

Biennial Conference 2023

Newsletter

The Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum



FANDF

Giving a voice to Forces families with additional needs and disabilities

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Chair's welcome

Firstly, for those of you who were not in attendance at this year's conference, which took place on the 12th June 2023, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Stephanie Quintrell and some of you will recognise me from previous FANDF events, as I have been a committee member since 2020. Our biennial conference also plays host to the committee hand over from the current Chair and Vice Chair to the new committee members stepping into those roles. I am delighted to introduce myself as the new FANDF Chair and am thoroughly looking forward to fulfilling this role over the next two years.

I think it would be useful to give a little insight into mine and my family's life, which will hopefully allow you to understand why I feel in the best position to take on my new role. As a disabled adult who is dependent on a wheelchair full time, I have the unique insight into what life looks like as a disabled person 'behind the wire'. I have been met with many challenges since becoming unwell and disabled 4 years ago and continue to fight for disabled access both on the barracks we live on and also out in the wider community. I am married to a soldier serving in the REME and we have a 6-year-old son, who lives with complex additional needs. We are currently going through the diagnosis process with him and have faced a range of very different challenges over the last few years. Navigating our way through the EHCP process, the NHS paediatric system, an unsuitable school placement and all the while being a serving military family, has truly been eye-opening to the struggles of Armed Forces families living and managing with physical disability, additional needs, chronic health conditions and mental health illness.

I have a true passion and drive to make a difference to other military families in whatever way I can, and I hope to see real progress over the next few years in many areas. Just from speaking with a number of professionals at the conference, I am already feeling excited for the change they are striving to bring about. I hope that come the next

FANDF conference, we will look back at this time and recognise how much things have changed for military families. Of course, I am not so naive to think that a few great presentations and promised solutions are what it will take to improve lives as is needed, but I am hopeful and optimistic.

You will find a conference report on the next page. Thank you to those of you who were able to attend, our conferences are only ever as successful as they are because of the people in the room. I really enjoyed seeing so many faces, both familiar and new, and am looking forward to meeting more of you at future events. The committee will continue to hold regular meetings and always value any feedback you may have, so that we can pass this on to the various subject matter experts from several MoD agencies that attend our meetings. So please do keep your comments coming, either via SSAFA's Additional Needs and Disability Advisor on anda@ssafa.org.uk, or alternatively directly via our Facebook page [@ForcesANDF](https://www.facebook.com/ForcesANDF).

A special thank you needs to go to FANDF committee member Iza Gill as we wave her goodbye, due to her Husband retiring from the Armed Forces. After many years sitting on the committee, including a term as FANDF Chair, Iza will most definitely be missed by the rest of the committee and the FANDF membership.

Our previous Chair Alan Bowie has left big shoes for me to fill, but with the support of the committee and Karen Ross, who is going to continue in her role of Vice Chair, I am confident that I will be able to lead the committee and our members successfully over these next few years.

All the best

Stephanie Quintrell
FANDF Chair

Biennial Conference Report 2023

The FANDF committee were thrilled to welcome 100 delegates back to MoD main building in London on Monday 12th June for our biennial FANDF conference. Since the last conference in October 2021, our membership has increased by 323 members to date, which was evident by the full room of guests for this year's conference. This brings our total membership to 745, with that number continuing to rise. Following on from our last conference, which was held in the Union Jack Club (UJC), it was great to be back in the MoD building, even with some additional challenges to deal with on the day! A rather hot and somewhat uncomfortable day was had by all due to an air conditioning issue within the building, but we adapted and showed definite resilience by everyone sticking with it until the end of the program.

With over just short of 60 guests joining us at the UJC for the pre-conference evening reception, it was a great way to start the event. A three course meal followed a light-hearted and fun game of table bingo to 'break the ice' and it certainly did that! We had guests sharing secret tattoos, touching their nose with their tongue, and competing for the prize of most 'strange or bizarre fact about another guest'. It is fair to say there were laughs coming from all around the room, which combined with the rather hot weather-meant there was no ice left to break! It is always great for the committee to have the opportunity to talk with FANDF members and we enjoy sharing our lived experience with others and hearing theirs too.

On what was a very sunny Monday morning, we all headed to MoD main building to begin the conference. After the somewhat slow but absolutely essential process of signing guests into the building, we were escorted by the very helpful staff to the beautiful high glass ceilinged room to begin the day. Our theme for this year was 'transition' and we had a great variety of speakers throughout the day, touching on various areas this relates to.

Rear Admiral Phil Hally, who is the Chief of Defence People was first to speak after Alan Bowie, FANDF Chair at the time, officially opened the conference. After an update, Phil then took questions and comments from a number of delegates around the room.



Admiral Phil Hally



A welcome from Alan Bowie, FANDF Chair and Master of Ceremonies

Rebecca Beevor from the MoD Families Policy team kicked off the presentations by updating us on the work she has been doing since taking on her new role in January this year. With the Families Policy team sitting within Armed Forces Families & Safeguarding (AFFS), it was really positive to hear what areas they are currently focusing their time on. With Rebecca showing statistics relating to those Serving with caring responsibilities, it was a stark reminder of how many military families have an additional need and who require more support. Rebecca talked about her teams next steps, which largely focus around ensuring the UK Armed Forces Carers Statement of Intent is put into action.

See Rebecca's presentation slides here: [Rebecca Beevor, MOD Families Policy Team](#)

Mark Mitchell from the Covenant Team with the Ministry of Defence gave delegates some interesting information about what the Armed Forces Covenant is, and explained it's use in relation to education, housing, and healthcare. All of these topics are areas which cause struggles for our families living with an additional need or disability, so it was great to hear some examples of where the covenant can be helpful due to its legal duty. Mark suggested the use of the following website when looking at the covenant: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/armed-forces-covenant-duty-toolkit/>

See Mark's presentation slides here: [Mark Mitchell, The Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty](#)

We were pleased to welcome Richard Swarbrick next to the stage, who is Head of Policy and Partnerships for NHS England. Richard spoke passionately about the forthcoming developments for Armed Forces health, which include expanding support for those who are transitioning from serving to civilian life. Richard was happy to answer questions from delegates both after his presentation and at our Q & A panel towards the end of the day.

See Richards's presentation slides here: [Richard Swarbrick, Supporting the Armed Forces Community - The NHS Perspective](#)

Following nicely on from Richard, with the focus staying on healthcare was Kate Parkin, Director of NHS Armed Forces Community, NHS Sussex and NHS Kent & Medway. Kate discussed areas that are covered within the 'single point of contact' and why this approach is so necessary, especially for those families living with an additional need or disability.

See Kate's presentation slides here: [Kate Parkin, Single Point of Contact in Action](#)

Moving on from healthcare and focussing on the legal aspects of education for children and young adults living with SEN, meant we heard from Esther Salter next, who is an Associate Solicitor specialising in Education Law. Esther gave us insight into the EHCP process and legal requirements, transitioning within education due to military families regularly moving, and signposted delegates to where we can go if support is needed.

See Esther's presentation slides here: [Esther Salter, SEND Transitions - Know Your Rights](#)



Keeping with the education theme meant we heard from Ed Harris and Russell Collier next, from the Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding (AFFS), sitting within the Defence People Team. Ed started the presentation by updating the room on what changes have been seen since we last saw him at the FANDF conference in October 2021. It was good to hear about the DfE SEND Review, the development of joint DfE/MOD guidance for children of Armed Forces families, the duty of due regard - AFC legislation and the development of the Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3), managed by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. We were given some useful information around individuals who have an EHCP in place who are required to move out of the country for postings with their Serving person, and the difficulties they are likely to face when returning from overseas postings. Ed told us about a recent experience a family is having with such a problem, which sadly seemed to resonate with many of FANDF's members around the room. We were reminded that we must keep pushing forward with the local authority.

See Ed's and Russell's presentation slides here: [Ed Harris and Russell Collier, Educational Transitions for Armed forces students with higher tariff SEND](#)

As we neared the end of what had been a truly interesting and informative day, we listened to Louise Briggs from OIC Defence Transition Services and Mell Duncan from Veterans Welfare Service. They talked about what the organisation does, who they support and what assistance can be offered. We heard details on the medical discharge process and were signposted on where to go.

See Louise's and Mell's presentation slides here: [Louise Briggs and Mell Duncan, Veterans Services](#)

Helen Helliwell, Director for Armed Forces People Policy, was our final speaker for the day and talked with passion about FANDF and how useful the conference has been to her. Helen was keen to hear comments and questions from members, so she can use that lived experience to support her work to ensure military families see positive change in the future and receive the right support.

We were joined on the day by a number of stall holders representing organisations that support our military families in various ways. With thanks to the following who attended:

- **Naval Families Federation (NFF)**
- **Army Families Federation (AFF)**
- **Chronic Conditions and Disability in Defence (CANDiD)**
- **Military Wives Choir (MWC)**
- **SSAFA Mentoring Service**
- **Education Advisory Team (EAT) UK**
- **Naval Children's Charity**
- **DWP Armed Forces Champion**



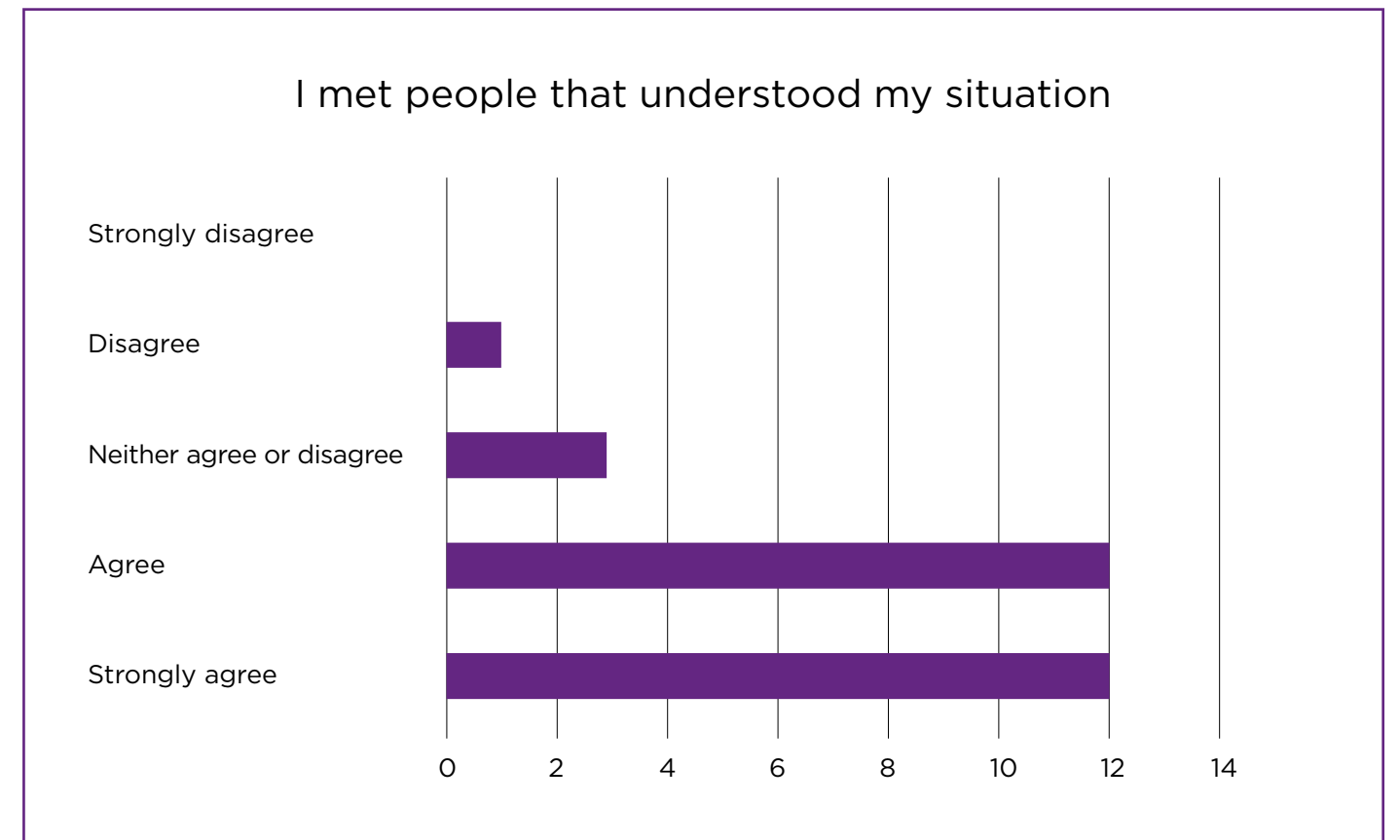
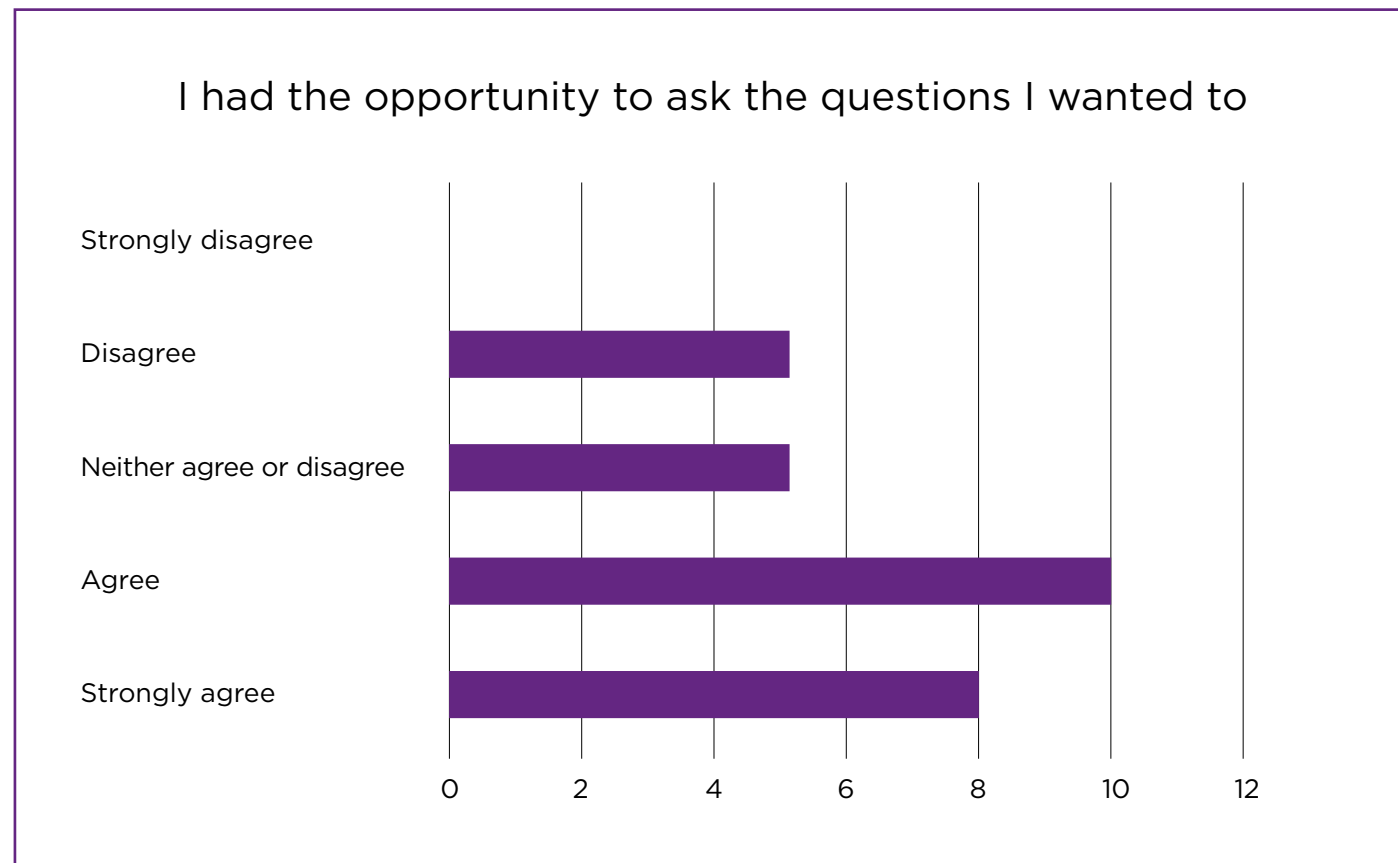
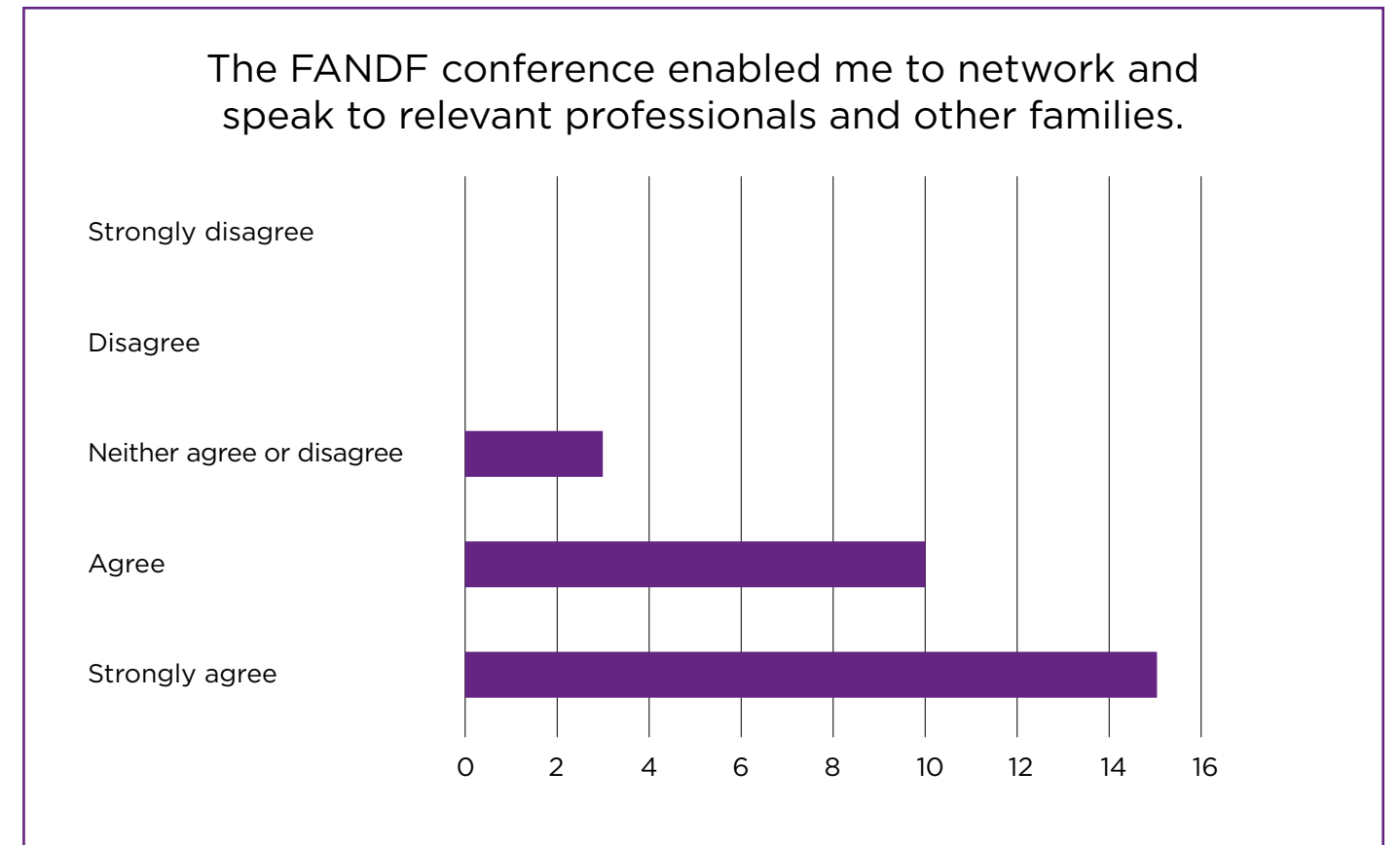
The FANDF committee wouldn't be able to host the biennial conference without the fantastic support of SSAFA, and in particular Fran Robinson and Lucy White, who work hard throughout the year to facilitate the committee to meet regularly and run both the conference and our smaller outreach events. The committee look forward to our next conference which will take place in 2025.



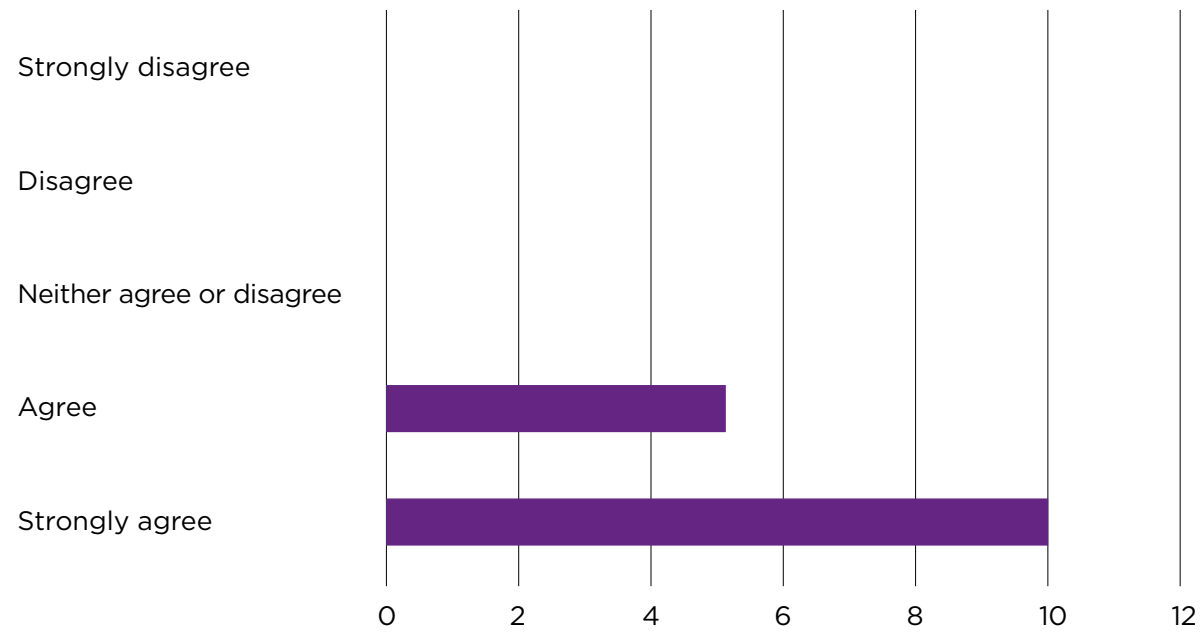
FANDF Biennial Conference Feedback

- **100** delegates attended the conference
- **32** attendees were either interested professionals, stall holders or guest speakers.
- **68** attendees were families and individuals with an additional need/disability or who had a dependent with an additional need/disability.
- **57** delegates attended the 'meet and greet' evening at the Union Jack Club on Sunday 11 June.

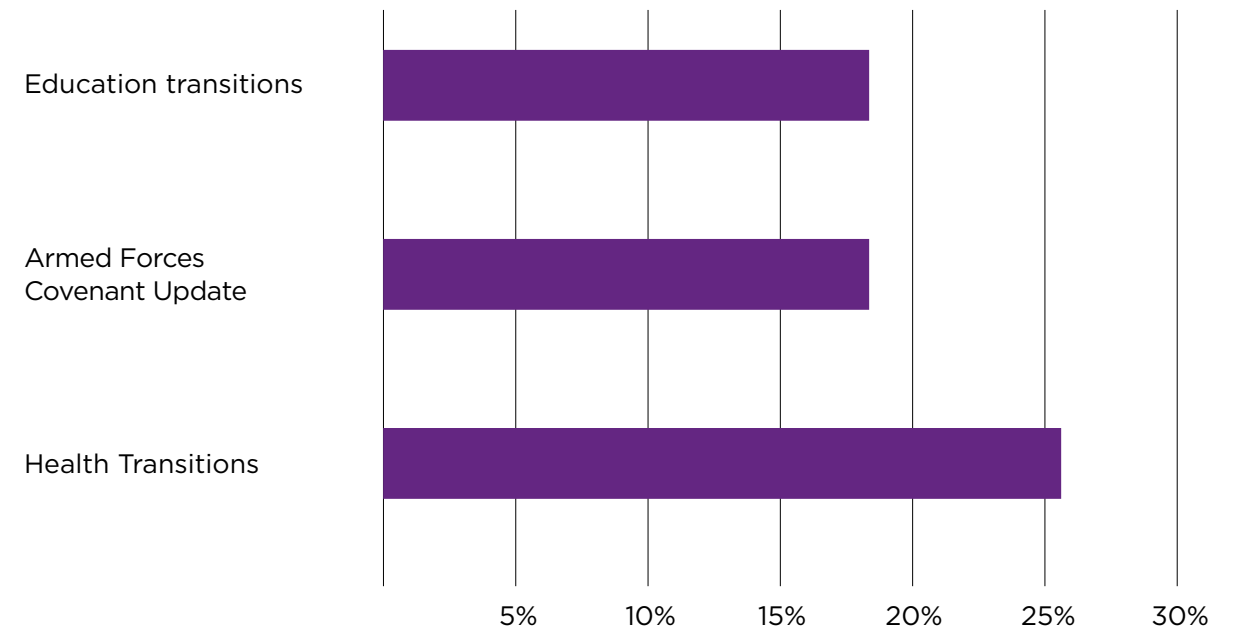
We asked those that attended to rate the following statements, with varying results.



The 'meet and greet' evening meal was a good opportunity to meet other delegates and the FANDF Committee.

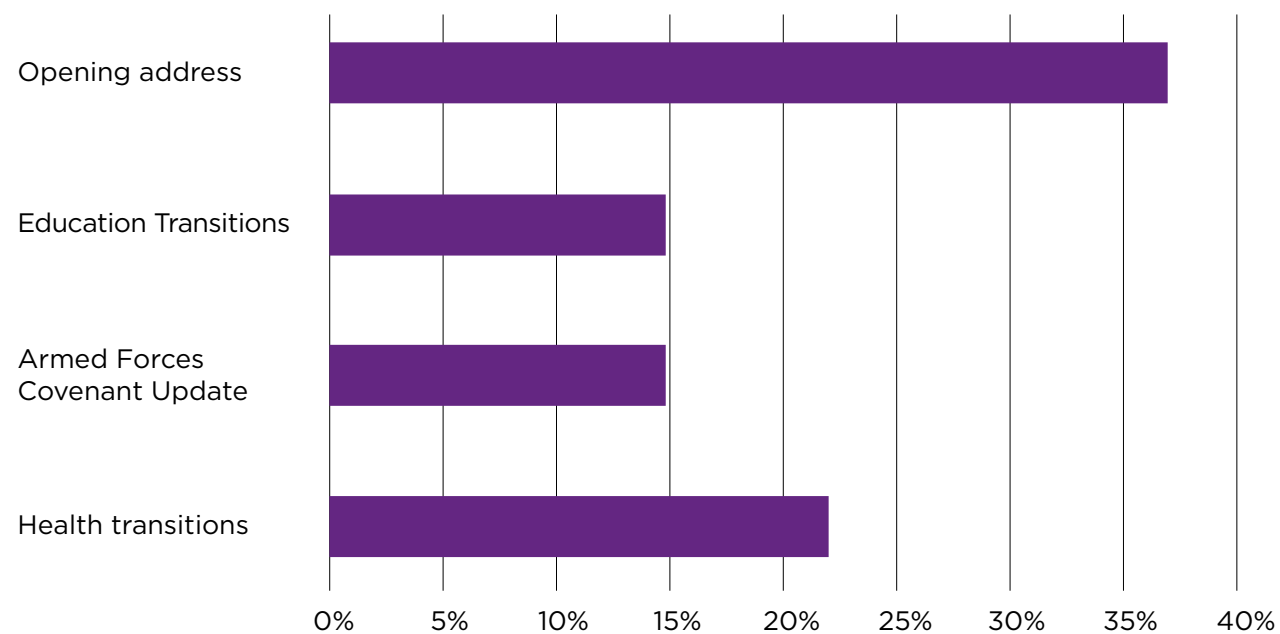


Which speakers/presenters did you find most interesting or valuable during the FANDF conferences? Second choice

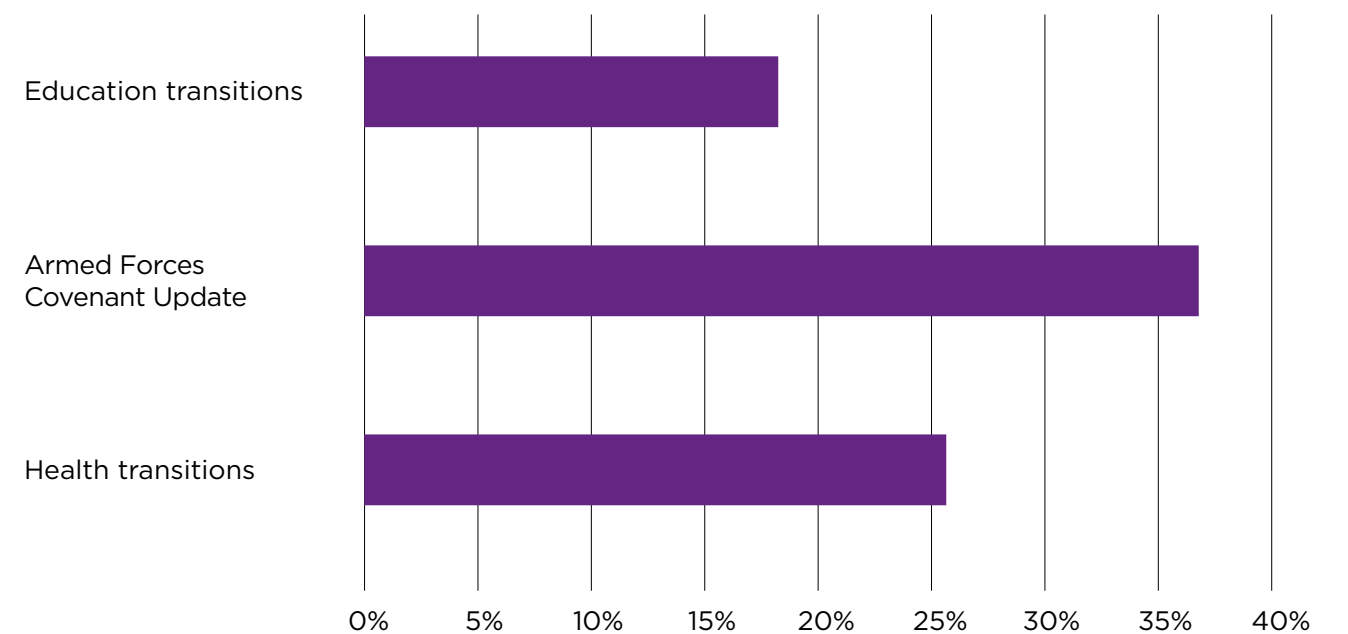


We also asked attendees to rank which presentations they found most valuable. Our results show that the majority of those that provided feedback found the opening address from Rear Admiral Phil Hally, Chief of Defence People most insightful.

Which speakers/presenters did you find most interesting or valuable during the FANDF conferences? First choice



Which speakers/presenters did you find most interesting or valuable during the FANDF conferences? Third choice





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