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COMMAND BRIEF

School Children's Visits overseas survey, February 2014

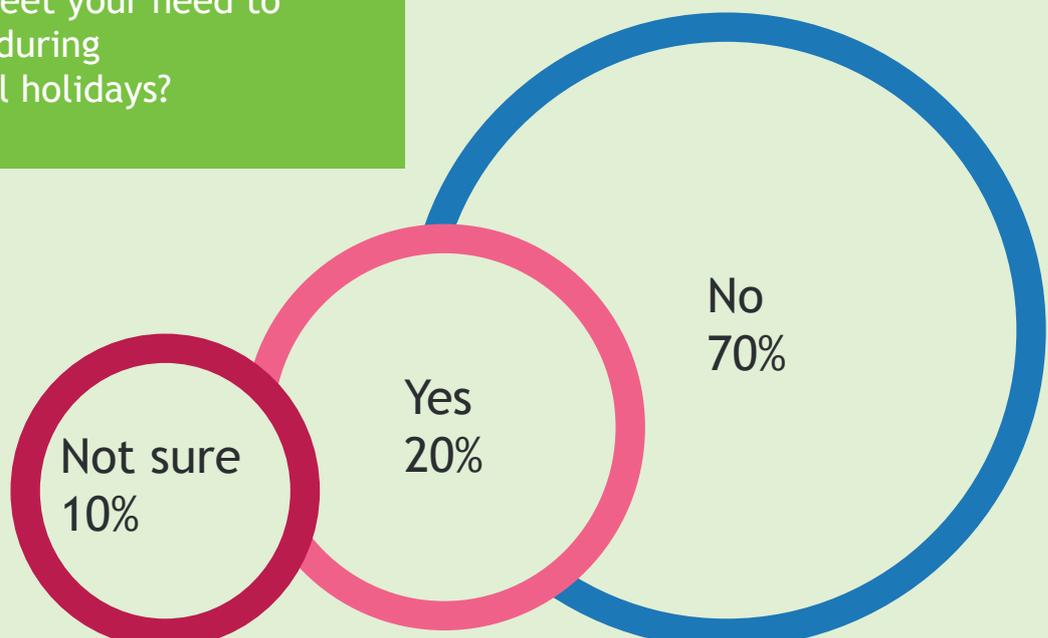
The title 'School Children's Visits' fails to grasp the fact that children are coming HOME. It is not a visit, it is where they live.

Introduction

The aim of School Children's Visits (SCVs) is to contribute towards the cost of reuniting children of Service personnel with their parents at their duty station during some school holidays. Families posted overseas have told AFF that the current entitlement of three return flights a year is insufficient.

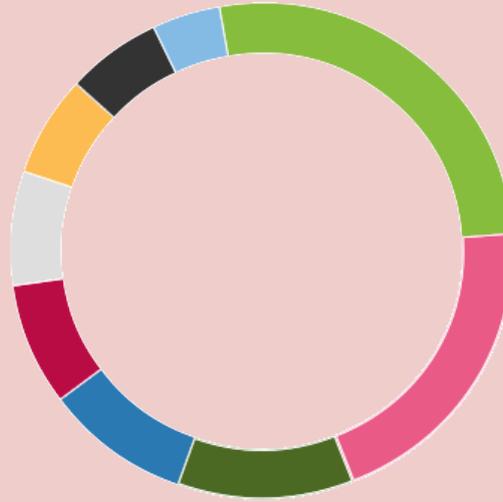
In January 2015, AFF conducted a survey on the SCV allowance. 356 people completed the survey, with 252 respondents currently or previously in receipt of the SCV allowance. Responses were received from 32 countries.

Does/Did the current number of School Children's Visits meet your need to provide childcare during all the main school holidays?
Respondents 235



How much does/did this additional travel cost your family per year?

£2,000+	62
£1,000-£1,500	43
£1,501-£2,000	35
£801-£1,000	31
£601-£800	27
£401-£600	15
N/A	8
£201-£400	7
£0-£200	3



88% of families have had to pay for additional flights to enable their children to visit them overseas.



89% of families have had to pay for additional flights to return to the UK to see their children.

SCV needs to cover half term holidays

- 70% of families surveyed believe that SCV should cover all the main school holidays, including half terms
- Modern boarding schools usually have a two-week half term in autumn and a week in spring and summer
- Extended family and friends' help will already have been used to cover exeat weekends where school accommodation is not provided
- Not every Service family has extended family or friends in the UK to care for their children
- Half term provides crucial family time together for children separated from parents every weekend and evening
- Many families considered that they already contribute significantly financially due to claim limits and cost of transfers, combined with cuts or freezes in Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) and the potential loss of a second income

“The children want to come home at the half terms

SCV is now out of step with boarding school life.”

The issues

- Children's visits home should be a nil cost to the family
- The cost of the transfer service to enable the children to travel to the airport can be very high, especially if the children are at different schools and require taxis
- The maximum claim ceiling is set so low that the amount claimed often falls far short of the actual cost of the journey

“Getting my son to the airport is almost as expensive as the flight sometimes”

“Although it is a personal choice to send your children to boarding school, it is not always a personal choice to be posted abroad.”

Would you hesitate to undertake an/another overseas posting due to the number of SCV flights currently available? Respondents 289



57% Yes

24% Don't know

19% No

What do our families want?

- Change the allowance to a fixed fee rather than number of flights, so that families can budget accordingly and choose when and how to travel.
- Consider covering exeat weekends when children are not allowed to stay in school and school events which parents are required to attend.
- Take into account where parents are assigned overseas, as the allowance should reflect the costs and travel options available to families.
- Consider increasing the allowance to allow more journeys from the overseas posting to the UK for the parents to visit the children or accompany them home.
- Allow the transfer of the annual Get You Home (Overseas) GYH(O) flights between the Service person and their spouse.

“ALL our LOA goes towards flights for the children”

“We are getting into debt just because of the cost of seeing our children. I would discourage my husband from getting another overseas posting”

Flights for university students

Respondents also commented on flights for full-time university students. AFF recognises that whilst the annual entitlement to one return flight has been re-instated, many need student flights to cover the holidays as students only have accommodation in term time.

AFF View

AFF would like to see the SCV allowance reviewed in order to recognise modern boarding school life, which is based around frequent contact with parents. Families assigned overseas are considerably disadvantaged by their location and are incurring substantial financial costs in order to see their children. AFF considers that the current provision of three return SCV flights per year is insufficient and asks that the provision is doubled to six return flights. The comments that have been provided about children returning home to see their parents suggests that the allowance should be retitled and AFF suggests School Children's Travel.

Recommendations

- Double the current entitlement from 3 return flights per year to 6
- Cover all the travel costs associated with a journey, including transfers
- Permit the reversal of travel, so that parents can visit children in the UK if the journey involves long haul flights
- Consider changing the allowance to a fixed fee so that families can budget accordingly, choosing when and how to travel
- Review the title of the allowance, so that it reflects modern boarding school life

A full report is available from Julie Lowe, AFF Overseas Director, at overseas@aff.org.uk