (55%) being in the 51-60 age category. In terms of ethnicity, most described themselves as White British, with only small numbers of other ethnicities represented.

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of participants**

|                         | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |           |         |
| Female                  | 43        | 61%     |
| Male                    | 28        | 39%     |
| <b>Age Group (n=69)</b> |           |         |
| 30-40                   | 2         | 3%      |
| 41-50                   | 15        | 22%     |
| 51-60                   | 38        | 55%     |
| 61-70                   | 13        | 19%     |
| 70+                     | 1         | 1%      |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>        |           |         |
| White                   | 63        | 89%     |
| Mixed                   | 1         | 1%      |
| Asian/Asian British     | 4         | 6%      |
| Black/Black British     | 1         | 1%      |
| Other                   | 2         | 3%      |

## Background and professional experience

### Professional background

Table 3 shows that about half (52%) of the participants were from a social work background, while others had a professional background in law (14%), health (9%) or the police (15%). A small number of those who attended the programme had a background in a combination of these areas (for instance, nursing and social work). Nearly all (91%) were educated to at least degree level, with over half (51%) having a Master's degree or above, and had substantial experience in their field (91% having been working over ten years in their particular profession).

**Table 3: Professional background and experience**

| Professional experience                         | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| <b>Professional background (n=65)</b>           |           |         |
| Social Work                                     | 34        | 52%     |
| Law   | 9         | 14%     |
| Health  | 6         | 9%      |
| Police  | 10        | 15%     |
| Management                                      | 1         | 1%      |
| Combined (of categories above)                  | 5         | 8%      |
| <b>Length of time in profession (n=69)</b>      |           |         |
| 1-3 years                                       | 2         | 3%      |
| 4-9 years                                       | 4         | 6%      |
| 10 + years                                      | 63        | 91%     |
| <b>Highest educational qualification (n=70)</b> |           |         |
| Pre-degree                                      | 6         | 9%      |
| Degree  | 14        | 20%     |
| Post graduate certificate/diploma               | 14        | 20%     |
| Masters or above                                | 36        | 51%     |

### Review experience

There was clearly a broad range of past reviewing experience among participants. Table 4 shows that 27 attendees had previously authored a Serious Case Review overview report and only eleven had no previous experience of authoring any type of review. A total of 37 participants had previously authored Individual Management Reviews (IMRs) for children’s serious case reviews (IMRs were a requirement in Working Together 2010 but this is no longer the case following Working Together 2013) and 46 had authored another type of review report, such as a Domestic Homicide Review report. Many participants had experience of authoring more than one type of review report, and hence the numbers in Table 4 sum to more than the 70 profile forms completed. In total, 43 participants (61%) had experience of the child SCR process, either as IMR author, overview report writer, or as both. 39% were new to child reviews, although many of them had experience of the adult review process.

**Table 4: Previous experience as review author (n=70)**

| Previous Experience    | Frequency |
|------------------------|-----------|
| No previous experience | 11        |
| SCR IMRs               | 37        |
| SCR Overview report    | 27        |
| Other review type      | 46        |

We have already indicated that most who attended the training were experienced reviewers. The scale of the reviewing experience is shown in Table 5 where it is evident that most of the group had authored several reviews. Approximately a third had authored six or more IMRs and over half (56%) had authored six or more SCR Overview Reports. Individual respondents may, of course, have written more than one type of report or review.

**Table 5: Number and type of reports authored**

| Number of reports | SCR IMRs  | SCR Overview Report | Other type of review |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1 reports         | 6 (17%)   | 3 (11%)             | 7 (18%)              |
| 2-5 reports       | 17 (47%)  | 9 (33%)             | 13(33%)              |
| 6 + reports       | 13 (36%)  | 15 (56%)            | 19 (49%)             |
| Total             | 36 (100%) | 27 (100%)           | 39 (100%)            |

Most reviewing experience was recent or very recent, with 50 of the 61 (82%) who had written any type of report having completed their most recent report in 2012, 2013 or 2014 (see Table 6). Dates were given by 19 of those who had written IMRs, 16 of those who had authored a SCR Overview Report, and 26 who had completed a similar type of review.

**Table 6: Date most recent report completed**

| Year             | SCR IMRs | SCR Overview Report | Other type of review | All types of report / review |
|------------------|----------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 2004             | 1        | 0                   | 0                    | 1                            |
| 2005             | 1        | 0                   | 0                    | 1                            |
| 2006-2008        | 0        | 0                   | 0                    | 0                            |
| 2009             | 1        | 1                   | 1                    | 3                            |
| 2010             | 3        | 0                   | 0                    | 3                            |
| 2011             | 0        | 1                   | 2                    | 3                            |
| 2012             | 7        | 4                   | 6                    | 17                           |
| 2013             | 5        | 9                   | 13                   | 27                           |
| 2014             | 1        | 1                   | 4                    | 6                            |
| <b>All dates</b> | 19       | 16                  | 26                   | 61                           |

## VIEWS ON THE CORE TWO-DAY TRAINING

In total, 75 evaluation sheets were submitted by participants across the four course locations. Overall, the response was very positive, with 63 of the 73 respondents who had answered this question (86%) indicating they had found the course a useful foundation for the rest of the 'Improving the Quality of Serious Case Reviews' programme. The remaining 10 (14%) indicated that they will possibly find the course a useful foundation.

**Table 7: Overall helpfulness of course**

|   | Yes | Possibly | No |
|---|-----|----------|----|
| <i>"Do you think the course has been a useful foundation for the rest of the 'Improving the Quality of Serious Case Reviews' programme?" (n=73)</i> | 63  | 10       |    |
| <i>"Were the training materials helpful for the course?" (n=73)</i>   | 70  | 2        | 1  |

The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate (using a Likert scale) their level of agreement with a number of statements about specific elements of the course. The results, which are contained in Table 8 below, reveal a broadly positive response. The aspect most appreciated was 'Hearing the voices of families'. Also helpful were aspects of the course relating to 'Adopting a proportionate approach to the review', 'Applying principles to the review' and 'Using an evidenced based approach'. There was slightly less agreement about the usefulness of the elements of the course regarding 'Applying a systems approach' and 'Ensuring there is an integrated multi-agency review'.

**Table 8: Helpfulness of specific aspects of the course**

| Level of agreement with statement “ <i>the following themes were covered adequately on the training course</i> ” | Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| <i>Applying principles to the review</i>   | 25             | 42    | 4        |          |                   |
| <i>Using an evidence based approach</i>  | 21             | 43    | 8        |          |                   |
| <i>Hearing the voices of families</i>  | 38             | 32    | 2        |          |                   |
| <i>Ensuring there is an integrated multi-agency review</i>   | 17             | 34    | 16       | 4        |                   |
| <i>Applying a systems approach</i>   | 13             | 43    | 11       | 3        | 1                 |
| <i>Adopting a proportionate approach to the review</i>   | 26             | 37    | 7        | 1        |                   |

The questionnaire also included free-text sections, to elicit unprompted views on the helpfulness or otherwise of the various aspects of the course. These comments were then grouped by the research team into (researcher-defined) categories. The number of mentions in each category is presented below, with the most frequent themes first. Participants could of course mention more than one positive or negative aspect.

#### HELPFUL

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Networking, debate and discussion with others                         | 38 (51%) |
| Good course materials   | 34 (45%) |
| Trainers – knowledge, delivery etc.                                   | 16 (21%) |
| Discussion of the report structure                                    | 13 (17%) |
| Day 2 more helpful than Day 1   | 12 (16%) |
| Learning about, clarification of, different methodological approaches | 6 (8%)   |
| Learned new things  | 6 (8%)   |
| Interviewing practice   | 2 (3%)   |

#### LESS HELPFUL

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Course too rushed  | 35 (47%) |
| Skipping back and forth through materials                | 11 (15%) |
| Better case materials or specific report examples needed | 10 (13%) |
| Rather basic and didn’t learn too much that was new      | 7 (9%)   |
| Negative comments about the trainers                     | 7 (9%)   |
| Some information deemed to be out of date or inaccurate  | 5 (7%)   |
| Greater differentiation between the approaches needed    | 3 (4%)   |

## Were any topics missed out?

The subsequent question on the evaluation form related to whether there were any topics missed out, and in some cases the answers duplicated the 'least helpful' aspects. Often the comments made were very specific, but a small number of themes did emerge, most notably that more time for discussion and debate would have been appreciated:

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Greater time required for discussion and debate                                 | 15 (20%) |
| The relationships between the LSCB, panel, Chair, author and other stakeholders | 7 (9%)   |
| Need for pairing, mentoring and/or association of authors                       | 5 (7%)   |
| Greater child focus, and discussion on children's involvement                   | 4 (5%)   |
| Greater discussion of recommendations   | 3 (4%)   |
| More discussion of the national and local policy context                        | 3 (4%)   |

The illustrative quotes used in this section are derived primarily from the questionnaires, supplemented occasionally by relevant material from the interviews.

## KEY THEMES

### Course materials

The feedback about the course materials was overwhelmingly positive, with a near consensus that these were well structured, relevant and helpful. In total, 70 (96%) of questionnaire respondents said the course materials were helpful. Typical comments included:

- *Lots of ideas to try out*
- *Very helpful to have them all together and bound*
- *Well laid out and planned*
- *Very accessible*
- *Interactive training materials very helpful*
- *Very impressed with course material – this is excellent*

In particular, the course materials were viewed as a valuable resource to draw upon for future reference following the course:

- *I can refer to it whenever relevant*
- *Manuals to review in depth at leisure*
- *I will definitely refer back to them*
- *Lots of material to read after the event*
- *Training tools and materials look very useful i.e. pro-formas / templates etc.*

An interview participant elaborated further on how he would use these materials:

*I think one of the things, on reflection, was actually the way the course was structured lent itself almost into developing a check list and I kind of thought well actually that is what I will do if someone asks me to do a Review or if I am commissioning one, I will use those coloured different sections of the course just to quickly kind of create myself a check list.*

However, the use of the materials within the training process itself was sometimes criticised – this was a recurring theme in the questionnaire responses. Respondents felt that there was too much skipping through the documents and moving from one document to another without giving time to absorb or read the material:

*The training materials will be very helpful for my post course SCR practice, but the way the materials are organised did not assist the training process as it was constantly necessary to refer to different sections at speed in order to keep up (particularly on day 1 morning).*

*The structure of the course didn't mirror the structure of the training materials, making it hard to skip across the documents.*

*Skipping back and forth through course materials, constant requests to look at particular pages.*

*Some sessions on day 1 seemed to be little but a series of references to pages in the course materials.*

### **Rushed pace, too much content**

By far the most repeated criticism was that the course delivery was too rushed and too ambitious in what it hoped to cover, with sometimes insufficient time for reflection and peer interaction. Exercises, such as the interview exercise, weren't always completed.

*Timings did not allow for experienced professionals to contribute and debate.*

*Covering all the things in the programme was not achieved, and need for discussion perhaps underestimated.*

*The downside of so much content was that at times it felt like information overload.*

*Sometimes we moved on too quickly and more discussion would have been useful.*

This issue was mentioned as especially affecting the first day of the course, which was felt would have benefitted from a slower pace and more opportunity for debate and discussion. Suggested improvements included:

- Some suggestion that it would be better to lengthen the course rather than to rush through the materials. Some felt the course would have been better delivered over three days.
- Less time for lunch break.

- Alter time scales on the first day – could have shortened pm to allow more debate in the first part of the course.
- Fewer overheads, slower pace.

### **Opportunity for networking and debate**

The opportunity for discussion, and a chance to network and to share experience and perspectives was widely felt to have been the single-most helpful aspect of the course. As one participant put it, what was most valuable was *“the information that was shared”*. Other favourable comments included:

*Interaction between participants and the opportunity to speak with SCR authors.*

*Opportunity to hear from experienced SCR authors and conversation between peers*

*Group discussion very helpful.*

*Speaking to other experts in the field and sharing views.*

*The opportunity to discuss legal and ethical issues with peers.*

*I liked the openness, the discussions, the debate - that was all very good .*

For this reason, the interactive parts of the course were felt to have worked especially well, and some participants indicated they would have welcomed even more time for discussion. That the course allowed for interruption was also commented on as positive for this reason, with for instance one participant commenting that they appreciated the *“flexible approach allowing for discussion and debate”*. This collaborative, informal style was felt to have been conducive to allowing the, often substantial, experience of those in the room to contribute to the learning. One participant suggested that being moved around between discussion groups during the two days would have encouraged even greater sharing of experience and views:

*Helpful if the interactive groups were not the same groups for each topic. Different ideas and perspectives.*

### **Professional background**

Nearly half of those attending the course had a social work background, with the remaining participants having a professional background in law (14%), health (9%) or the police (15%) (see Table 3 above). Questionnaire responses indicated that this mix of professions was felt to have been a positive aspect of the training course:

*Sharing experience with colleagues from a range of backgrounds.*

*With experience in adult safeguarding I found the course helped put some context to children’s agenda.*

The opportunity for transferable learning was similarly commented on by two interviewees:

*There was my colleague in my break out group that had come from, I got the impression it was from the sector of Domestic Abuse. And that was useful because you know once or twice we were in conversations and you know she kind of quite rightly kind of challenged you know some of the assumptions in our thinking and just brought a different perspective and so that was really helpful.*

*[It was] helpful just to kind of be taken out of one's own kind of woolly comfort zone... the group was interesting because it brought different perspectives.*

However, the absence of any formal introduction session at the start of the course was noted to have possibly hindered this process. Our initial interviews revealed confusion about who else was actually attending, and what their backgrounds were. Another respondent commented, *"There weren't introductions – would have been helpful to know who else was in the room"*. It is our understanding that after the first two day course this omission was recognised and introductions were made.

### **Range of review experience**

There was a wide range of previous review experience of course participants (see Tables 4,5,6). A focus group participant described their perception of two distinct groups attending – those who had substantial experience in this area, and those considering becoming a children's SCR reviewer wishing to find out more (*'is this for me?'*). This latter group were positive about the learning they had gained: *"Learned lots of new things I did not know before. Made me think"*. However, some of those with more experience expressed frustration that the content was too basic and that they had learned little in the way of new information:

*Some very basic stuff that was for those without experience?*

*Too much information giving – but recognise that some were at the start.*

*Some of the context was very basic, e.g. interviewing skills, getting started, and fears and fantasies never developed to consider the agenda of the group at all.*

Despite this, many also felt that attending had still been very worthwhile as a means to refresh knowledge and devote some 'thinking time' to the issues:

*Not sure I learned that much that was new, but it was good to be reminded.*

*Reaffirming my own skills – I know what I am doing.*

*It was quite good to have that opportunity for some focussed thinking around some of the issues that on the one hand I am familiar with and on the other hand you know you always need to kind of revisit.*

There are implications and questions here around how to pitch the course. One alternative would be to separate or differentiate elements of the courses: *"Possibly tailor courses to levels of experience to avoid 'teaching to suck eggs'."* However, this may be at the expense of what can be gained from bringing participants with a range of experience together.

### **Credibility of information**

A small number of respondents (11) raised concerns about the credibility of information, questioning the relevance of the experience of some of the speakers, or finding some course content to be out of touch with the world of SCRs.

*Poorest when ideas appeared out of touch with reality.*

*A number of new developments and guidance were not provided by trainers.*

*Some of the inputs did not recognise that the topic was most likely to be managed by the LSCB rather than the independent writer.*

There was specific mention of the recommendations session in this regard, and that this was disconnected from reality:

*Recommendations session could have been more grounded in the real world with better understanding of accountability and statutory responsibilities.*

*Session on recommendations was not informed enough.*

This was some questioning of the relevance of the experience of some of the speakers. Although the knowledge and expertise of the trainers was generally appreciated – with 16 positive comments, compared to seven negative comments regarding this - there was also the suggestion that the course would have been improved by involving a greater variety of speakers, and maybe from less emphasis on the specialist areas of the presenters themselves.

## EVALUATION OF THE 'TASTER WORKSHOPS'

### TASTER WORKSHOPS

The *Improving the quality of Serious Case Reviews programme* offered taster workshops on a range of systemic methodologies. The content of the workshops and the materials in support of them did not go through the equivalent process of approval by the DfE given to the two-day training event, and most were carried out by organisations which were not part of the programme partnership. The workshops were intended to provide an opportunity for reviewers, as well as commissioners, to sample a particular methodology, understand how it fits with statutory guidance on learning and improvement, and see how it might be applied to Serious Case Reviews. Summaries of each methodology are listed below quoting from the words of those who wrote the materials and/or delivered the workshop.

#### **Appreciative inquiry (AI)**

This summary has been adapted from the workshop brief prepared by Lesley Moore.

'Rooted in action research and organisational development, AI is a strengths-based, collaborative approach for creating learning change. AI seeks to discover and connect to those things that give life to people, organisations and human systems at a time when they are most engaged, effective and healthy.

SCRs conducted with an appreciative eye create a safe, respectful and comfortable environment in which people look together at the interventions that have successfully safeguarded a child; and share honestly about the things they got wrong and how that felt and feels. They look at 'where, how and why events took place and use their collective hindsight wisdom to design practice improvements'.

AI is designed with the aim of providing a rigorous, inclusive and collaborative inquiry process, involving the whole system in deep learning and simultaneous change design; within a framework that is customised to suit each unique and individual child, family and local circumstance. Key aspects include:

- Everyone, including children, young people and their families, inquires together with a motivated eye.
- All contributions are heard and valued; people are respected.
- Mistakes, both individual and systemic, are accepted, understood and used as opportunities for learning and change.
- Change begins from the outset of the inquiry, healing is enabled and shared learning renews and improves practice immediately.'

### **Root cause analysis (RCA)**

This summary has been adapted from the workshop brief prepared by Bill Loach.

'RCA was developed following a series of catastrophic problems in the 1960s NASA space programme. It has been applied in a variety of industrial contexts since, ranging from pharmaceutical manufacturing to nursing and social care. RCA sets out to find the systemic causes of operational problems. It uses persistent questioning approaches to uncovering ever-deeper explanations for the root causes of problems. While there are a wide range of RCA techniques, the most popular, and effective, are the '5 whys' and 'Fishbone diagrams'. Both of these techniques allow the reviewer to map the layers around core systems failures or root causes. There is no implication that a single 'root cause' will be enough, often many causes are identified all requiring remedial action. The big challenge for reviewers and organisations, applying RCA, is to stay focused on those systemic processes, which are controllable, manageable or adjustable. So, for example 'not enough staff', 'staff sickness' or 'made a mistake' may all be true, but they are out of control and therefore not change orientated systemic explanations within RCA.

RCA sheds light on several measures to address problems within a system. It is often considered to be an iterative process and therefore viewed as a tool of continuous improvement. RCA focuses the reviewer's attention on the organisational or systems explanations of the actions of operational professionals delivering direct services to children.

RCA can be used as a 'whole review' approach or as a 'set of techniques' within other SCR methodologies. It provides simple, well-structured tools for ever more interrogative uses of the 'why?' question. It takes the 'what?' (serious injury or death) and subjects it to systematic examination. So, using the '5 whys' technique reviewers can get from 'social worker unfamiliar with procedure' to 'social worker trained but not supervised' to 'supervisor distracted by other priorities' and finally to 'organisational priorities not clearly stated at strategic level'. In this way the actions of frontline professionals are explained in the context of overarching systemic problems.'

### **SCIE Learning Together**

This summary has been adapted from the workshop brief prepared by Sheila Fish.

'SCIE's Learning Together model uses a systems approach for improving child safety and welfare. A systems approach is the established methodology for improving safety in fields marked by 'low probability, high impact' incidents and accidents e.g. aviation, nuclear power as well as health. SCIE has adapted the systems approach specifically for the field of multi-agency safeguarding and child protection. The approach offers:

- a core set of principles and analytic tools to unify all learning and improvement activities including audits, case reviews and serious case reviews (SCRs)
- a range of possible applications including 'reflective audits'; 'focused' and 'speed' versions
- opportunities to build internal capacity by having staff trained and accredited in the approach
- access to a pool of independent reviewers who are trained and accredited in the model

- availability of methodological supervision to assure rigour and reliability of analyses and foster expertise over time
- access to an archive of systemic findings produced through Learning Together audits, case review and SCRs
- membership to a methodological network providing forums for critical reflection and on-going development of the model and its application.'

### **Child Practice Reviews**

This summary has been adapted from the workshop brief prepared by Barbara J Firth.

'Child Practice Reviews replace the Serious Case Review system in Wales and came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. They are underpinned by a clear set of principles and bring together agencies, staff and families in a collective endeavour to reflect and learn from what has happened in order to improve practice for the future. The focus is on accountability and not culpability. It is about learning and not about blame.

If a situation meets the criteria for a review then a Review Panel is established to both guide and steer the process but also to be integral to the learning. The tasks of the Review Panel are to:

- Agree the time frame of the review.
- Request agency timelines of significant events/contacts.
- Commission a Reviewer or Reviewers.
- Merge the timelines.
- Identify and prepare participants for the learning event.
- Ensure the family are engaged in the process

At the heart of the review is the learning event, facilitated by the reviewer(s), which brings together the practitioners who were involved in the situation to reflect on what happened and to identify learning for future practice.

After the event a short, anonymised report is prepared, together with an outline action plan and these are presented to the LSCB for discussion and approval. There is also feedback to the family.

Before implementation Child Practice Reviews were piloted throughout Wales and the results of those pilots have contributed to the refinement of the model and to the final guidance.'

### **Significant Incident Learning Process (SILP)**

This summary has been adapted from the workshop brief prepared by Paul Tudor and Donna Ohdehar.

‘The drivers behind the formulation of the SILP are:

- A reaction against the hitherto bureaucracy, expense and ‘cosmetics’ of Serious Case Reviews which distract energies from the family, the staff and the learning
- A reaction in favour of the engagement of those frontline staff and first line managers involved in the case in owning their action learning

Practitioners are often left isolated both during and after the SCR process. The principles of SILP are that alongside members of LSCB Serious Case Review Panels and agency Safeguarding Leads, frontline practitioners and first line managers will:

- have access to all the agency reports prepared for the review, setting the SILP process apart from the conventional Serious Case Review
- fully participate in analysis and debates of all the material, including early drafts of the Overview Report. Learning is no longer confined to the panel.

Analysis, reflection and learning on a multi-agency basis are greatly enhanced by the practitioners involved in the case at the time being able and willing to share:

- their view of what was going on in and around the case
- their understanding of their role and the part they were playing
- their thinking and their context at the time
- their perspective on what aspects of the whole system influenced them
- the theories and practices they were using.’

## EVALUATION

Evaluation sheets were completed at each of the 10 ‘taster workshops’ and a total of 121 were returned, from an overall total of 136 attendees (response rate of 89%). The numbers for the five workshops (each course was run twice) was as follows:

|  | Evaluation sheets | Number attending | Response rate |
|--|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| • Appreciative Inquiry (AI)                    | 29                | 34               | 85%           |
| • SCIE model                                   | 22                | 24               | 92%           |
| • Root Cause Analysis (RCA)                    | 28                | 33               | 85%           |
| • Significant Incident Learning Process (SILP) | 21                | 25               | 84%           |
| • Child Practice Review (CPR)                  | 21                | 21               | 100%          |

Any one individual was able to attend a number of the five workshops, and thus the analysis of those who attended, in terms of professional background or role with regard to Serious Case Reviews, relates to all those attending. In broad professional terms, 67 participants had a social work background, 21 were from health, 15 from the police, 12 were legally qualified, and seven had a different managerial background. One participant, who was qualified both in law and social work and who attended two courses, is counted in both professions.

**Table 9: Participants by professional background**

| Profession                                   | App. Inquiry | SCIE Learning Together | Root Cause Analysis | SILP      | Child Practice Review    | All courses |
|--|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Social work / social care                    | 17           | 10                     | 15                  | 16        | 9                        | 67          |
| Health                                       | 6            | 4                      | 4                   | 3         | 4                        | 21          |
| Police                                       | 4            | 3                      | 5                   | 0         | 3                        | 15          |
| Law  | 3            | 3                      | 3                   | 1         | 2                        | 12          |
| Managerial, training, Voluntary organisation |              | 3                      | 1                   | 1         | 2                        | 7           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>29*</b>   | <b>22*</b>             | <b>28</b>           | <b>21</b> | <b>21</b><br>(1 unknown) | <b>121</b>  |

\*One participant in the first two workshops was both a qualified social worker and a solicitor and appears in both cells in the relevant columns.

Social work was the most frequent professional background of participants, for every course, and particularly for the workshop on the SILP methodology.

Participants came to these workshops with varying experience in relation to Serious Case Reviews, from those who had experience as an author of IMRs and SCR overview reports as well as on occasions chairing a review and having commissioned a review. There were also those without experience but who were potential authors, or likely to chair or commission a review. Attendance at the five workshops, in terms of participants' SCR roles, is analysed in Table 10.

**Table 10: Participants by role in relation to Serious Case Reviews**

| Profession           | App. Inquiry                               | SCIE Learning Together     | Root Cause Analysis            | SILP            | Child Practice Review   |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Independent reviewer | 15   | 10                         | 20                             | 9               | 11                      |
| IMR author           | 9  | 8                          | 9                              | 6               | 4                       |
| Commissioner         | 8  | 4                          | 7                              | 4               | 5                       |
| Chair of SCR         | 12   | 5                          | 11                             | 3               | 6                       |
| Other roles          | 4<br>(DHR, DHR Chair, author adult review) | 3<br>(DHR, complaints, QA) | 4<br>(DHR, MAPPA, IMR auditor) | 3<br>(all DHRs) | 3<br>(DHRs, complaints) |

NB Main 'other role' is in domestic homicide reviews (DHRs). Participants often held more than one role.

## **MOST USEFUL ASPECTS OF THE WORKSHOPS**

'Free-text' comments boxes on questionnaires provided additional, unsolicited, views about the workshops and these were grouped into (researcher-defined) categories. The number of mentions in listed next to each category.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Learning about, clarification of, the model /methodological approach  | 87 |
| Understanding how to apply to the SCR; practical points and tools   | 32 |
| Trainers – knowledge, delivery etc.   | 21 |
| Plenty to think about, motivating, radically changed thinking, dispelled myths<br>(Appreciative Inquiry and RCA accounted for 15 of these 20) | 20 |
| Networking, debate and discussion with others   | 18 |
| Positive focus appreciated (13 of the 14 mentions relate to AI taster)  | 14 |
| Everything was useful (8 of these 12 mentions related to Root Cause Analysis)   | 12 |
| Learned new things, or appreciated update on method/approach  | 9  |
| Good course materials   | 5  |
| Who to interview and how to gather information  | 2  |

It was gratifying that 'everything was useful' for 12 of the participants and of note that eight of these twelve people had attended the Root Cause Analysis workshop.

In the following sections the main positive themes are discussed, and illustrated with quotes from those attending. It should be noted, however, that numbers are relatively small, with between 20 and 30 participants at each of the 'tasters', so that any differences mentioned between the workshops, or between the different groups of professionals, are illustrative rather than statistically significant.

### **Learning about, clarification of, the model /methodological approach**

The prominence of these comments indicates that the workshops succeeded in their overall aim of clarifying and extending learning about a particular model or approach. This learning was mentioned for all five courses:

*Understanding the model and its strengths when compared to the traditional approach. (CPR)*

*Provided a useful and interesting overview. (SILP)*

*Overall perspective of the model and its uses/implementation, clarity of how straightforward it can be as a learning tool. (RCA)*

A related, but slightly different, point was made by some participants who appreciated the opportunity to learn about a new methodology, or to update their current knowledge of it. This most often related to the SCIE and the Appreciative Inquiry taster sessions:

*I came new to the subject and the workshop provided a very good and thought provoking overview. (SCIE)*

*I came with no knowledge of AI and this gave me plenty to think about. (AI)*

### **Understanding how to apply the relevant model to the SCR; practical points and tools**

The second most frequent theme identified was around the practical application of the models, which might include comments on tools pertinent to one of the models. Positive feedback on the practical application of the approaches was most prominent in two in particular, namely, Appreciative Inquiry (48% of participants) and Child Practice Review (43%).

*The afternoon where we actually focussed more on the practical application of AI.*

*To hear from a practitioner who has conducted such reviews about the practical aspects of the process. (CPR)*

*Exploration of the process of the model and experience of actually undertaking SCRs with this model – rather than just theory. (CPR)*

*Hearing about applications to practice. (SCIE)*

### **Plenty to think about, on occasions changing the participants' way of thinking**

Of the 20 comments which could be grouped in this theme, 15 related to the Appreciative Inquiry or Root Cause Analysis workshops, and were made by all categories of professionals.

*Reframed my thinking. (AI)*

*Dispelling some myths. (RCA)*

*I really believe that my thinking was radically changed. (RCA)*

*Blew away some bias I may have had re how the model would work in practice. (SCIE)*

Feedback was given by 13 (just under half) of those attending the Appreciative Inquiry workshop in relation to the positive focus of the methodology, which was liked, and which was seen as quite distinctive of this approach to SCRs.

*Reviewing through a prism of positive successful practice. (AI)*

*Thinking of 'reframing' in a positive way to reduce 'blame' and generate more open information. Welcome different and positive approach. (AI)*

## Trainers

Participants were not asked to evaluate those giving the training, but a number did make positive comments, particularly in relation to the Child Practice Review workshop where eight of the 21 attending (38%) mentioned the trainers and the Root Cause Analysis workshop, where eight of the 28 attending (29%) made positive comments. The police participants were most likely to mention the quality of the trainers.

*Presenters had good knowledge of origins of CPR process and practical experience of using the process to conduct reviews. (CPR)*

*Trainers were extremely interacting and engaging – enjoyable to listen to. (RCA)*

*Lively trainer – lots of wisdom. (RCA)*

## Networking and discussion

As is so often the case with workshops and conferences, it is the opportunity for group discussion and both formal and informal networking which is a key element for those attending. Positive comments about networking and discussion were made by 18 participants, across all workshops although particularly from those attending the AI, the SCIE or the SILP tasters.

*Meeting other professionals. (SCIE)*

*Networking with other participants. (SILP)*

## COULD ANYTHING BE IMPROVED OR CHANGED?

Again the free-text answers were group by the researchers into themes, this time into four principal themes. The frequency with which these themes emerged is as follows:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Too rushed – needed longer (although maybe appreciating was only a taster) | 50 |
| A different structure or emphasis needed                                   | 17 |
| Better case materials, tools or practical applications needed              | 16 |
| Need for clearer differentiation between the methodologies                 | 6  |
| Other comments   | 12 |

### **Too rushed – needed longer**

As regards suggested improvements, the overriding comment made was that the tasters were ‘too rushed’, although this may show a misunderstanding of the nature of a ‘taster’ which never purported to be exhaustive. Nevertheless this is a message which needs to be fed back to the organisers, not least because it was made on 50 (41%) of the 121 evaluation forms, and in relation to all five workshops. Indeed 21 (75%) of the 28 attending the Root Cause Analysis taster felt the half-day was too rushed. The percentage ranged between 21% (AI) to 41% (SCIE) for the other sessions. The words ‘longer’ and ‘more time’ occurred frequently, and the following fuller quotes are representative examples:

*Could have done with a full day (SCIE) More time, could have been a whole day. (SILP)*

*Session length, tried to cover too much in short period – needs to be longer. (RCA)*

*Could easily have been longer with more discussion and time for reflection. (CPR)*

One participant expanded by saying:

*Third workshop attended – all too short. As most people will set aside a day, could they be longer if further ones arranged in future? (CPR)*

Some of those attending did acknowledge that the session was only a taster, but timing was still an issue for them:

*A more comprehensive insight – but acknowledging this is a 3 hour workshop. (SCIE)*

*Aware it was a taster but really too much information for 3 hours; needs longer. (RCA)*

One participant thought the difficult balance had been struck appropriately:

*Big ask to cover in the time, but no complaints. (SCIE)*

### **A different structure or emphasis needed**

Comments on the structure were often related to the perception that the workshop was rushed, and needed longer (as discussed above), and that therefore some parts could be potentially dropped, and other elements given more time and/or greater emphasis. In particular, participants on all five courses wanted more time for discussion. Comments on the structure included:

*Introduction too long. (AI)*

*Much more time [needed] on SCR process rather than on hands on exercise. (AI)*

*Less on the ‘history’ and more on the actual processes; did not get to some of the key points. (SCIE)*

*More time for discussion (this quote occurred for all five workshops).*

*Could have thought of more multi-agency scenarios. (RCA)*

### **Better case materials, tools or practical applications needed**

The next most frequent set of suggestions concerned a wish for better case materials, or tools which would illustrate the practical application of the methodology.

*Templates or examples would be useful. (SILP)*

*Case example to work on. (AI)*

*Tools? Examples of tools used to assist / implement the approach. (AI)*

A few participants mentioned that there were insufficient hand outs, or that they had been asked to return materials at the end of the session, and that they would have appreciated electronic access to materials before and/or after the workshop.

*[need to be] advised in advance of how to access learning material, as it needed to be returned at the end of the session. (CPR)*

*Slides would be helpful if sent electronically. (AI)*

There was also a wish to see actual examples of Serious Case Reviews which had used one of the methodologies

*Would have liked to have seen some SCRs using SILP model. (SILP)*

*Perhaps an anonymised example of an AI SCR or reference to a published (if any) report. (AI)*

*Sight of a final report [using methodology] would have been useful. (SCIE)*

*Would have been useful to see an example of an action plan. (CPR)*

Two participants, both at the Appreciative Inquiry workshop, mentioned a need for furthering the involvement of children and families, and addressing the issue of publication of reports:

*At the moment, model has not been used much for SCR – with more use will begin to tackle burning issue of family involvement and how to write a “public” report. (AI)*

### **Need for greater differentiation between the methodologies**

Although not the most frequent comment (it was made six times) it is interesting that some participants wanted the ‘tasters’ to more clearly define what it was about that particular methodology which differentiated it from the other four. Four of these comments were made on the evaluation forms at the SILP workshop – with three made on the same day - (although this of course may not be coincidental, and may have been an opinion that a group of those attending had

discussed amongst themselves and had then all noted on the form). This comment was also made once at the AI workshop and once at the RCA workshop.

*Clearer differentiations from other methodologies. (RCA)*

*More differentiation from other approaches, SCIE and AI. (SILP)*

*Interested in comparison with other models considered through this programme, to establish overlaps and different levels of effectiveness. (SILP)*

## **Further Training**

109 of the 121 (90%) evaluation forms expressed an interest in further training on the specific methodology. Eight people said they were 'undecided' about wanting more, and only four were 'not interested'. In fact three of the four evaluation sheets indicating no interest in further training were filled in by the same participant, who had attended four separate taster workshops. In addition, this participant was 'undecided' as to whether further training on the fourth topic attended would be of value or interest. The fourth expression of no interest in further training was made by someone who only attended the CPR taster.

## **'Branding' of methodologies**

Interestingly, while this was rarely commented on as part of the initial evaluation feedback forms, concerns about the 'branding' of methodologies were raised by a number of interviewees. There was a pronounced unease about the workshops functioning as a commercial exercise whereby a particular consultancy attempted to persuade those who attended to 'buy in' to their brand (SCIE and SILP being specifically mentioned by some).

*I also felt that some of them were more a selling programme for their model. That didn't go down well at all, it put people off - the 'This is what we're about, come and find out more, come and buy our product'. That's not necessary in what we do in this world of SCRs. We should all share, it's all about learning, not 'This is my product - if you purchase something then you can come and join in this'.*

This reflects broader concerns about the direction the SCR process is taking in this respect:

*The current SCR process has become a money making market with the various 'brands' competing and even worse trying to get a monopoly. We need to stop SCRs being a money making machine, with 'brands' creaming off revenue for quality assurance.*

*The branding of 'methodologies' purchased at great cost to the public purse is a colossal waste of money in my view and has annoyed many agencies.*

## EVALUATION OF THE SEMINAR FOR LSCB CHAIRS AND MEMBERS

### THE CONTENT

The programme for the seminar and the LSCB commissioner materials, were approved by the DfE (see Commissioner Materials at Appendix 1). A representative from the DfE attended and spoke at each seminar. The presenters described the seminar as ‘complementing the reviewers’ two-day course’, supported by materials which ‘included a section entitled ‘features of a good review report’.’

### THE EVALUATION

A single-day seminar for Commissioners was held in March 2014, and repeated for a different group of participants on the following day. In total 55 people attended, of whom 46 (84%) filled in an evaluation form. Some said repeating the seminar in the same week was unhelpful, since if the potential attendee were away that week, s/he would miss both opportunities. There were also some comments about the seminar location:

*Would be useful to have these seminars further north – a lot of us have travelled a long way.*

The design of the seminar specifically for a group of LSCB Chairs, Board members and Business Managers was judged by those attending to be valuable and timely, and allowed them to have a day specifically devoted to issues around commissioning and delivering Serious Case Reviews. Nine participants rated this as the most valuable aspect of the seminar. The day provided them with:

*Time to explore issues about commissioning and delivering SCRs - an opportunity for sharing concerns and being able to debate them.*

*A helpful overview of ‘journey’ of SCR from inception to completion.*

*Reassurance that all LSCBs are in similar position. No-one right way to respond to SCR, and comfort that we are doing all we can within resources.*

*An understanding of function and purpose as I am new to SCR panel role.*

### VIEWS ON THE COURSE ELEMENTS

Participants were asked to rate specific elements of the programme (in an identical manner as those attending the four two-day courses for authors discussed in Part 1 of this evaluation, Table 8). There was a broadly positive response to all six elements, as shown in Table 11 below, with the aspect most appreciated being ‘Adopting a proportionate approach to the review’.

**Table 11: Helpfulness of specific aspects of the course – as rated by commissioners**

| Level of agreement with statement “ <i>the following themes were covered adequately on the training course</i> ” | Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| <i>Applying principles to the review</i>   | 13             | 31    | 2        |          |                   |
| <i>Using an evidence based approach</i>  | 9              | 23    | 10       | 3        |                   |
| <i>Hearing the voices of families</i>  | 7              | 23    | 13       | 2        |                   |
| <i>Ensuring there is an integrated multi-agency review</i>   | 6              | 22    | 15       | 2        |                   |
| <i>Applying a systems approach</i>   | 13             | 28    | 5        |          |                   |
| <i>Adopting a proportionate approach to the review</i>   | 16             | 30    |          |          |                   |

Also helpful were aspects of the course relating to ‘*Applying principles to the review*’ and ‘*Applying a systems approach*’. There was markedly less agreement about the usefulness of the elements of the course regarding ‘*Using an evidence based approach*’, ‘*Hearing the voices of families*’ and ‘*Ensuring there is an integrated multi-agency review*’; 17 participants (38%) were not sure or disagreed that this latter aspect had been adequately covered. Again this is similar to the views of the wider audience attending the two-day courses, where the same aspect was judged to be least well covered.

## LSCB COMMISSIONER MATERIALS

Central to the benefit derived from the day were the seminar materials which all 46 participants found helpful, and there were some very enthusiastic comments, for example ‘fantastic’, ‘excellent’, ‘brilliant’, ‘timely’ and ‘topical and comprehensive’.

*The training materials are excellent; the whole day was thought provoking, constructive and enabling.*

The materials were judged by many to provide an on-going resource which they would refer to and use in their jobs, and also be able to incorporate in materials they were designing locally:

*I think they will provide excellent guidance in the current climate of fear and uncertainty.*

*The Training materials / LSCB commission pack is invaluable. As a board manager this information has provided a perspective that we simply have not had access to, and allows us to have the understanding that the ‘trained’ reviewers have.*

*They will definitely help me commission an SCR.*

*The complexities to be considered in commissioning the right reviewer for the specific SCR.*

*Will enable a local framework to be developed to speed decision making.*

*They will provide strong basis for our new SCR / Board Toolkit.*

The only negative comments made in relation to the training materials were that it would have been better if they were available in advance:

*Would have been useful to have seen training materials before the day.*

*Given the emphasis on the training materials, I would have appreciated sight of them beforehand.*

It was also hoped that extra hard copies would be available after the course, or electronic versions sent, so that they could be shared with colleagues.

*Would like them emailed so that I can share with Chair of SCR subgroup.*

## **OPPORTUNITY FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND INFORMAL NETWORKING**

Apart from the direct question on the quality and use of the commissioner materials, there were two 'free-text' comments boxes for general views as to what had been most (and least) helpful. The aspect of the day which was most appreciated was the value of the formal group discussion with the other participants, allied with the opportunity to informally network. The opportunity for discussion, debate and sharing concerns across LSCBs was mentioned by 30 people (two-thirds of those attending).

*Discussion, dialogue, sharing with colleagues. Helpful to hear what other LSCBs do to solve problems.*

*Mixture of Chairs and Business Managers allowed for useful discussions. Presentations and questions helped to focus discussions.*

*Round table discussion excellent; so helpful to discuss with colleagues.*

However, one presenter was less keen on the composition of the discussion groups, and two commented on the need to keep discussion focused on the topic in hand, and for the group dynamics to be appropriately managed:

*It was useful to have discussion in mixed groups, but I would have liked opportunity to talk with other Chairs too.*

*Maybe needed table facilitators to keep discussions focussed.*

*Sometimes one individual dominated conversation or it went 'off track'.*

One participant admitted to being 'Not a lover of group work though do appreciate the meaningful discussion as a result', and while one person thought that there was 'Too much time given to table discussions' another thought that there had not been 'Enough time to discuss the issues properly'.

## STRUCTURE OF THE ONE-DAY SEMINAR

The balance of the day was favourably mentioned by some attendees. In addition six participants specifically described the day as being ‘thought provoking’, and a further four mentioned that they had learnt new things.

*All very interesting and thought provoking material – excellent presentation style and good balance with group discussion.*

*Good mix of information and discussion. Good balance of process / legislation / practice.*

There were differing views as to whether the balance was right regarding the legal contents of the presentations, with this part of the day being judged ‘too long’ by one participant:

*Legal presentations – clear, relevant and pacy.*

*Last presentation on legal cases set good examples on how we locally proceed with SCR disclosure and transparency.*

*Too legalistic – the legal framework is important but our approach to publication etc. needs to be guided by what helps learning, not just a few pieces of case law.*

*[unhelpful emphasis on] the legal cases; I would take advice from LA lawyers.*

## PRESENTERS/PRESENTATIONS

There was no direct question on the quality of the speakers, but participants on occasions used the free text boxes to remark on positive or negative aspects of the talks. There were eight comments appreciative either of the trainers in general, or of a particular presenter/presentation.

*The facilitators had a solid knowledge base and varied experience / background. This was powerful and a firm foundation for the seminar. It would be helpful to have the option of contacting them and being updated with regards to future opportunities to meet.*

There were however five negative comments about the presenter and his/her presentation, citing that some Powerpoint slides were confusing, that there were too many slides in total, and that one presentation was somewhat disjointed and this session in general lacked coherence. A more varied style would have been appreciated by one participant.

Reflecting a similar finding from the evaluation of the two-day training course for the more general audience (Part 1: Key themes) the most frequent negative theme mentioned by 9 participants (20% of those attending) was the ‘skipping around’ between slides and different parts of the accompanying booklets:

*Juggling between slides and two different books of source material.*

*Too much swapping and changing between different sections in the supporting materials. Should be more logically bound.*

*Flitting in and out, flicking between slides – difficult to follow.*

*Not being able to locate paragraphs being referred to quickly and easily.*

## **FURTHER TOPICS THAT THOSE ATTENDING WOULD HAVE LIKE COVERED**

The evaluation sheet contained a free text section asking for any 'missing topics', and attracted a wide range of suggestions, but no overriding themes.

Two participants wanted greater coverage of how to engage with families, and three mentioned the links with Ofsted and how that had impacted on the SCR commissioning and authoring process:

*Would have like to get into more details about engagement of families (including potential perpetrators) and the involvement of practitioners, and at what stage.*

*Possibly more on the impact of Ofsted on SCRs and their aftermath.*

Two participants wanted the issue of publication to have been explored in greater depth:

*Would have liked an opportunity to share information about publication.*

There were also various comments suggesting that more could have been said about what happens after the SCR's publication; did anything good come out of a previous SCR, what happened to the recommendations made, had lessons been learnt as envisaged, were there any barriers to learning?

*More focus on findings / recommendations from SCRs.*

*Some examples of good SCR outcomes would be helpful.*

*Barriers to learning – professionals' mind-set and beliefs- embedding learning.*

Two comments suggested that the context of limited resources needed to have been more prominent:

*[Greater] discussion about capacity, resources, budgets etc.*

*Perhaps something about support in times of limited resources, and limitations and expectations; balancing DfE expectations against practicalities.*

Finally, as with authors and prospective authors, on-going contact with peers, in this instance other Chairs and Board Members would be appreciated:

*Would like ongoing forum for discussion/learning from this area of activity.*

*Good start, but can we have access to a website to get useful hints/tips. Maybe national Association of Independent Chairs website could be used.*

## ACTION LEARNING SETS

Four Action Learning Sets (ALS) were established, in different parts of the country, with three meetings scheduled for each location.

Quoting from the ALS Facilitators: ‘ALS are group sessions which provide an opportunity for learners to come together and share issues and develop ideas and different solutions. The Action Learning Method is designed to provide a challenging space for reflective learning, enabling individuals to work through issues as a group, share the skills they learn with those they work with. Designed as a follow-on from the two-day programme, and/or the taster workshops, the ALS were intended to extend learning and development for those conducting or commissioning SCRs.’

The ALS were very well received by those who participated. However they were not always well attended, with the events in London, Leeds and Bristol attracting eight, seven and seven attendees at the first of their three sessions respectively, while the ALS in the Midlands was cancelled due to low take-up. Attendance also dropped off over the three meetings, particularly in Bristol where only two and three people attended the second and third sessions respectively. Some of those interviewed for the main evaluation of the whole SCR training programme did not even appear to be aware of this element of the programme, or had confused them with the taster workshops.

- Action for Children undertook its own internal evaluation of the Action Learning Sets, with 14 of the 22 participants completing evaluation forms. Those attending were asked to score ten ways in which the learning may have improved their expertise; giving a score of between 1 and 5, with 5 being the highest rating that could be given. Their scores pre and post the ALS were averaged over all the 14 attendees who had completed an evaluation form. The ten statements are shown below, with the ‘before and after’ scores, and they are ranked according to the highest, post learning, average score given. Those attending felt more confident of their ability on all ten indicators after taking part.

**Table 11: Attendees’ views of their own expertise, prior to and after ALS participation**

| Participants’ rating on 10 indicators of expertise (mean of 14 attendees) [data contained in NSPCC end of project report – see Appendix 3]         | Old score | New score |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| Openness to <b>new practice</b> and developing new ways of looking at issues   | 3.8       | 4.4       |
| Ability to <b>actively listen</b> and diagnose   | 3.4       | 4.4       |
| <b>Problem solving</b> skills, ability to support others to achieve different solutions  | 3.4       | 4.3       |
| Ability to usefully <b>challenge</b> others  | 3.6       | 4.3       |
| Receptivity to <b>feedback</b> from others on leadership and management skills   | 3.5       | 4.2       |
| Awareness of your <b>strengths and weaknesses</b> as a leader  | 3.6       | 4.2       |
| Awareness of the <b>group process</b> and how individuals relate to each other   | 3.3       | 4.1       |
| Confidence to have <b>reflective discussions</b> , specifically in relation to the review of serious incidents involving children and young people | 2.7       | 4.1       |
| Skill to promote <b>reflective learning</b> with others involved in reviewing serious incidents  | 2.5       | 4.1       |
| Skills to use <b>reflective learning</b> when reporting back to commissioners  | 2.5       | 3.9       |

These positive findings are reinforced by evidence from the interviews conducted as part of the independent evaluation. Those who had attended spoke highly of their experience, the only disappointment mentioned was the drop in attendance over time. The groups were thought to have been well facilitated and some interviewees felt this to have been the most valuable element of the entire programme:

*The learning sets after the course were brilliant. Precisely the in depth discussions with peers about real issues faced by authors.*

*They weren't very well attended but I thought they were excellent. I really appreciated everything [the facilitator] did. That was the best part for me.*

*The action learning sets did make me think differently... Action for Children facilitated well.*

The various positive aspects of the ALS which were highlighted by interviewees included:

- The groups were held in various regions and were therefore relatively easy to access.
- The opportunity for individuals to bring issues of current relevance to them for discussion, for example one interviewee was able to discuss the difficulties she was facing at the time working with a particular LSCB.
- To think through broader and longer term implications of being involved in the work: *"I was also able to think through where I wanted to go with Serious Case Reviews"*.
- A useful means of gaining supervision in a confidential setting, especially given the often isolated nature of the work, *"we respected confidentiality, it was great that what we discussed would stay where it needed to stay"*.
- Newcomers were able to benefit from the experience of others: *"The Action Learning Sets were far more beneficial for me...with colleagues who were extremely experienced but facing some quite challenging situations, and it made me realise the complexity of writing reports and chairing reports in an ever changing external environment where politics play a role and issues around inspections and all that sort of thing."*

## MENTORING

The programme originally intended to incorporate a telephone mentoring system for independent reviewers. However, funding for this form of support was withdrawn (and diverted to provide the commissioners seminars) because of limited interest. Anecdotal feedback provided by the programme team suggests that this may in part have been due to problems around timing (reviewers were not commissioned to conduct a review during the time period when mentoring was available), and also concerns around confidentiality.

Evidence from the independent evaluation indicates that, at least on a more informal basis, it was felt that the programme had contributed in some way towards establishing better peer support networks. Some participants described how the need for this had been brought to the forefront of their minds while attending the programme, and that it had been a helpful means of establishing a network of contacts to provide support or 'quality assure' work:

*I remember thinking 'Who could I phone here?' - you know thinking about mentoring.*

*I came away [from the 2 day training] having made a personal decision that I am not going to do one of these on my own.*

Nonetheless, a need for a more formalised system of mentoring and peer support was clearly expressed by respondents in every element of this evaluation. For example, five of those attending the Watford two-day course commented in their feedback questionnaires on the desirability of a formalised mentoring scheme, "pairing new reviewers with established ones", and the need for "some sort of association of SCR authors". Moreover, when asked about further support or training as part of the interviews, participants most often cited the need for peer support and professional supervision.

*Would it be possible to set up a structure for shadowing experienced authors by individuals who wish to become SCR authors, but do not have hands-on experience? I appreciate there are potential cost implications, but this may be one way to ensure consistent high-quality reports in the future.*

Not only was this viewed as something that would improve quality of reports, but also help address the challenges for individual reviewers around the emotional impact of dealing with distressing material and the often isolating nature of the work:

*I mean I have been very concerned about some of my colleagues who became very busy doing Serious Case Reviews and, like any sort of work where you are perhaps looking more frequently at kind of deficits and you know issues where perhaps practice hasn't been great, is that there is a sort of distorted world that can emerge and a very negative view of the world and you know I think it is really important that we give some attention to supervision.*

*I think it would be really helpful for IRs/authors to develop a system of peer support and challenge. These are isolated roles and I'm sure it would be useful to discuss or consult with another author.*

*I feel it's a very lonely and isolated role and a lot of people are doing it freelance. I think there needs to be something built in where that person can have a buddy working alongside them or something like that. For me - as somebody who would be taking this on new, I would see that as being essential really...being able to work alongside somebody, where you could do it but somebody would help you to write it....somebody to take me under their wing. I won't take that next step unless I know I can do it properly. You've got to feel confident and competent.*

## **PART 3: IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME**

The programme aimed to improve the participants' skills in producing a quality SCR. This section draws primarily on the reflections from the interview material, rather than the initial feedback forms, to give a longer term perspective on the ways in which participants felt the programme as a whole had made an impact on their SCR activity. The dominant themes that emerged from the 18 interviews are discussed below. Sometimes these themes also relate to the wider SCR context, and while these issues may be beyond the scope of this programme, they are important to bear in mind in designing any future training and support.

### **LEARNED MORE/REINFORCED KNOWLEDGE**

In keeping with the positive feedback from the initial evaluation questionnaires, most interviewees felt their attendance had been worthwhile, either that they had learned more or that the programme had reinforced their existing knowledge. They also valued the time it gave them for reflection and some also made mention of the value of 'unlearning' old ways. Learning more about theoretical models and approaches was particularly appreciated. One person commented that the course had presented a better insight into the systems approach to analysis than they had heard before and that this had reinforced their understanding of its theoretical basis. Another person summed up the way the programme had boosted their confidence in using models of review.

*I think just firming up models that I would feel more comfortable with than others, so sort of a little bit more confidence to say that yes I would be willing to perhaps undertake a commission but on sort of a clearer basis in terms of a method that I was happy with.*

Others commented on the way the training had helped them to think differently and more analytically about the purpose of a review and its conclusions and to move away from "ticking a box to say something has been done" and the need for a "root and branch systems change after a Serious Case Review". The learning about the need to be balanced and realistic in making findings and reaching conclusions was praised particularly in emphasising the high profile role of the author in subsequent publication of the report and the scrutiny of the conclusions by the media.

*It's been really helpful, and some of the information they gave out I've used since.*

### **SUPERFICIAL LEVEL OF COVERAGE**

However, in contrast, the interviews also revealed a degree of frustration among some participants about the relative superficiality of what could be covered, and that although the programme had been enjoyable, they learned little that was new. One person did not feel their report writing skills had improved.

*Nothing was done in huge depth, and the interactive sessions, whilst useful discussions did not increase my skills in report writing. I did not feel any more confident about writing a SCR Report after the course, but I think it is one of those activities that you just need to do and practise to become proficient.*

One person commented that the programme seemed to assume that everyone was a good writer but this was not tested at any point. There was a suggestion that writing skills should feature on any future course as this is fundamental to the success of a report.

Although participants were realistic about what was achievable some wanted more time spent on models of review and some were frustrated that they had not been able to attend workshop sessions devoted to this. People were very complimentary about the supporting course material which provided helpful guidance and structures for those undertaking a SCR. However some interviewees felt that the opportunities to apply this learning whilst on the programme were limited, particularly in relation to applying a methodology.

*What is missing is any depth of training on the methodology to be applied. In essence it seems to be a free for all (this is not a criticism as different methodologies are better suited to some SCRs. Many would be reluctant to use SCIE for a SCR that was not complex, if only on the ground of cost). Central government has not demanded that a particular methodology should be applied, but if it is endeavouring to achieve a degree of consistent quality in SCRs, proper training in the differing methodologies should be provided.*

## **METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

We have already shown that there were many comments about methodological perspectives and responses to this aspect of the training tended to depend on the extent of pre-existing knowledge and training. Some found it refreshing to know what was out there, that the SCIE model was not the only way, but those who advocated a systems approach were more sceptical of the overall approach adopted on the two day training.

*They were taking what I would call an investigative model as the basis of their work, which didn't fit in a way with what Munro was saying about we should be using a systems model and neither did it fit with the SCIE approach. I'm SCIE trained and really the two courses don't fit together at all...And it may have left people a little confused. Although there was a page on that in the notes, the people who were presenting were not people with an understanding of systems approaches.*

Other interviewees commented that a couple of SCIE trained people were brutally critical about the programme because it offered alternatives to the SCIE model.

*They are kind of one track, this is the way of the world, and they were saying this course isn't systemic enough, they basically wanted it to be the SCIE model.*

There was a degree of confusion about the extent of flexibility in carrying out a review, particularly among the less experienced reviewers.

*What really confused some of the less experienced people is that in the paperwork it says you've got the systems methodologies but it seemed to be indicating you could mix and match with a bit of old style investigation. Whether that's true or not, people were going hang on a minute, 'Working Together' say you should be using systems methodology.*

Others also commented on this confusion although one person did acknowledge that there was clarity in the new edition of *Working Together* (HM Government 2013).

*I think there is a confusion out there. Real confusion about what is required. For several reasons – I think the message that was originally being given was that you can't use the old methodology and it's got to be the SCIE or systems methodology. And then we went to the DfE training, and this was news to me and most people that were there, was that actually no that's not the case. And I suppose if you look at the wording of Working Together, it doesn't say it's got to be systems methodology, it says what principles you've got to use.*

A number of the interviewees were interested in developing or had begun to utilise a hybrid methodology and others commented that they felt this to be a more effective way of producing the reports. In some cases, attending the programme had helped crystallise their thinking around this and encouraged them to 'find their own way':

*I attended all the available workshops to try to get a good understanding of the different methods that are currently being used. I found them useful and will definitely pick out different bits from each rather than stick to one model.*

## **FURTHER TRAINING IN METHODOLOGY FOR CHAIRS OF BOARDS**

The confusion about methodological approaches was also thought to apply to Chairs of Local Safeguarding Children Boards who commission reviews. Some in this role were felt to have a limited understanding of the implications of using different methodologies which has implications for their decisions about which type of review or reviewer to commission. There were comments that using a systems approach presents particular challenges for the Chair to firstly understand the review findings and secondly to be able to use a review that will not have a plethora of recommendations.

*The chairs need development work specifically for them to help them understand the new approach really... because they are used to having 50 recommendations – do more training, do more this, do more that – so we shouldn't underestimate the cultural shift there is for the board really and the executives of course who have to develop the improvements.*

Those acting as lead reviewers felt that their task would be aided substantially if there was good support for LSCB chairs so that the SCR report could be presented to an informed audience.

## WHAT MAKES A QUALITY REPORT? THE NEED FOR CLARITY AND CASE EXAMPLES

One of the aims of the training programme was to provide clarity about what a good report looks like and how it should be used. A recurrent theme in the interviews was the current lack of clear guidance and the confusion that surrounds this:

*It would be very good to see what the DfE thinks of as 'a good report' and what is expected. It sounds very simple and obvious but there are lots of us out here who think that is what we need.*

The programme partnership informed us that the DfE was asked to supply samples of good SCRs but that none were provided. The comments from interviews reflect a wider confusion about the DfE's expectations of a quality report and, perhaps, a reluctance among authors and potential authors to take on the responsibility for determining quality in the review themselves. Interviewees accepted that lead reviewers have been given much greater licence but were uncomfortable with the absence of clear guidance in the context of such a high profile and important task. To address this, there were suggestions that more concrete examples could be given on the programme and case materials could be improved or better utilised. There were pleas for more practical examples, less theory.

*There was nothing around "This is what a good report would look like. This is what is expected". If [DfE] are the ones that are supposed to be saying 'This is what we want' then we didn't get that. I know that's difficult because people have different styles, but people were asking for that.*

It was acknowledged that providing examples to emulate would not be straightforward as no two reports or situations are the same and the degree of transferability from one situation to another is problematic. Moreover, there are also the difficulties of satisfying the various audiences, each with their own demands and agendas.

*One of the complexities that remains and is a national complexity, is that actually the Serious Case Review is trying to be one thing to too many different audiences and so somewhere there is going to have to be a compromise for one of those audiences, whether that be the family, whether it be the practitioners, whether it be an agency, the Board or the media or the Government, you know it is just the whole complexity of one document trying to serve all those different needs really, so that is a challenge that you know one just has to bear in mind.*

Part of the confusion was the perception of a dissonance between the systems learning approach and public statements from Ministers and the DfE which were perceived to be more about blame than learning. Many people wanted a dialogue with the DfE and more reassurance.

*At the moment we are moving towards systems methodology which lifts the blame from individuals, but there is a bit of a conflict basically because some of the politicians involved in this area, if the case ends up high profile, do the ministers want to have someone to blame or a blame-type solution?... but in the sector more generally we are trying to reassure social workers and others that what we are trying to get to is the 'latent problems' that are deep down underneath. It is like setting a trap often. So clarity on what is a high quality SCR and a little bit of guidance as to how that different ethos can rub along together really.*

[There is an] *emphasis by DfE that SCRs are about learning and not naming and shaming but their criticisms have frequently required putting in the public domain who /which agency has failed.*

## **PUBLICATION**

A further programme aim was to equip those who attended with the skills to “produce a quality report ready for publication without needing to be amended or redacted”. There was some consensus that the programme had been helpful in developing this, and even some very experienced authors/chairs felt it had changed their approach and attitude to this issue:

*There was a really big message [from the course] that there has to be an extremely legitimate reason not to publish. It has changed the way I write them, actually in fairness - not to be more reticent or to be less honest, just write them in a way that has the public in mind.*

Several other interviewees also felt the course and the input from the DfE made them much more confident about writing without the need for redaction. They appreciated that too much redaction or amendment devalues the report and places suspicions of a cover up in the minds of the public.

*I used to redact everything or just publish the executive summary. But the last two reports I've written are completely ready for publication and I've got my head around that now... ....I was quite anti-full publication before, but I've come round to it and accepted it. I still think there are dangers, but I'm fit for purpose now.*

It was noted that the training material provides guidance about how to approach and then construct a SCR in order for it to be published which can be reviewed and used at a later date.

## **ROLE OF NATIONAL PANEL**

There was confusion and some scepticism about the panel and its role and how it relates to the work of reviewers and chairs of Boards. Representation from the panel at the training may have been helpful and allayed concerns.

*I don't think any of us are any clearer, what this expert panel is supposed to do and be about. We were told once you get commissioned your name is put forward as a reviewer to the expert panel. Why? What is happening to this list [of names] Should you be on that list? Should you not be on that list? Is it only those that are on that list that will be recommended to chairs of boards? This is something that is making many people worried and nervous.*

Although members of the panel are eminent in their field, there was a view that since no member is a safeguarding expert able to bring the group together, it is difficult for the sector to have confidence in their role. One interviewee was disappointed to get very little feedback or comment on a review and felt it unacceptable to be told “you'll only hear if we've got a problem with it”.

*In any future courses, [the national panel of independent experts] should be there as key players to give you advice on reports they've received and how they feel these reports could be improved. I'm not sure they see that as their role.*

## **WHO OWNS THE SCR? HOW INDEPENDENT IS THE PROCESS**

There were issues and tensions about working with LSCBS and challenges around maintaining independence. Any future programme may need to address ways of managing these tensions.

The following issues were raised:

- **Who owns the SCR?**

*Is the report owned by the board or the writer? I think I came away more confused on that than when I went in the room.*

*If you undertake a report as an accredited reviewer with SCIE, you have to deal with conflicts in governance – whose report is it: SCIE's or the LSCB's – I have observed that lead reviewers can be stuck in the middle of this conflict with 2 bosses. This is horrendous and can end up taking extreme lengths of time to sort out.*

- **Should the SCR report be quality assured by an outside body?** One person commented that Independent Overview Writers should be trusted and respected by the partnership to produce a fair and reflective report. They felt that reports should be owned and approved by the partnership and not be quality assured outside of the partnership by someone who was not part of the process.
- **Should there be an independent SCR chair?** (this is no longer required by Working Together 2013):

*Unfortunately the LSCB chair is usually too involved with the DCS to be independent. Moreover, the chair tends to identify his/her success with that of the authority, especially with the new inspection regime. As a consequence criticisms in SCR are perceived to be [making] judgments on LSCB chairs too.*

## **THE DEGREE OF EXPERIENCE REQUIRED**

There was a clearly held view about the significant amount of experience and time required, above and beyond the training offered as part of the programme, to undertake a skilful SCR analysis. Doubts and concerns were expressed that attending the two day course, or indeed the whole programme, could provide a sufficient basis for somebody with no prior experience to gain sufficient knowledge and skill to write a competent report.

*You cannot underestimate the complexity of doing this across several agencies and trying to understand the 'why' questions for all those agencies not just the one you are most comfortable with.*

Meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge for the programme.

*I think you had two groups of people in the room, you had the people who had a lot of experience and actually understand the issues, hence some of the questions and then you had a group of people that had never done it before and was coming to see if they could do it, which is great but I think it is fundamentally a completely different thing.*

The relevance of the experience brought by participants was questioned by some who thought that substantial experience of child protection was needed, although the skill mix and range of perspectives in the room was also valued.

*Participants seemed to have no experience of children's services/safeguarding at all which raised some questions for me as to how systematic and analytical they could be e.g. a reviewer needs to have some knowledge of what questions may need to be asked.*

*I think it gave a nice mix of perspectives, it was really nice it was multi agency but if the DfE were using it to come up with a pool of professionals to take SCRs forward, there wasn't always commonality of experience.*

The lack of knowledge about systems analysis was raised as an issue for those with and without reviewing experience. Interviewees with social care backgrounds did not have the monopoly on an understanding of a systems approach. A participant from health felt very well-schooled in systemic thinking and thought it useful.

*Systems analysis is a mind-set – I don't think a two-day training course is enough to change any entrenched behaviour from undertaking traditional reviews over many years.*

There was a view, particularly among more experienced authors, that the programme had most benefit for those with relevant prior experience, but was a real struggle for novice authors. There was a suggestion that there had been too much to assimilate for those with less experience:

*The training, and the workshop sessions were very good, but they also confused people, particularly people that were only starting doing these reviews because they were only snapshots, it became very clear that they were confusing people. This was the feedback coming out through the group discussions – 'how do I know which one to do? How do I know where to start?'... I had a couple of people on my table that were starting off, and somebody that hadn't even done one but had thought 'this is what I'm going to', and they were very confused .*

Having the credibility to undertake a review was seen to be a potential stumbling block for novice authors getting commissioned. As one person commented:

*As a commissioner I would not risk commissioning someone to write an overview report if this was their only experience of LSCBs/SCRs, which I understand was the case for a proportion of the attendees.*

## RELUCTANCE TO TAKE THE WORK ON

An issue repeatedly raised by interviewees was the sense of a growing reluctance to be involved in SCRs. The concerns raised surround a perceived lack of clarity and uncertainty about what is wanted coupled with fears that the publicity of the reviewer's name may damage their future career. This reluctance was very rarely linked to the experience of attending the programme but was primarily associated with these wider external issues. The implication here is that (despite the contrary intention of the programme) there may be a reducing pool of potential independent reviewers willing to take on the work and a consequent adverse impact on the quality of SCRs produced.

*A lot find it extremely challenging, people are really worried that 'if I get it wrong I'm going to lose my job'.*

These issues were raised by those with substantial experience and those new to SCRs alike. Some of those with a great deal of experience were actively reconsidering whether they wished to continue in this line of work:

*The bad news about the course was - with the course running at the time that it did, and all of the publicity about Serious Case Reviews, it's made me kind of rethink a bit and I'm taking a bit of a back seat from Serious Case Reviews now. And to be honest, I think a lot of people are. A lot of people are feeling it's become so political and the goal posts keep moving, and the expectations keep changing but we're not really in the loop as to how....I think it was everything that was going on around it [the training] that made me think I'm not sure I want to do these again.*

*It is becoming increasingly complex role and impossible to do well for all the various audiences involved. I am closer to giving up than at any time.*

*I have never worked in an environment as defensive as the current climate. The fear amongst DCS and LSCB chairs is absolutely overwhelming with SCRs. They fear Ofsted's arrival.*

*And also I know there are people out there saying 'I don't want to do this any more' because your name is bandied about and it's your reputation. I think the way [Daniel Pelka report] was slated has made people in this world very nervous of doing Serious Case Reviews. It is scary...it is a nerve wracking world.*

*I also think some of the criticism that's been thrown at some of the reports, for example Daniel Pelka, Hamzah Khan – it's quite a scary world in the sense that really [chairs of boards] are nervous about 'have we done the right thing?'. I've chaired a review where we've really been pushing the 'why' rather than just 'what happened'. However ...we have no idea of whether they are going to say that is appropriate or not, and from a commissioner point of view that is quite scary.*

Similarly, potential authors/chairs who had attended the programme were now thinking twice about whether in reality this was something they wished to do:

*I would be nervous of undertaking a multi-agency review because of the national and local political ramifications.*

*It's absolutely off-putting [for new authors]. What happened in Bradford....what I saw in the press and how the government came down.... as somebody who might have been considering writing reports, the child protection side of things, I've moved away from that.*

*There was one [newcomer to SCRs] in particular I was talking to, who would love to do them but the more she heard from the rest of us the more she actually thought, that was, the more she was thinking actually 'I am not sure whether to do this'.*

*I'm working with someone who is a new author, and he is quite nervous.*

The degree to which the programme has been able to increase the appetite to be a reviewer remains uncertain but LSCB managers were said to be absolutely desperate to fill this role. There was still some optimism that the course would produce new reviewers alongside the view that people were very wary about taking on the role.

## **THE COMMISSIONING PROCESS**

From a commissioner's viewpoint, the process needs to be improved and there is clearly a struggle to find suitable authors, especially those who are sufficiently independent:

*It is a very weak commissioning process that I don't think would stand up to scrutiny. And I say that as a commissioner.....we sit down and think 'Do you know anyone? Do I know anyone?'. It's not a very objective process.*

While the issue of how to identify a suitable author was not overtly addressed or resolved by the programme, one participant did comment that attending the workshops had not helped her to, for example, "identify where I might find an SCR author with expertise in root cause analysis". Similarly, another commented that after attending the commissioner seminar:

*I'm not sure that as a chair I am any more knowledgeable about how to identify a good overview report writer if they have not previously been recommended.*

Having taken part in the programme, potential authors remained uncertain about how to overcome this obstacle and actually get commissioned as an SCR author:

*The trick is persuading Boards that you are up to the task, especially when you have limited practical experience in producing SCRs. If you are new to the area I feel that who you know is just as important as what you know. ....My contacts are not extensive.*

*I thought the course was very informative but would like the opportunity to put the learning into practice. I feel that this is more difficult as agencies will stick to those who have a proven track record and not use new people for this area of work.*

*In my experience, LSCBs seem to have their favourite Overview Writers, whether they have done the two day training or not.*

## PART 4: CONCLUSIONS

This concluding section sets out whether the aims of the programme have been achieved. It is relevant to add that many of the issues raised by participants go beyond the scope of programme. They are nevertheless included here because they are important to bear in mind when designing any future programme.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE THIS SERVICE TO AT LEAST 50 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE LIKELY TO BE LEADING SCRS OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS; IDENTIFYING AND ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUALS TO TAKE PART IN THE PROGRAMME.**

- The aim of identifying individuals to take part in the programme, and providing the service to at least 50 people was achieved (and indeed exceeded). All the courses were over-subscribed and, with just under 200 individuals initially wishing to book, many were disappointed at not receiving a place. There is clearly an appetite for information and support.
- Whether the programme has achieved the aim of these individuals becoming *'likely to be leading SCRS over the next two years'* is less certain. From a commissioner's viewpoint, there remains a struggle to find suitable authors (often a case of 'who you know'). Having taken part in the programme, novice authors were unsure about how to overcome this obstacle, gain credibility and actually get commissioned.
- Interviews revealed a growing reluctance among many of those who participated in the programme to be involved in SCRs, and this was raised by those with substantial experience and those new to SCRs alike. This did not appear to be directly connected to the experience of the programme but rather to wider fears and concerns. These included a sense of uncertainty and perceived lack of clarity about what is wanted from a SCR, coupled with anxieties about potential adverse publicity which could damage their future career. The concerns surrounded a perceived lack of clarity and uncertainty about what is wanted, coupled with fears about any potential adverse publicity damaging their future career. The implication here is that (despite the contrary intention of the programme) there may be a reducing pool of individuals willing to take on the work and a consequent detrimental impact on the quality of SCRs produced.

**AIM:**

**ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE FROM A WIDE RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO SCR REVIEWS.**

- The participant profile questionnaire for the two day training showed that this aim was achieved, with the course attracting participants from a wide range of professional backgrounds, including those who were new to SCRs.
- The opportunity for transferrable learning was welcomed by all. The minority new to SCRs reported that they learned lots and benefited from the chance to hear from experienced SCR authors. While some of the more experienced participants enjoyed the opportunity to refresh and build on existing knowledge and devote 'thinking space' to the issues, others felt disappointed by what they judged to be a somewhat basic level of training.
- Meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge for the programme. Planning for future delivery of the programme would benefit from considering how best to cater for this range of experience.
- There was some concern expressed that attending the two day course, or indeed the whole programme, could not provide a sufficient basis for somebody with no prior experience to gain sufficient knowledge and skill to write a competent report.

**AIM:**

**TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS OF INDIVIDUALS SO THAT THEY CAN PRODUCE SCR REPORTS WHICH MEET THE DFE REQUIREMENTS:**

*-provide a sound analysis of what happened in the case and why, and what needs to happen in order to reduce the risk of recurrence;*

*-written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and the public alike;*

*-suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted, for example they will not contain personal data which needs to be protected.*

- Since participants' skills were not assessed as part of the programme, the evaluation was not able objectively to establish whether or not the programme had developed their skills and therefore achieved the aims. However, the evaluation was able to establish that, subjectively, individuals felt overall they had been provided with a training experience which would help them achieve the goals set out.
- The evaluation sheets submitted by participants in all elements of the programme show that overall, the response was very positive (for example, 86% indicated they had found the two-day course a useful foundation). Of particular value was:

- **The opportunity for discussion**, and a chance to network and to share experience and perspectives was found to be the most helpful aspect of the course. Or as one participant put it, what was most valuable was *“the information that was shared”*. Hence the interactive parts of the training were felt to have worked especially well. Some would have welcomed even more time for discussion.
- **The training materials and LSCB commissioner materials**, with a near consensus that these were well structured, relevant and helpful (96% of those who attended the two-day course said the course materials were helpful). Furthermore, interviewees revealed that the materials had since been widely disseminated and were thought to be a valuable resource to draw upon.
- In keeping with the positive feedback from the initial evaluation questionnaires, most of the 18 interviewees felt their attendance had been worthwhile, either that they had learned more or that the programme had reinforced their existing knowledge and confidence about making a sound analysis. They also valued the time it gave them for reflection and some also made mention of the value of ‘unlearning’ old ways. Others commented on the way the training had helped them to think differently and more analytically about the purpose of a review and its conclusions and to move away from *“ticking a box to say something has been done”* and the need for a *“root and branch systems change after a serious case review”*.
- However, in contrast, the interviews also revealed a degree of frustration among some participants about what they perceived as the relative superficiality of what could be covered, and that although the programme had been enjoyable, they learned little that was new. Although participants were realistic about what was achievable, some wanted more time spent on models of review and some were frustrated that they had not been able to attend workshop sessions devoted to this.
- There was a degree of confusion about the extent of flexibility in carrying out a review, particularly among the less experienced reviewers. Being confused about methodological approaches was also thought to apply to Chairs of Local Safeguarding Children Boards who commission reviews and good support was felt to be needed for LSCB chairs so that the SCR report could be presented to an informed audience.
- A number of the interviewees were interested in developing or had begun to use a hybrid methodology and felt that attending the programme had helped crystallise their thinking around this and encouraged them to ‘find their own way’.
- There was a mixed response as to whether the programme had helped attendees to be better able to produce reports which are **written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and the public alike**. Many felt that this was not addressed in any great depth and that it would have been useful to have been provided with a clear example of a report which was thought to have achieved this aim. There was also the suggestion that writing skills should feature more prominently on any future course as this is fundamental to the success of a report.

- In terms of *producing an SCR suitable for publication*, the programme was thought to have been helpful in developing this skill, and a number of interviewees commented that it had changed their approach and attitude around this. Some described how they felt more confident about writing without the need for redaction, and that the training material had provided a useful resource to refer to about how to approach and then construct a SCR for publication.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE CLARITY FOR PROVIDERS AND COMMISSIONERS ABOUT WHAT A GOOD REPORT LOOKS LIKE AND HOW IT COULD AND SHOULD BE USED.**

- Although the training materials and LSCB commissioner materials contained sections on producing reports which are fit for publication and features of a good report, apparently satisfying this aim, a recurrent theme in the interviews was a desire for clarity from the DfE on the issue. Interviewees accepted that lead reviewers have been given much greater licence but were uncomfortable with the absence of clear guidance in the context of such a high profile and important task. To address this, there were suggestions that more concrete examples could be given on any future programme and case materials could be improved or better utilised. There were pleas for more practical examples.
- It was acknowledged that providing examples to emulate would not be straightforward as no two reports or situations are the same and the degree of transferability from one situation to another is problematic. Moreover, there are also the difficulties of satisfying the various audiences, each with their own demands and agendas. Part of the confusion was the perception of a dissonance between the systems learning approach and public statements from Ministers which were perceived to be more about blame than learning.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE ON-GOING SUPPORT TO INDIVIDUALS AS THEIR SKILLS DEVELOP**

- The programme originally intended to incorporate a telephone mentoring system for independent reviewers. However, funding for this form of support was withdrawn because of low take-up. On a more informal basis, it was felt that the programme had nonetheless contributed towards establishing better peer support networks.
- The Action Learning Sets were not always well attended, and one regional set was cancelled due to low take-up. However, they appeared to be very well received by those who did participate: with those (14) who completed evaluation forms indicating that they felt more confident after taking part. These findings are reinforced by evidence from the interviews. The groups were thought to have been well facilitated and some interviewees felt this to

have been the most valuable element of the entire programme, providing much needed in-depth discussion with peers about real issues faced by authors.

- It was surprising that there was lack of interest in the peer support and the telephone mentoring elements of the programme, as when specifically asked about further support or training that was required, participants often cited the need for peer support and professional supervision. This was viewed as something that would not only improve the quality of reports, but would also help to address the challenges for individual reviewers around the emotional impact of dealing with distressing material and the often isolating nature of the work.

**AIM:**

**PROVIDE QUALITY ASSURANCE TO COMMISSIONERS OF SCRS**

- Although each element of the programme might have touched upon how one might gain scrutiny of practice and reporting, the programme did not, in itself, provide anything more around quality assurance.
- Concerns were also expressed by interviewees that consultancies were creaming off revenue for quality assurance, and that some of the taster workshops had functioned as a commercial exercise whereby a particular consultancy attempted to persuade those who attended to 'buy in' to their brand.

## **ENDPOINT**

The programme was successful in achieving its aim of providing training to over 50 individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, including those who were new to SCR reviews. Although meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge, in general, the feedback from participants was very positive. Most felt that they had either learned more or that the programme had reinforced their existing knowledge and confidence about making a sound analysis and producing an SCR ready for publication. Especially valued were the training materials, which were considered well-structured, relevant and helpful. The opportunity for networking and sharing of experience that was integral throughout the programme was also welcomed, and a need for more formalised ongoing support of this nature, especially peer support networks, expressed.

The programme took place at a time of transition for SCRs, and participants remained unsure about a number of issues. Among these was the need for more clarity about what constitutes a 'good report' (including clear case examples), the degree of flexibility over methodological approaches, and how to go about getting commissioned. This context of uncertainty, coupled with fears about the consequences of producing a 'bad report' appeared to be contributing to a growing reluctance, among both new and established reviewers, to actually take on the work. These are challenges that

may need to be considered and addressed in any future training and support. Nevertheless, overall, the programme was highly regarded and there are hopes among participants that it will continue.

## **APPENDIX 1: TRAINING MATERIALS AND LSCB COMMISSIONING MATERIALS**

**Please note that the materials below formed only one part of the supporting materials, which also included extensive slide printouts, case studies, case law and research.**

**Your attention is drawn to the copyright provisions contained in the materials, none of which should be used for profit-making activities. Any use of the materials should contain an acknowledgement that this is with the permission of the Department for Education and Sequeli.**

## **APPENDIX 2: END OF PROJECT REPORT**

### **End of project report: Improving the quality of children's Serious Case Review**

**March 2013 – March 2014**

#### **1. Introduction**

This end of project report provides a brief account of a commission awarded to the NSPCC, Sequeli and Action for Children by the Department for Education. The aim of the commission was to provide support and training to those undertaking or considering undertaking children's serious case reviews (SCRs) with the goal of improving the quality of children's serious case reviews. The report outlines the detail of the commission and then describes how the project was implemented. Following this it explains the activities that took place. The report considers challenges and risks experienced as well as notable successes, and concludes with thoughts about maintaining momentum on improvements that appear to have been made.

This report is intended to be made available to the Department for Education, NSPCC, Sequeli and Action for Children and is seen as a factual account of the contracted activities.

#### **2. Outline of the commission as scheduled in March 2013**

This section outlines the detail of the commission and contractual requirements.

Serious Case Reviews are conducted by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) when a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is known or suspected to be a factor. Research commissioned by Government on SCRs, and the experience of recent high profile cases, suggested that the previous approach to SCRs was not resulting in learning being shared and embedded as effectively as it could be. The Government aimed to improve this situation by:

- redesigning the SCR process so that it supports learning;
- addressing the quality and content of SCR reports; and
- ensuring that the reports of SCRs are published in the interests of transparency and accountability.

The Department for Education consulted over the summer 2012 on draft Statutory Guidance on Learning and Improvement. The guidance was planned to allow LSCBs flexibility to choose their preferred review model, and also to take a proportionate approach to SCRs to fit the circumstances of the case. In order to comply with the proposed new guidance, LSCBs would need to be able to commission SCRs from independent reviewers who are skilled in conducting and also at presenting their findings in a clear and accessible way.

The NSPCC, in collaboration with Sequeli and Action for Children, was commissioned by the Department for Education to design and deliver a programme of support aimed at improving the quality of SCRs. The programme of support was intended to enable independent reviewers to write SCR reports which:

- provide a sound analysis of what happened in the case and why, and what needs to happen in order to reduce the risk of recurrence;
- are written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and the public alike; and
- are suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted, for example they will not contain personal data which needs to be protected.

Specifically, the objectives of this programme were to;

- develop the skills of individuals so that they can produce SCR reports which meet the requirements listed above;
- provide this service to at least 50 individuals who are likely to be leading SCRs over the next two years;
- identify and encouraging individuals to take part in the programme,
- develop a selection criteria which would encourage participation of individuals who are from a wide range of backgrounds including those who are new to SCR reviews;
- provide on-going support to those individuals as their skills develop;
- develop a minimum threshold in terms of competence levels; and
- provide quality assurance to commissioners of SCRs.

### **3. Delivery of the programme of support**

This section outlines the activities, as contracted and scheduled at the outset of the programme in March 2013.

Project management was undertaken by the NSPCC. Project meetings and discussions were convened at various points throughout the duration of the project.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the programme of support planned to;

- develop a web resource,
- hold an event at the beginning of the programme to elicit interest and promote the programme of support,
- provide face to face skills training for independent reviewers,
- provide taster workshops on various methodological approaches to case review for independent reviewers and commissioners,
- provide action learning sets for independent reviewers who had completed the skills training,
- provide telephone mentoring for independent reviewers who had completed the skills training, and telephone support for commissioners to consider process, successes, learning and implementation of recommendations following case reviews.
- The programme would then be independently evaluated.

Responsibilities for the following activities were shared across the partnership as follows;

- NSPCC was to project manage the overall programme but also ensure delivery of the taster workshops on methodological approaches to case reviewing, and the telephone support for commissioners,
- Sequeli was to lead on developing and delivering all knowledge and skills training,
- Action for Children was to lead on action learning sets and telephone mentoring for independent reviewers.

Monthly progress meetings were scheduled with the Department for Education. The Department were apprised of all developments throughout the programme, as well as involved in decision making about any changes needed.

Eligibility criteria were created for those independent reviewers who were interested in applying to participate in the programme. An applicant could be considered suitable if:

1. They have chaired or written an independent overview report for one of the below:
  - a children's serious case review
  - an adult serious case review
  - a domestic homicide review
  - a mental health homicide investigation
2. OR they have experience of chairing or writing reports of an equivalent level of depth and complexity to the above (these may cover, as illustration, work on major complaints, peer or professional audits and other scrutiny, investigations and reviews).

The criteria were intended to identify those applicants who were already familiar with chairing or writing review or investigation reports, as well as individuals who have undertaken other high level reviews or written similar complex reports.

In addition, priority could be given to those from outside children's services to ensure the Programme supported and trained individuals from a variety of backgrounds but also those who committed to participation in other aspects of the programme e.g. attending taster workshops or action learning sets. The Department for Education wished to actively encourage participation in the programme by those whose experience of reviews and investigations came from outside children's services.

#### **4. Outline of activities as delivered by March 2014**

This section outlines the activities that were actually completed by the end of the programme, against the planned objectives and key performance indicators.

#### **4.1. Early event to elicit interest & promote the programme of support**

Initially, an event to elicit interest and promote the programme of support was considered necessary. However, early on, it became apparent that there was considerable interest in the programme therefore a decision was taken that such an event would not be necessary. Funds were diverted; initially into an idea about holding webinars as a method for further disseminating information, however later this was also dropped as something that was not necessary or best use of funds.

#### **4.2. Development of a web resource**

Ning, a social networking site was used to develop an on-line platform for a time limited web resource. This aspect of the Programme was led by the NSPCC and required considerable set up time at an early stage of the project. The web based resource made it easier to promote the programme but also allowed information to be provided to all individuals who registered onto the Ning site, who in turn, registered onto the Programme. This web resource was used to post information about all aspects of the programme, as well as post updates and useful resources for independent reviewers. As well as information about all aspects of the Programme, for example skills training courses, action learning sets and methodological approaches, resources concerning case law and guidance were also made available on one central site. This site was used as a platform for interested individuals to submit bookings for attendance at training, workshops and action learning sets.

The Programme was initially promoted through informal networks known to the Partnership. This proved to be a valuable kick-start to the Programme. Other, more formal contacts were made in order to promote the Programme; these included, ADCS, ACPO, LSCB Chairs Association, LGA, Association of Lawyers for Children, Judicial College, HASCAS, CAADA, Mental Health Tribunal Association, IPCC, as well as continued promotion through NSPCC, Action for Children and Sequeli networks.

Membership of the Ning site, from launch (1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 31/03/14) has reached 435 people (this includes NSPCC, Action for Children and Sequeli staff members that were working on the project).

The following headline analytics for the Ning site are provided;

- Total Visits: 2091
- Average Visit Duration: 5:37mins

The web resource will cease to exist by May 2014, with subscription not being renewed to Ning. Contact information from the social networking aspect of the site will be saved for future use as appropriate.

#### **4.3. Provide face to face knowledge and skills training for independent reviewers**

A central component of the Programme of support was the provision of skills based training courses. This was led by Sequeli. Training and resource materials were developed by Sequeli for use throughout the Programme.

The key performance indicator for this activity comprised of delivering three 2 day courses to be delivered in May, June and September 2013 and to ensure 50 potential reviewers completed this training. This target was exceeded. The programme attracted considerable interest. Initially, 60 places were available, however more than double this number applied for a place on one of these three courses. This inevitably meant that there were a high number of disappointed people who were not accepted on to the training, either because of the limited number of places available, them not fitting the eligibility criteria sufficiently, or they had received previous Government funding to undertake other training on case reviews.

Total number of booking forms received for Two-Day Training: 198

- 15-16 May 2013 in London: 38 bookings received
- 3-4 July 2014 in Leeds: 43 bookings received
- 10-11 September 2013 in Leicester: 69 bookings received
- 3-4 February 2014 in Watford: 48 bookings received

All 20 individuals attended the May and September training courses, 19 attended the June course. Due to the levels of interest the partnership decided to run a further course, having diverted funds from the original proposal to kick-start the programme with an event. Instead, funds were used to run a fourth 2 day course in February 2014. Again, this attracted considerable interest. Having booked 20 people onto this course, 18 people attended the February 2014 course (2 dropped out at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances).

In total 77 individuals attended the course from outside of the Partnership. The final list also includes others such as those who have assisted in the delivery of other aspects of the course and who are employed by the NSPCC and Action for Children. In total, 84 individuals completed the skills training.

The profile of those who attended the training varied, as required by the Department for Education. Individuals from a range of professional backgrounds expressed an interest in the programme, and those that completed the training courses were drawn from a diverse professional field. As examples, this included those from social work, health, policing, and legal backgrounds. The majority of individuals were self-employed independent consultants, with a smaller number employed by local authority children's services departments, NHS trusts, and police authorities.

A further requirement of the Department for Education was the need to ensure that 40% of those who completed the training were new to children's serious case reviews. This target was exceeded, with the Partnership deciding to ensure that half of those who were offered a place on the training were in this category.

A representative from the Department for Education attended and provided a formal presentation at each of the four skills training courses.

A list of names of those individuals who have completed the training has been provided to the Department for Education. Individuals who completed the training were also invited to give their consent to share their contact details, as well as submit biographical information to aid potential commissioners to seek an independent reviewer. In total 66 individuals provided their consent, with a number also providing biographical information. A final list of names has been collated and has been provided to the Department for Education and the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs. Other interested parties may seek this information.

#### **4.4. Provide taster workshops on various methodological approaches to case review for independent reviewers and commissioners**

Taster workshops on five different methodological approaches were delivered. The following table provides a breakdown of specific events and the number of participants;

| SCIE Learning Together    | Root Cause Analysis       | Child Practice Reviews   | Appreciative Inquiry      | Significant Incident Learning Process |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| June 2013:<br>8 attended  | July 2013:<br>15 attended | Sept 2013:<br>8 attended | June 2013:<br>13 attended | July 2013:<br>12 attended             |
| Sept 2013:<br>16 attended | Oct 2013:<br>18 attended  | Nov 2013:<br>12 attended | Oct 2013:<br>21 attended  | Nov 2013:<br>13 attended              |

In total 136 people attended these workshops. The total number of booking forms received for taster workshop places (including bookings for other parts of the programme): 131. Individuals were able to make multiple bookings in one submission when applying for a place, which accounts for the higher number of people attending the workshops compared to a lower number of bookings received.

The key performance indicator for this activity was to ensure that between 10 and 20 people attended those workshops.

Overall, this target was achieved. The number of people scheduled to attend all of the workshops at the point of delivery exceeded the minimum requirement. However, on many occasions, individuals had booked a place for the workshop but either dropped out or did not attend which accounts for the small number of workshops that had lower rates of attendance.

#### **4.5. Provide Action Learning Sets for independent reviewers who had completed the skills training**

The Key Performance Indicator for this work stream was that four Action Learning Sets would be established with the intention of each set meeting on three separate occasions between July 2013

and March 2014. Four Action Learning Sets were established and meetings took place in London, Leeds and Bristol and the fourth was intended to meet in Nottingham.

The total number of booking forms received for Action Learning Set places (including bookings for other parts of the programme): 111

There were 12 learners allocated to each set however actual take up was lower than anticipated and some learners failed to attend without apology or explanation. The Nottingham set was the latest set meeting to commence after sign up and allocation of places. There was a six month gap between application and delivery, and therefore this time gap may explain the very low attendance rate for this set; this resulted in cancellation of the set.

Action Learning is considered to be most effective with groups of 6-8 people and the quality of the learning experience was not compromised in any way for those that did attend.

| London              | Leeds               | Bristol             | Nottingham |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Set 1 – 8 attendees | Set 1 – 7 attendees | Set 1 – 7 attendees | cancelled  |
| Set 2 – 6 attendees | Set 2 – 7 attendees | Set 2 – 2 attendees | cancelled  |
| Set 3 – 6 attendees | Set 3 – 6 attendees | Set 3 – 3 attendees | cancelled  |

Topics brought for discussion at Action Learning Sets fell broadly into the following areas:

- Building skill and confidence to embark on a first review
- Ensuring that SCR activity and reports enabled the effective dissemination of learning
- Reviewing within a politically challenging climate
- Accepting commissions from LSCBs with confidence and influencing decisions on the model to be adopted for the review
- Writing a report that is fit for publication
- Learn from the Daniel Pelka SCR (published mid-way through this programme of support) and subsequent Ministerial response.

Attendees reported that they found the opportunity to meet with other reviewers valuable and would welcome future peer support/networking arrangements.

Evaluation forms were completed by 14 people and the key performance indicator of learner satisfaction rate for Action Learning was achieved at 100%.

#### **4.6. Provide telephone mentoring for independent reviewers who had completed the skills training, and telephone support for commissioners to consider process, successes, learning and implementation of recommendations following case reviews**

The telephone mentoring system for independent reviewers was established to provide individual support for those who had completed the training and who might be undertaking a review. Very little interest was shown in this offer by the independent reviewers. This may be due to a number of

reasons however anecdotal feedback suggests problems around timing may have been particularly relevant i.e. reviewers had not been commissioned to review a case within the time-frame of the offer of mentoring being available. Issues regarding confidentiality may also have contributed to this support not being pursued. This may have been the case in respect of the telephone support for commissioners which was not pursued by many.

Due to limited interest, the telephone mentoring for independent reviewers and telephone support for commissioners was withdrawn in October 2013 and funds were diverted to provide two, one day seminars for commissioners.

#### **4.7. Seminars for commissioners**

Due to funds being re-allocated, two one day seminars were delivered for commissioners of serious case reviews. These were specifically for LSCB Chairs, Business Managers and those who might have direct involvement in commissioning arrangements. They were delivered in March 2014. The Programme budget enabled up to 80 participants to attend one of the seminars. Two events were held, one in Leicester and one in Watford. Initial interest was higher for the Watford event; however a number of individuals dropped out in the final few days before the event. Twenty six people attended the Leicester event and 29 attended the Watford event. Slightly higher numbers were expected but some people did not attend. The seminars were led by Sequeli and commissioning materials for use at the seminars were developed by Sequeli. This provided continuity with the reviewer training courses and training materials.

A representative from the Department for Education attended and provided a formal presentation at each one of the two seminars.

#### **4.8. An independent evaluation of the programme of support.**

The independent evaluation of the programme was undertaken by Professor Marion Brandon, of the University of East Anglia. This is reported separately.

## **5. Challenges faced & successes achieved**

This section outlines the key challenges and risks the project has experienced and highlights notable successes achieved.

### **5.1. Challenges & risks**

- 1) Three months into the Programme the Department for Education advised the Partnership that it would not be possible to accept applications from individuals who had already received Government funding to attend other previous training on case reviewing. This was unhelpful timing as the original eligibility criteria had been posted on the Ning site and a high number of people had applied to the Programme. The Partnership overcame this issue by seeking confirmation from the Department for

Education about the revised eligibility of all candidates chosen to participate in the training.

- 2) Re-structuring at the Department for Education meant that the Programme had three different Department for Education Project Managers during the lifetime of the project. This meant that extra time had to be spent building up new relationships and on communications.
- 3) Individuals booking onto an activity and then not attending causing lower attendance figures. This is likely to be inevitable given that many applicants were self-employed and were not able to entirely control their own commitments.

## **5.2. Notable successes**

- 1) The integrity of the partnership remains positive
- 2) Interest in attendance at the two day knowledge and skills training courses was high. By re-directing funds we were able to put a higher number of people through this aspect of the programme than originally anticipated.
- 3) Where the project plans remained unchanged, key performance indicators were achieved or exceeded.

Kevin Ball

Senior Consultant & Project Lead

On Behalf of the Improving the quality of children's serious case reviews programme

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014