



Family Court Section 2016 – Jay Barlow Writes

Family Court Section Meeting and AGM Round Up

Welcome to all Cafcass members to a new Napo committee year!! The Family Court Section had a quorate and very positive Section Annual General Meeting on 15th October at Eastbourne as part of the main Napo AGM.

The Section meeting was addressed by Ian Lawrence (General Secretary), Steve Hornby and Nicki Kenney (Co-chairs of the Section), Dean Rogers (Assistant General Secretary) and by “yours truly”.

Annual reports from the Section Executive Committee (SEC) and the Section Officers were considered and accepted by the meeting and Officers were elected onto the SEC for the forthcoming year.

Members were also elected onto all the Family Court Section committees, including the Editorial Board of the Family Court Journal. All seats have been filled on the Family Court (professional) Committee.

There are only two vacancies to fill on the Cafcass Negotiating Committee. These are reserved for a Service Manager and for an Enhanced Practitioner. If members at these grades are interested in these seats please put yourselves forward and you will be made very welcome and given any support you may need for the role.

It is important that the seats are filled and the views and needs of these grades are kept on the agenda. Office Contacts and Health and Safety reps are in place in many offices but there are gaps. Again, if you are interested in this please make yourself known to us.



FCS Professional Issues

Since the section AGM where we debated and passed four motions, we have been very busy pursuing them. One was about the number of repeat applications and the number of families known to us, the Police and Children’s Services. The motion instructed the Family Court Committee to open discussion with Cafcass regarding the collection of statistics so that the information may be used to develop practice to better protect the children (affected by this) whom we seek to safeguard. It will be interesting to consider

the impact on repeat applications of the Child Arrangements Programme and the speedy movement of children's cases through the Family Courts.

A motion on Cafcass Pilot Schemes instructed the Cafcass Negotiating Committee to request full information about these with a view to negotiating a safe and manageable workload.

The third motion was about the guidelines with regard to the Attendance Policy. The guidelines instruct staff to contact their line Managers early in the morning on each day that they are off sick. This was not properly in line with what the policy says. This has since been discussed with management and an agreed change to the wording is awaited to say that negotiation will take place between the staff member and the manager.



Nicki Kenney addresses the AGM

Motion number four was about staff in Cafcass working very long hours and not being able to take time off in lieu as they are too busy. The particular concern is with regard to the amount of unpaid and unrecorded hours that are worked by Family Court Advisers and Service Managers. Cafcass Management have acknowledged the goodwill and hard work of staff following the time recording exercise conducted last year. We will be conducting a survey of members to determine the extent of this issue and follow up the outcome. Please find time (despite your busyness) to respond to this

when it comes as it will inform an absolutely vital piece of work.

FCS make themselves heard at AGM

The motion from the Section on the main AGM agenda was passed. This was about the unfair indefinite detention of immigrants in Britain and we have already lobbied the Family Courts Unions Parliamentary Group about this issue, which can have a massive impact on the wellbeing of children and families.

During the Family Court Section slot in the main Napo AGM we heard from Sian Hawkins from Women's Aid who told us about the campaign they are launching with regard to domestic violence and Contact Orders. This issue was also firmly on the agenda at the Family Court Unions Parliamentary Group meeting yesterday. Watch this space.

Family Court Section Conference 2016

The three Family Court Section committees have already met for a two day strategic planning session where we looked at the work that the committees have ahead of them over the next year.

This will include the Family Court Section professional conference which is to be held on 26th May 2016. The theme is to be work with vulnerable children and young people and planning is already underway.

We want this to be as (or even more) successful as last year's event, and it should also be a very positive aid to the recruitment of new members. It is very important that we remember that Napo is more than a Trade Union. It is also our Professional Association.

Family Court Journal Re-Launched

It was also fantastic to see the Family Court Professional Journal re-launched and sent to members in December.

This is an excellent and fascinating read. Putting together a credible professional journal is no easy task and after a production gap I'm delighted that Napo are again able to provide such a useful contribution to professional debate and discussion.

Planning for the production of the next Journal is already under way and contributions, thoughts, ideas and feedback are very welcome. Please email either info@napo.org.uk for forwarding to the editorial team or contact the editors directly – their details are inside the Journal.

Improving our offer for members!

The Journal is just a part of what Napo membership offers on top of the usual employment support and protection. In December, Napo conducted an FCS membership customer survey. This showed high levels of satisfaction with the individual support Napo offers members who are in difficulty, and also highlighted how much members value the professional work that Napo does, including highlighting challenges for staff and users to parliamentarians. Now here else is providing that independent, professional voice for staff and the service.

However, the survey also provided interesting and helpful insights into how Napo can improve communications with members, involve you more, and provide even better value for money by broadening our offer and reviewing price.

This work is already underway. Following a review, Napo is working towards the launching a new Member Benefits package, giving access to a much greater range of offers and support in a more accessible way – our aim being to help your Napo membership pay for itself whilst providing access to top quality non-employment related advice, support and services.

Reduce your Subs by Direct Debit

At the AGM members also approved subscription reductions for members who switch to paying by Direct Debit and for all new members who join via the online DD application process. The savings can be **as much as £50.40p/a**. To access the savings go to www.napo.org.uk

As members of a Professional Association you can also claim tax relief from your subs, so don't forget to claim yours!!! Again information is available from our website or by calling Napo HQ.

We are looking to recruit as many new members to Napo as we can and to retain those we already have. Our impact in negotiations with Cafcass and our strength as a professional voice for the service is linked to how many members we speak for. So if you know a colleague who isn't a member, share this update and encourage them to join today!



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FCS NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE

Business Support Review

On 21st January, Napo Assistant General Secretary, Dean Rogers met with James Hyde and key managers from CAF/CASS Business Services to discuss their planned review. This could involve staff reductions. Dean said, "It's important that staff in this area are represented and now they have a union battling in their best interests."

The meeting was constructive, open and honest which is a good start. Napo will be making sure that every effort is made to minimize job losses and prevent compulsory redundancies. At the same time we'll be working hard to make sure that on-going support is adequate and that there is scope to meet ever shifting need. Business support isn't an add on but a critical part of what makes Cafcass effective."

Workload Weighting

Napo representatives, in particular Nicki Kenney and Napo Officer Sarah Friday, have been leading our campaign to make sure that workloads remain at safe levels. At our AGM we passed motions recognising the serious levels of TOIL that staff were working. By constantly monitoring this issue, ensuring we have access to regular data, and by helping to influence how workloads are assessed within the Workload Weighting Tools, Napo is ensuring this remains a central HR priority and is holding Cafcass senior management to account.

This work is also informing our Parliamentary lobbying. At the meeting of the Family Court Union parliamentary Group, attended by MPs, Napo raised how increased numbers of private and family law cases, combined with new working practices are pushing delivery towards the margins of what is safe.

Napo AGS, Dean Rogers said, "We are worried by several initiatives in the Spending Review and how they could impact upon Cafcass and the vital work it does. Firstly, by being a new member of the MOJ family it could get caught up in the huge cuts target set in the review. Secondly, a Treasury review of sickness absence sends an ominous sign about continued support for the popular and successful Health and Well-Being Programme which would be self-defeating. Then professionally, wishful thinking to facilitate spreadsheets could have a dramatic human cost if cases rise, repeat applications aren't recognized and recorded and access issues prompted by legal aid cuts and court closures see families opt-out of the system."

More news about FCS issues will be issued as soon as it becomes available.

Your Voice in Westminster

Also at this meeting, chaired by Liz Saville-Roberts MP, Napo raised our involvement supporting the Women's Aid campaign for greater recognition and support around domestic violence in courts; and concerns about Cafcass being an accidental victim in the spending review given that Cafcass still hasn't had its budget settlement for 2016-19.

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