

School Absenteeism: Universal Problem Seeks Gold Standard Solutions

12 – 16 March @ Snellius

Science:

1. *A concise version of the description and aims of the workshop, including what were the most important scientific questions motivating the workshop (about 5 lines).*

The workshop brought together 21 international academics and practitioners focused on the thorny problem of school absenteeism. In the decades leading up to this workshop, there was a profound lack of consensus about how to conceptualize school attendance problems (SAPs), which hindered: (a) communication about SAPs, and (b) the comparison and synthesis of research results derived from different countries. The main aim was to achieve consensus on best practices for conceptualizing SAPs and identifying at-risk youth.

2. *Is a tangible outcome of the workshop expected? If so, please mention – even if it is, as yet, at the level of intention.*

Three tangible outcomes were achieved. First, during the workshop participants started work on a position paper that provides consensus on the operationalization of SAPs and guidance on how to differentiate between types of SAPs. The aim is for the paper to be ready for submission within six months after the workshop. Second, we established the International Network for School Attendance (INSA). INSA will steer the evolution, evaluation, and dissemination of interventions for SAPs, including conferences and special issues in scientific journals. There is a commitment to meet yearly. Digital platforms will be used in between yearly meetings, to foster the dissemination of resources and literature, and to provide supervision to younger academics and practitioners. Third, a special issue of *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY* will focus on school attendance problems, drawing on contributions from numerous participants at the workshop.

3. *Where there any developments which could, already, be termed a (beginning) scientific breakthrough? If yes, please tell about it shortly.*

The 21 participants were unanimous in their decision to simplify the process of operationalizing problematic absenteeism, so that stakeholders (e.g., schools, parents, researchers) can efficiently identify youth and families in need of support. Prior to the workshop, most authors and practitioners adhered to a clumsy process that required differentiation between 'justified' and 'unjustified' absenteeism. This distinction is no longer regarded as helpful.

4. *Did you, or to your knowledge any of the participants, experience notable "Aha" moments (for instance, separate scientific communities realizing that they have significantly more in common than they had thought)?*

Two process-related experiences are noteworthy. First, when the group broke into smaller working parties to discuss and resolve an issue, we found that all small groups independently converged on the same solutions for the issue. Second, many participants had had the sense that they were

working on their own in this challenging field of attendance problems. The shared week together offered a highly valued sense of support and collaboration.

Organization/Format:

5. *How did you experience the format of the workshop (the structure of the program, lectures vs discussion time etc.)? Did you try something new (different kind of discussions for instance)? If so, how did it work out? Would you do it again or advise it to others?*

Participants expressed much appreciation for the structure of the workshop and the lead-up to the workshop. Specifically, they noted value in the pre-planning (e.g., personal introductions to each other via the Communication Platform; contributing feedback on the theme of the workshop; uploading and reading 'must read' and 'like you to read' articles submitted by everyone), as well as the implementation of the workshop itself (ice-breaker to quickly build rapport; summaries of the preceding day, during the 'transition time' each morning; structure of each day; link between the activities of each day, and the broader aims of the workshop). There was value in having small amounts of time dedicated to presentations, and a larger amount of time dedicated to small and large group discussion. This served our purposes well (i.e., reaching consensus).

6. *Other comments, suggestions and/or criticism for the Lorentz Center, the scientific advisory boards and/or future organizers.*

The Organizing Committee and the participants had high praise for the staff from the Lorentz Center. In particular, Carey Batenburg was constantly willing and able to help us during the many months of planning, and during the workshop week itself; it was a great pleasure to work with her.

If in the coming years, papers are published which you believe owe significantly to your workshop, please notify us. We find that highly gratifying fruits of our work and it is naturally desirable for fundraising.

Organizers:

David Heyne (Universiteit Leiden, the Netherlands)
Carolyn Gentle-Genitty (IU School, United States)
Malin Gren Landell (Linköping University, Sweden)
Glenn Melvin (Monash University, Australia)
Ken Reid (Swansea University, United Kingdom)