

# Early Experiences of Implementing Sure Start

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Sure Start is a cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. It aims to improve the health and well-being of families and young children under 4, particularly those who are disadvantaged, so that children have greater opportunity to flourish when they go to school. This is a summary from the first national evaluation report on early experiences of implementing Sure Start programmes, based on a survey of 118 Round 1 and 2 programme managers.

## Key Findings

- The level of parental involvement in Sure Start programmes is generally high, with an average of five parents represented on the management board of each programme.
- These parents are overwhelmingly mothers although almost half of programmes do have fathers on the management board.
- Almost all management boards have representatives from the main statutory agencies – health, education and social services departments, and on average 3 representatives from the voluntary sector.
- On average six voluntary agencies are involved in either the management of the programme or the delivery of services.
- Joined up working is challenging and there is still a long way to go on this although progress is being made.
- There is a high level of interaction between Sure Start and other Government initiatives.
- Sure Start programmes are becoming significant employers in their area, employing professionals and members of the local community on a full, part time or sessional basis.
- Most programmes have up to twenty volunteers working in the programme.
- Sure Start programmes are making good use of multi-disciplinary workers as well as existing health and social care professionals, particularly in outreach and home visiting activities.
- Three quarters of programmes are providing new childcare places in either crèche, childminder or group settings.
- 90% of programmes have, or are in the process of making, links with local educational institutions to encourage parents to take up training or education.
- There is considerable variation in the funding of programmes with some spending up to six times more per child than the lowest spending programmes.
- Programmes are making progress towards ensuring families know about Sure Start and have access to services, although this is very challenging and often time consuming, particularly in making sure all groups are encouraged to make use of services.
- It is taking longer than expected for programmes to implement their Sure Start programmes and to deliver a full range of services.

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# Early Experiences of Implementation

## Background

Sure Start is delivered through community based local programmes containing between 400 to 800 children under 4. The first 260 programmes were rolled out in stages – each ‘round’ has approximately 60-70 programmes.

A comprehensive national evaluation will assess the impact, implementation and cost effectiveness of Sure Start. The study will analyse how Sure Start has been set up and delivered, what services are provided and how these are organised locally. It will also look at how far Sure Start has re-shaped or added value to existing service provision. The Implementation Study has three interlinked elements: a survey of all 260 round 1-4 Sure Start programme managers, administered three times at annual intervals, 26 in-depth case studies, and a series of themed evaluations.

## Aims of the survey

The main aim of the survey was to ask programme managers about their experiences of setting up and implementing a local Sure Start programme and to monitor the developing nature and organisation of the programmes over time. In addition, the survey aimed to collect information on the design, policy and practices of Sure Start programmes in order to look at the different types of programmes that are emerging and to develop indicators of effective practice.

## Methods

A postal survey was administered to all 128 programme managers in round 1 and 2 programmes in August 2001. A 92% response rate was achieved.

## Main findings

Five core areas were explored in the survey – management and governance, staffing, facilitating access to services, core services provided and inherited and financial resources.

## Management and Governance

### Partnerships

Sure Start partnerships have been set up in different ways across programmes. It is most likely that a representative from a statutory or voluntary agency will Chair the partnership but alternatively some programmes have chosen a local councillor, a parent or other member of the community. Approximately one-tenth of programmes have appointed a parent-user (a parent with a child under 4) as Chair. 58% of programmes rotate this post and 23% have, or are thinking of, constituting their partnership as an independent legal entity.

### Chair of Partnership

	Round 1 n=55 %	Round 2 n=63 %	Round 3 n=118 %
Statutory Agency	38	44	42
Voluntary Agency	16	29	23
Elected member	15	8	11
Parent – user	9	10	9
Member of the Community	9	3	6
Independent	9	3	6
Other	4	3	3
Private Sector	0	0	0

### Management

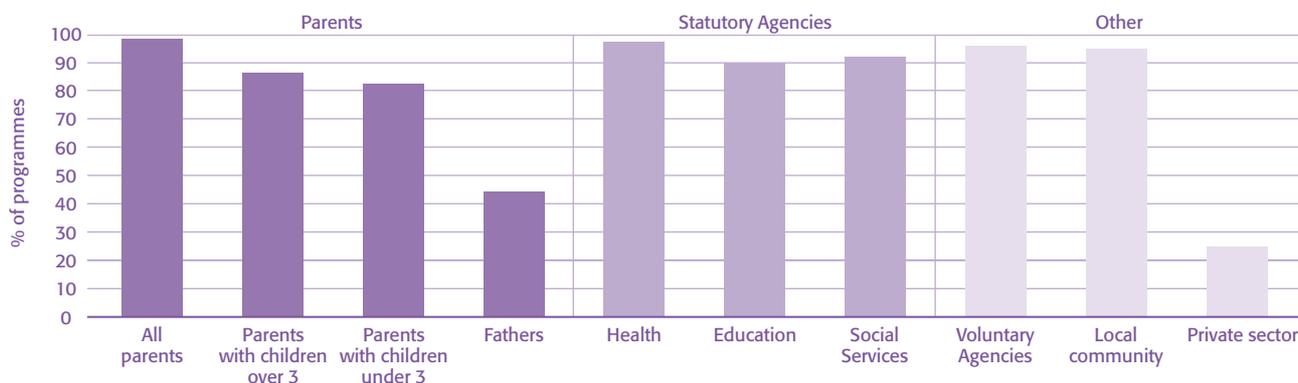
Programmes vary in how they set up their management boards and systems for ensuring parent representation.

There is broad representation in the management structures of most programmes, with the main statutory agencies, voluntary sector interests, members of the local community and parents represented.

### Parental involvement in management and delivery

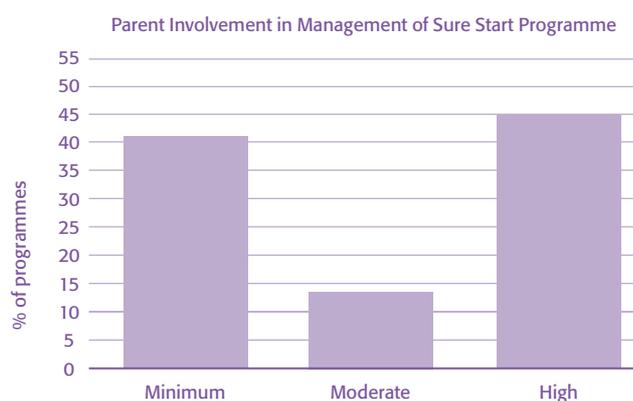
The level of parental involvement in Sure Start is generally high, with parents contributing to the management of every programme but one. In most programmes at least two parents

Table 1: Representation in the Management of Sure Start Programmes

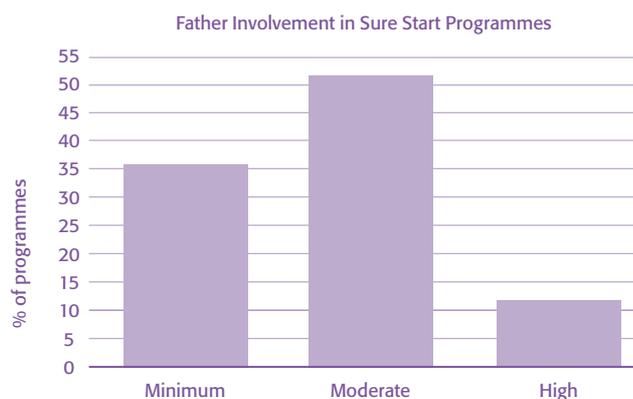


# ting Sure Start

contributed to management and on average five did. These were overwhelmingly mothers rather than fathers, although almost half of programmes do have fathers on the management board. The survey showed that 45% of programmes rated 'high' on a scale of parent involvement in management, although 41% scored 'low' on this scale.



Although 64% of programmes scored 'moderate' or 'high' on a similar scale looking at the involvement of fathers in the programme, 36% scored 'low' on this scale



Most programmes provide practical support such as childcare and transport, to enable parents to be involved in management meetings, and some provide other types of support such as confidence building courses.

Almost all programmes have parents of children under four working as volunteers in their programme. Most programmes have up to twenty, although some have many more.

### *Involvement of the voluntary sector*

The voluntary sector is well represented in the management of most Sure Start programmes with an average of three representatives in each programme. Only five Sure Start programmes had no voluntary sector representative; interestingly, all of these had high numbers of community representatives.

On average, six voluntary sector agencies were involved in either the management of Sure Start or delivering services.

Table 2 illustrates which voluntary agencies are operating in Sure Start areas and which of these agencies are linking with the Sure Start programme. (See Table 2 below.)

### *Involvement of statutory agencies in programme management*

The main statutory agencies – health, education and social services – are represented in the management of most programmes. Health agencies have the highest number of representatives, with an average of 3 per programme.

There is relatively little involvement of the private sector.

### *Links to other initiatives*

On average, 10 other Government initiatives operate in Sure Start areas, illustrating the complexity of the context in which Sure Start programmes function. There is a high level of interaction between Sure Start and these other initiatives.

Table 2: Voluntary organisations with greatest operating presence in Sure Start areas

Name of organisation	% of programmes where they have an operating presence	% of programmes where they have a link with the organisation
Pre-School Learning Alliance	66	65
Home-Start	63	78
Citizens Advice Bureau	63	34
National Childminding Association	53	54
National Portage Association	43	67
Women's Aid	41	44
NSPCC	34	35
National Childbirth Trust	26	29
NCH Action for Children	26	61
Barnardos	28	46
Children's Society	20	44

Programmes make operational links with 6 of these other initiatives, on average, 2 of which contribute resources.

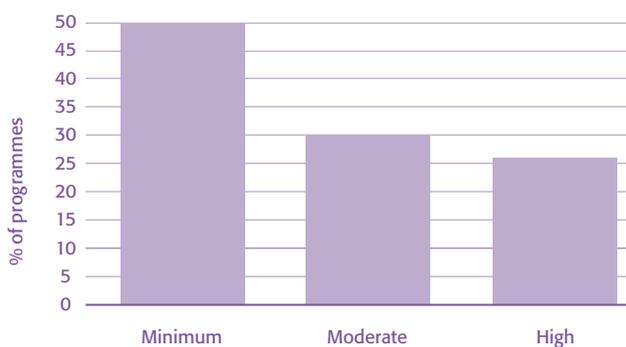
### Working in partnership

Working in multi-agency partnerships, developing collaborative relationships and 'joining up' with partners and other relevant groups is one of the most important, albeit challenging and time-consuming tasks facing programme managers.

The survey found that, although a quarter of programmes are finding ways to join up with their partners, most programmes, at this early stage, still have a long way to go.

Table 4 shows how programmes scored in terms of being 'joined-up'.

Table 4: Being 'Joined Up'



An example of where Sure Start programmes are embracing the idea of joined-up working is by conducting joint staff training and holding meetings for all their staff, professionals, practitioners and parents, together.

Sure Start programmes are becoming significant employers in their area, employing both professionals and members of the local community.

Although some programmes are working towards ensuring their staff's ethnic profile compliments their populations' ethnic characteristics, some still have considerable work to do in increasing the number of ethnic minority representatives among staff. In all communities, whether predominantly white, black or Asian, white staff continue to out number staff drawn from other ethnic minority groups. Only 62% of programmes have a system in place to monitor the ethnicity of their staff.

### Volunteers

Volunteers are an important resource in terms of delivering services in almost all Sure Start programmes, though the number of volunteers varies widely. In those programmes using volunteers, the average voluntary input is 98 hours per week, which is equivalent to almost three full time staff weeks.

## Facilitating Access

There is a diverse pattern of effort and provision being made in order to maximise access to Sure Start services. This diversity applies right through from publicising the programme, to engaging hard to reach groups and tailoring the provision of service delivery to groups with particular needs.

### Publicising Sure Start services

Sure Start programmes are adopting many different ways to publicise their services – on average 16 different methods.

The most popular include social events, written publicity in public places, home visits by health visitors or midwives, local press coverage, through voluntary organisations and parent support groups.

The ethnic diversity of some catchment areas exerts a particular set of pressures on programmes in respect of interpreting and translating publicity or information materials. Programmes do endeavour to make all materials available to all members of the community.

Programmes have devised various ways of discovering where families with young children live, with almost half using health information systems and two thirds using health professionals to introduce families to Sure Start. A fifth of programmes discover where families live themselves, often by knocking on doors.

### Access to services

Health visitors and midwives are extremely important to Sure Start programmes, particularly in terms of making initial contact with families and encouraging them to use services, although programmes are also making good use of community workers, social workers and other Sure Start workers to do this.

The majority of programmes make special provision for hard to reach groups, with particular attention paid to parents under 20, minority ethnic groups, families with literacy problems, fathers, families with mental health problems, traveller's families, refugees and asylum seekers.

## Core Services

Service design and delivery varies across programmes and between various types of services. Round 1 programmes appear further along than round 2 programmes in terms of meeting Sure Start requirements and providing services. However, there is still work to be done in all programmes, particularly in reaching hard to reach groups.

### *Outreach and home visiting*

The size of outreach teams varied enormously across programmes, ranging from 1 to 78 and no 'typical size' emerged, although the average (median) number of outreach staff is 15. Half of programmes had a 'key worker' for families with particular needs.

Programmes' policies on routine home visiting varies. The number of routine home visits planned tends to decrease the older the child gets. Most programmes planned at least one routine visit to children under the age of 12 months with a quarter of programmes providing 2, two thirds planned routine visits to 13-24 month olds, while around a half planned routine visits to 25-48 month olds. Many programmes stated they visited 'as needed' rather than routinely.

### *Supporting parents and families*

Extending existing home visiting and family support services, parenting programmes and drop-in centres, and having a dedicated 'Sure Start Centre' are the main ways in which Sure Start programmes support families. Three quarters of programmes have specific provision for supporting fathers and the majority of programmes (85 per cent) have introduced specific services for families with children with special educational needs or disabilities. Most of these have provided between two and five different services.

Most programmes provide parenting programmes with over half providing specialist parenting programmes for parents with children with disabilities, travellers' families and asylum seeking families.

Most (90 per cent) Sure Start programmes have or are in the process of making links with local educational institutions to encourage and support parents in taking up training or education.

### *Health*

Home visiting, ante-natal services, access to specialists and services for children and parents with special needs are regarded as the most important health services for Sure Start programmes. Virtually all programmes are developing a range of new or extended ante-natal services, including home visits by midwives. Most programmes hold ante-natal clinics and classes in their local area.

The majority of programmes screen new mothers for post-natal depression and provide support for those mothers diagnosed with it. Those that currently did not were still in the planning stages.

Most programmes (89%) provided breastfeeding advice, information and support, again with the remainder planning to do so in the near future.

Smoking cessation and healthy eating advice are highly important aspects of almost every programme.

The majority of programmes (70%) provide home safety equipment to parents, although, less than one half offer home safety checks and 80% do not monitor housing quality.

### *Play, learning and childcare*

The picture of provision of childcare and play and learning services varies considerably between programmes. Some areas may already have a good deal of provision prior to the implementation of Sure Start in the area, while others had very little. Three quarters of programmes are providing new childcare places in either crèche, childminder or group settings. Many programmes are still developing their building so are not yet able to deliver day care although they may be planning to in the future.

The majority of programmes indicated they were setting up between two and nine new play, learning and childcare services.

## **Resources**

The resources available to Sure Start programmes varies considerably. In part, this reflects differences in the number of children and families in the area. However, there is significant variation in the size of grant received and how much programmes are spending on each child. The highest spending programmes are spending six times more per child per full year than the lowest spending programmes. This reinforces the point that Sure Start is not a single, uniform programme and that a range of services are being provided at different levels in different areas.

Programmes have been slower than expected in getting off the ground, which is evident in the proportion of their allocated grants that have been claimed in their first year of operation.

Two-thirds of programmes receive some resources from other Government initiatives, although less than half of programmes received cash resources from other sources.

There is no obligation on Sure Start programmes to seek resources from elsewhere but the extent to which they have secured other resources suggests that programmes are developing good collaborative arrangements with other local initiatives or providers.

## **Conclusions and future challenges**

There is strong evidence that good progress is being made towards developing the kinds of services parents want and need and that parents have a strong voice in shaping. However, the survey also illuminated the many challenges facing Sure Start programmes:

- It is challenging and time consuming to join up and work in partnership with other agencies and providers.
- Working in multi-disciplinary teams is also a challenging task and new to many professionals.
- Sure Start programmes operate in extremely complex areas where many other initiatives operate and this exacerbates the issues around collaborative working for most programmes.

Inevitably, some areas of activity appear to pose special challenges and may require a greater amount of time to develop. These include:

- ensuring that the main statutory agencies are represented in every programme
- getting local evaluations started
- facilitating greater involvement of the private sector
- initiating systems for monitoring the ethnic composition of parents and members of the community involved in management
- achieving a higher level of involvement of fathers in management activities.

## Further Information

Further copies of this summary are available from:

DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham, NG15 0DJ (Tel. 0845 602 260 or E-mail:dfes@prologue.uk.com)

Quote reference NESS/SF/01

Copies of the full report of 'Early Experiences of Implementing Sure Start', are available on the Sure Start website ([www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)) or from the above address

Quote reference NESS/FR/ 01

Further information about the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) can be found at [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk)

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