

# **SUPPORT TO LOCAL EVALUATIONS METHODOLOGICAL AND PROGRESS REPORT SEPTEMBER 2001**

## **Introduction**

Each local Sure Start programme is expected to conduct its own local evaluation. While the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) looks at the medium and longer-term impacts for the Sure Start programmes as a whole, the local evaluations need to evaluate what they are doing in order to understand how well their services are performing and to keep track of progress in meeting the objectives and targets for Sure Start.

They have been asked to concentrate on:

- (1) The process of delivering services
- (2) How well the Sure Start principles have been implemented
- (3) The effects these are having on progress in service provision.

Given these foci of the local Sure Start programme evaluations, there is potentially considerable overlap with the aims and activities of the national evaluation, especially the Implementation evaluation and the Local Context Analysis (LCA) modules. One of the main aims of this component of the national evaluation is to ensure that any overlap is minimal and unavoidable. There is potential for positive mutual collaboration, information sharing and support between NESS and local evaluations, so that the local evaluations can complement and supplement the work of NESS and provide a deeper understanding of the working of Sure Start. On the other hand there is also the potential for overlap and misunderstanding. NESS is an extremely complex undertaking, in which several different activities could be happening in any given programme area. In some cases the national evaluation will be dealing with the same people and using similar data as the local programme evaluations. It is therefore important that there are open lines of communication and negotiation between the programmes and NESS. This is further complicated by the fact that many of the Sure Start areas are also subject to other Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) whose local and national evaluators may also want access to Sure Start families.

## **Theoretical background**

Some key issues relating to evaluation will structure our approach to guiding, training and supporting local evaluations, to maximise the complementary nature of the local and national efforts.

### **(i) Internal evaluation and stakeholders' expectations**

As Rossi and Freeman (1993) note, evaluation is not just a technical activity but also an inherently political activity conducted within contexts where many parties have a stake in the outcome. In every situation, there will be a variety of competing interests and pressures to 'misuse' or change the evaluation results. Posavac (1994) writes that it is entirely rational and predictable that programme staff and managers would view evaluation with fear and mistrust. Evaluations are often associated with receiving a good or bad grade - it is never easy to deal with criticism. Moreover, external evaluators, as non-stakeholders in programs or systems, may approach their tasks with an eye toward change and flexibility, which can be difficult for managers and staff, who value predictability and stable structures.

In these circumstances, it is important for the individuals responsible for implementing and managing the evaluation to communicate an openness and respect for all stakeholder expertise, and to focus on identifying methods for improvements instead of simply providing good or bad labels for programmes or systems of care. The presence of the internal evaluator can create within the organization strong expectations for "good" results. This will be a key issue for Sure Start programmes, part of an innovative government initiative. There will be many implications for additional funding in their communities, which may leave them with strong feelings that they must show things to be working, whatever is actually happening, so that they will continue to gain important resources.

The internal evaluator also faces many practical challenges in terms of obtaining participation, balancing public relations demands with the need for serious data analysis, and managing short-term requests for information with the need for long-term projects. Managers may want evaluations to appear to objectively support decisions that have already been made. The local evaluation teams will be encouraged to find out from all relevant stakeholders what they expect from the local evaluation so that these potentially variable expectations and anxieties can be addressed.

## **(ii) Differentiation between systems change and programme change**

The evaluation of Sure Start is distinctive in that it includes examination of changes in systems as well as changes in specific services. The local evaluations will have a unique role to play since they will be able to look at particular local projects within the Sure Start programme and at the changes in the systems for providing services to children and their families. This differentiation between the different kinds of evaluation will be a focus of the national support since most available information about evaluation methods, and most published studies, concern programmes, not systems.

Usher (1995) has clarified the different levels for evaluation:

- The public policy context - values and principles of policy makers, budgets, legislation, resources available.
- Programme management and structure - the ways that specific services are provided, and the ways that staff and other resources are used.
- Programme operations - volume and mix of services and the ways that families are channelled into any particular program; staff training.
- Programme impact - the outcomes for individual families and children and the cumulative impact on the neighbourhood and the community.

This model will be used as a guiding framework to identify the stage a programme or project has reached.

Evaluations of systems are no different in essence from programme evaluations in terms of the evaluation "technology". They do, however, amplify the issues of translating evaluation results into policy. It will be necessary to think about goals, to engage with all relevant stakeholders, and to frame methods so that answers to questions can be generalized. Additionally, evaluation of systems change also needs to address the interplay of components of the system, changes in 'behaviour' of system components and thus goes farther than programme evaluation in that more questions are posed about the experience of being in a system.

### **(iii) Stage of “bedding down”**

The Sure Start programmes are at different stages of development, and their evaluations have also developed in different ways. Thus, part of the support provided by the national evaluation will be directed at working with programmes to think about the most relevant strategies for their developmental level, as identified by Jacobs (1988) in relation to family support evaluation, and adapted for thinking about child mental health services (Barnes et al., 1999).

In an ideal system, programme development, programme evaluation, systems building and evaluation would go hand in hand. Evaluation can be used from the very first development and refinement of programme goals, through monitoring of implementation, measuring client outcomes, tracking placement rates over time, determining differential effects among certain client groups, gathering cost effectiveness data, and outcomes. The five-tiered approach described by Jacobs provides a way to think about evaluation throughout a number of stages that most Sure Start schemes will go through.

- Pre-implementation - at this level evaluation is used to document needs for a system, to demonstrate the fit between community needs and the proposed system, and to provide base-line data.
- Accountability - at this point a system has been established and will be concerned to document utilization, entrenchment, and penetration into the target population; to justify expenditure and to build a constituency. Evaluation activities will focus on describing the system accurately and providing accurate cost information per unit of service.
- Programme or System Clarification - this is reached when a programme or system has been in place for a short while. Evaluation will be directed to improving the system and its component programs, and to providing feedback to programme staff.
- Progress towards objectives - this is reached when the system is established and wants to be improved, but it will also be necessary to demonstrate its effectiveness - its ability to reach stated goals and show expected outcomes. The evaluation audience will include multiple stakeholders including agency heads, local politicians, community leaders and programme participants.
- System impact - at this stage the evaluation will be using more sophisticated evaluation designs to delineate the impact of the systems change, and will provide quantifiable client-specific data, including standardized test results collected over time.

The local Sure Start evaluations have been advised not to be concerned with comparisons with control communities, but they will be able to provide important information at each of these levels of evaluation. The national support will be focused on working with them to think about the most appropriate methods, given the stage they have reached, to maximize their efforts. The national evaluation will additionally help programmes by providing national, regional and local benchmarks for key Sure Start outcome measures, supported by the data being collected by the LCA module.

### **(iv) Participatory evaluation and family involvement in evaluation**

Sure Start aims to generate a self evaluation, evidence based culture in Sure Start programmes, and one of the aims of this module is to support local programmes in developing this approach and engaging staff, users and other stakeholders in thinking about and participating in evaluation activities.

The local Sure Start evaluations will have a unique role to play in their capacity to encourage and develop methods of participatory evaluation, and this will be a focus of both their support, and the communication of information between local evaluations.

Participatory evaluation implies involvement of all relevant stakeholders, but is particularly relevant to the involvement of parents and other family members. Historically families have not been sent a message of empowerment or respect and involving them in evaluation is one way to redress that imbalance. While there are professional 'evaluators' who are skilled in designing the methods for carrying out evaluation, the input of the clients and their families is of the utmost importance, from the earliest stages of programme planning through its implementation, to its modification. Discussing the evaluation of family support programmes, Weiss and Greene (1992) suggest that the impact of such a collaboration with families means understanding evaluation as an inherently normative activity that can be conducted in consonance with empowerment programme values, means, and ends.

Problems may occur when families are considered at later stages in evaluation of systems or programmes. When families' concerns have not been adequately addressed, or their involvement in activities such as completing questionnaires has been planned without input from families about which measures they find troublesome, or equally which they find are constructive. Families often provide most of the information for outcome evaluations since they are the most knowledgeable about how well their child and the family is doing. Consequently the measures selected should allow them to express their knowledge in the most effective manner.

#### **(v) Cultural Competence**

Each local Sure Start programme will have slightly different issues with respect to the ethnic minorities represented in their communities, and ways in which their needs can be met. The local systems will be encouraged to think about these issues and their expertise will, in turn, inform the national evaluation strategy and methods. Unfortunately the goals of providing culturally competent and culturally sensitive systems of care are ahead of effective measures that can be used in evaluations. There have been many important starting points, however, that provide conceptual structures around which evaluation can be framed. Orlandi (1995), in the USA, has created a "Cultural Sophistication Matrix" with four components – cognitive awareness of cultural/ethnic issues), affective (from apathetic to committed to change), skills and overall effect (from destructive to constructive).

While there has been a great deal of important work to conceptualize what it means to have a culturally competent service system (e.g. Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991) there are as yet very few standardized ways of assessing programmes, or systems of care. Until that happens it will be difficult to conduct evaluations that address cultural competence issues completely. However, it is an ideal forum for using qualitative strategies that will not only produce important evaluation results, but also guide measure development and ensure that the quantitative strategies capture all the complexities of cultural issues as they impinge on child and family services. It may also be an ideal way to encourage small-scale research projects in some areas.

#### **Specific strategies for support to local programmes**

With respect to providing support for local programmes, the national evaluation is required to provide:

- Expert guidance and advice
- Training to programmes on evaluation
- Information on how the local and national activities interface
- Attention to ensuring that the local and national evaluations do not overlap and put undue pressure on families in local areas
- Strategies for co-ordinating national and local information collection and sharing information with one another

As the local evaluations become more advanced, the national evaluation will:

- Identify key themes for local and regional small scale in depth research projects.
- Provide some supervision for these in depth projects.

It is clear from the brief given to NESS that the relationship between the national and local evaluations will be based purely on a voluntary 'opt in' by the local programmes. NESS has no authority to decide what approach local programmes should use for their evaluations, nor, for example, what instrumentation would be appropriate for different aspects of their evaluations. This relationship differs from the central/local interface in several other ABIs, where the local evaluations tend to be seen, at least to some extent, as extensions or components of the national evaluation (DETR, 2000).

Because many of the programmes are at a very early stage or have not yet begun their evaluations, some programme managers require support in choosing an evaluator and identifying the focus and scope of the local evaluation. NESS will support the programme managers in these tasks and will aim to complement or supplement any work they have already initiated with chosen evaluators with respect to commissioning, monitoring, and management of local evaluations, as well as the use of evaluation for programme development.

## **PROVIDING A RANGE OF GUIDANCE, INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**

The overall structure of the support programme will consist of three components:

- A Central office to co-ordinate the regional offices and provide a link into the administration of the national evaluation. This will facilitate links with the national implementation, local community context, and the impact evaluations.
- A website containing information, advice and communication.
- Support provided by 5 regional units based on the Making Research Count (MRC) university network and in addition Lancaster University. MRC provides an existing infrastructure of support and advice to practitioners and researchers.

### **Central Office**

The local evaluations will have close links with all aspects of the National evaluation, and these will be co-ordinated through the Central office, where the National Co-ordinator for Local Support (Jane Stuart) is based. In general, the Central and Regional offices of the Support component will be the conduit for communication between local programmes/evaluations and NESS. This will avoid duplication and confusion and will promote an efficient and effective partnership between national and local evaluations. The central office will also co-ordinate the activities of the regional offices, who will provide the

main face to face support activities via visits, workshops and telephone. The National Co-ordinator is the fulcrum for this module of NESS, and will be responsible for ensuring the links between the website, the regional support units and other activities undertaken in relation to supporting local programmes and the national/local interface.

### **(i) Implementation**

The Implementation evaluation will co-ordinate initially with local programmes on the information collected in their document search of local plans, and their survey of schemes. Information from these activities that refers to the local evaluations will be shared with regional support co-ordinators. Emphasis will be placed on working with evaluators to think about the stage local programmes have reached. This should also help in the Implementation team's activity of creating profiles of local programmes.

After the case studies have been initiated, and the themed evaluation are being considered, it is likely that the national implementation team will have ideas about local evaluations that can complement with themes. For example, it is likely that some local programmes will be encouraged to develop new methods of assessing the cultural appropriateness of services that would link in with the themed evaluation of minority ethnic communities. Similarly, additional measures of consumer satisfaction may be needed for families with children who have special needs, or where the parents have poor basic skills

### **(ii) Local Community Context Analysis (LCA)**

From the outset there will be collaboration between the local programmes, their evaluators, and the LCA so that data from local providers are collected in the most efficient manner, incurring the least disruption of services and the least cost to local and national evaluations. Local programmes may indicate ways in which the national data collection needs to be supplemented to describe particular localities most accurately. The LCA will provide programmes with a range of community level indicators (see Appendix) to complement the information already collected within programme areas.

The LCA team will work with local programmes and their evaluators to develop questions for baseline random household surveys, to cover perceptions of the neighbourhood and of the services.

### **(iii) Impact evaluation**

Close links will be maintained between the local evaluations in the areas selected for the face to face interviews. It is important for ethical reasons to ensure that families are not approached twice, once by a local evaluation interviewer and then by a national interviewer, and methods will be developed which ensure that families are not overwhelmed by different researchers. Feedback from the Impact data collection will be provided (see Appendix).

### **(iv) Statistical Support**

Support on analytic issues will be provided by the regional offices, and through the website. They will also contribute to the regional training seminars. It is expected that analytic issues will become increasingly relevant once the local evaluations have been in place for several years, and they wish to conduct longitudinal analyses to assess change in local programmes.

## **(v) Cost Benefit Analysis**

Information and guidance from the CBA will be available from the national evaluation, as will links to government and other documents which provide guidance for costing outputs and measuring benefits in relation to costs. The guidance document has been written and will be placed on the website in October. This information will be backed up with training events for evaluators on unit costing, cost benefit, and cost effectiveness evaluations.

### National Workshops

One way that the Support team will facilitate interaction between NESS and the local programmes is through national workshops, designed to inform programmes about NESS and to encourage programmes to highlight their evaluation issues. There will be one national meeting each year, offered on two dates and in two locations to maximise attendance opportunities, unless programmes inform us that smaller, regional meetings are preferable.

The first national workshops were held in July, one in Leicester and the other in London. They were attended by approximately 325 programme managers and local evaluators, and by regional development officers.

The aims of the workshops were:

- To introduce NESS to local programmes and local evaluators.
- To discuss the interface between national and local evaluations.
- To consult local programmes and evaluators about the nature of support they require and how that support should best be organised.
- To consult on the nature and focus of the in depth collaborative evaluations.
- To provide an opportunity for programmes to share information with each other about their own evaluations.

Programmes were invited to prepare poster presentations to introduce their own evaluation plans and 26 programmes contributed. Their posters can be viewed on the NESS website under 'Local Evaluations'.

The NESS team outlined each of the modules of the national evaluation and the predominant response was that there was about the right amount of information, although about one fifth of attendees were left wanting to know more about the NESS activities. They were urged to consult the NESS website regularly and a copy of the presentation can be found on the NESS website by selecting the 'Workshop' button.

In the second part of the day discussion groups were organised and programmes were invited to discuss a range of topics.

The participants by and large appreciated the opportunity to meet with their peers and address these points and a number of programmes were able to share their own experiences of developing evaluation plans. However, it was clear from the extent of the discussions that programmes wanted more time, and wanted discussion that could focus on the specific aspect of evaluation that they were currently dealing with.

A number of points were raised in the groups :

#### 1. Commissioning and designing an evaluation

- There was a need for written guidelines for the tender process, for involving local academic or other organizations and for involving parents in evaluation. The timing of the commissioning was key; ideally it was thought by many that it should be as the programme was starting but in practice this did not often happen
- Programmes queried whether they should write specific proposal for selected topics or take an opportunistic approach. Alliances with existing research teams in local universities could be useful in that they had existing teams and other resources.
- Queries were raised about the conflict between commissioning objective outside ‘experts’ and wanting an evaluator who was immersed in the culture of the programme and could be instrumental in encouraging an ‘evaluative culture’ in the Sure Start programme
- The question of involving partner agencies was raised. Some programmes had been able to share the cost of evaluation with partners e.g. health authorities
- Programmes would like guidance on how to develop a framework for conceptualising local evaluation. Some participants had brought in consultants to assist in this process and they shared their experiences.
- There was an opportunity for programmes to be a ‘critical friend’ to each other as evaluation plans were made.

## 2. Focusing the evaluation

- How to focus the evaluation, incorporating the unique aspects of each programme, but incorporating the needs of service providers, service users and wider research community.
- Particular concern was expressed about setting priorities that included the views of families and other service users.
- If evaluation was targeted at specific groups, how to decide between divergent populations such as families who use the most services in the Sure Start area, hard to reach families, or specific groups e.g. fathers, an ethnic minority group.

## 3. Relationship between evaluation and programme operations

- Questions were raised about who is responsible for disseminating evaluation information, the evaluator (if external) or the programme manager/partnership.
- Programmes stressed that in day-to-day work it was not easy to disentangle monitoring from evaluation.
- Programme managers wanted to know what should be asked of external evaluators when they report on progress, and how does this compare with reports to the management group?

## 4. User involvement

- Several programmes involved parents as researchers and a number of ideas for their training and remuneration were shared.
- Involvement of community development association & ARVAC (Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) were suggested for training parents.
- Concerns were raised about how to include reluctant parents as respondents.
- Ideas were needed for how to engage children more in the evaluation process (e.g.

drawings, wish box).

## 5. Instrumentation & Data collection

- It was suggested that training about the data protection act would be useful (in terms of access to information for research (and monitoring) purposes).
- Programmes expressed interest in the NESS instrumentation.
- Concerns were noted about the accuracy of monitoring information when many families will not complete forms or give their details. This was particularly important for sampling and for tracking families over time to follow up initial evaluation activities such as user satisfaction surveys.
- Programmes shared some creative methodologies such as the neighbourhood walk/video diary to document changes in the community.
- Questions were raised about how to find good translators in the area who can cover the languages needed and be sensitive to the families

## 6. Ethical issues

- Programmes had varying experiences about Local Research Ethical Committees and would like guidance about how to manage applications.
- Programmes would like guidance on how to gain consent and about safe and confidential working practices, particularly when they were involving parents in data collection.
- There were varying experiences in relation to gaining data from partner agencies and sharing data with other agencies.
- Programmes wanted information on how to handle child abuse issues within an evaluation context.

The Regional Coordinators will take these themes and others raised at the workshops and develop expertise in specific areas so that they can work with the local programmes in smaller groups than the national workshops, to allow for more detailed sharing of experiences and to create local groups.

### **Seminar - Area Based Initiatives**

In conjunction with the core staff we are convening another, smaller seminar for evaluators of other Area Based Initiatives. The purpose of this workshop will be to:

- Share information with other evaluations about NESS and learn about other relevant evaluations
- Begin to develop a framework for co-operation at the national, regional and local levels
- Deepen our mutual understanding of the task of evaluating ABIs.

This seminar was held on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2001.

### **Website**

The website will be a key channel for communication between NESS and the local evaluators. It is intended that the website will not only offer useful information and guidance

but also will provide opportunities for local evaluators and programme staff to communicate and collaborate on issues to do with evaluation. The address of the website is [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk).

#### **(i) Current status of the website**

The website currently has information about:

- NESS staff and organisation, with CVs of the Principal Investigators
- Summary of the NESS methodology
- Methodology of each module
- Poster displays from local programmes displayed at the National Workshops
- Links to some 20 sites
- A map of NESS Regions showing regional offices
- A list of programmes and their NESS Regions
- The first of the guidance papers

#### **(ii) Plans for website**

The website will have a number of components:

##### 1) Information

The main aspect of this is now in place. Information is available about the national evaluation and its personnel. Each of the five modules is described – including staff contacts, description of methods, publications, local and regional events etc. Details will be provided of the data collection methods of the LCA, the digitised boundaries, strategies being used to map aggregate data and existing services to digitised boundaries. Once the national data collection begins there will be interim reports of the national evaluation and possibly of local evaluations.

It will also be important for local programmes to know the full range of information being collected nationally (see Appendix). They may decide, on the basis of the national proposal, to extend their own data collection so that they can make more judgements about their own area in comparison with other programmes.

##### 2) Searchable database of local evaluations

This will contain information about the individuals and /or organisations responsible for the local evaluations once the questionnaires have been returned. The database will include the names and contact information about the evaluators and basic information about the scope and focus of the local evaluations. Included here will be instruments/methods which local evaluators are willing to share with others.

##### 3) Mapping Local Evaluations

The website will be the main source for informing programmes about the activities of other local evaluations. At present there is no central data source about local evaluations. The initial examination of implementation plans identified that they do not consistently provide information about the nature or scope of the local evaluation, nor about who the local evaluator(s) will be. Not all programmes had developed clear plans about their evaluation strategy at the time of completing the development plan. In order to build up a database of

local evaluation plans we have contacted every Sure Start programme in rounds 1 to 4 and to get the details of local evaluators, either employed within the sure start programme or working from another setting.

By December 2001 programmes in Rounds 1 and 2 will have been contacted by the regional co-ordinators who will gather structured information about local evaluations and their relationship to NESS, including:

- Finding out more about the support needs of the local programmes
- Obtaining details of those undertaking the local evaluations
- Gaining an understanding of the focus strategy and scope of local evaluations
- Finding out the range of methods and tools which are proposed to be used locally
- Ascertaining what information local evaluators are willing to share with each other and the outside world about their evaluations

The most immediate action from this contact will be to establish links with each local programme and document their evaluation plans and/or current activities and link them to the Local Context evaluation team. The collection of administrative data within each community will overlap in some ways with the data to be collected nationally. The links between local and national teams will be important, to ensure that local systems such as GP surgeries and Social Services departments are not receiving multiple requests for their data and that local services do not charge both local and national teams. An integrated approach to data managers will not only be efficient, but will also alleviate unnecessary duplication of contacts and agreements.

#### 4) Guidance

This section of the web-site will provide information on methodological issues such as commissioning evaluations, appropriate design, access to information, ethical, legal, and data analysis issues, dissemination, cost effectiveness etc. Links will be made with existing technical assistance resources, both locally and internationally. The following is a timetable for guidance which will appear on the website by April 2002:

New timetables and topics for guidance will be agreed in subsequent progress reports or at beginning of each year – this is likely to be updates to existing guidance as well as some new topics).

Topic	Authors	Publication on NESS website
Cost effectiveness	P. Meadows	September 2001
Getting started with evaluation, including how to focus the evaluation and the process of writing a tender and commissioning	J. Henderson, K. Wilkins	October 2001
Ethics	J. Stuart, J. Barnes, I. Katz	October 2001
Baseline surveys and User Satisfaction	M. Ball	October 2001
Using existing data for evaluation, including the use of databases	J. Barnes, J. Saul	December 2001
Working with other initiatives	A. Ashton	December 2001
User (Parent) involvement	J. Stuart, R. Morgan	January 2002
Methods for Evaluation	I. Katz, J. Barnes, I. Brodie, R. Morse	March 2002
Quantitative and qualitative data analysis	I. Brodie, R. Morse	April 2002
Using findings, report writing and dissemination	S. Ellison	April 2002

## 5) Questionnaires and technical information

The national team will provide materials for the local programmes so that there will be more likelihood that similar questionnaires and information-gathering techniques are used in local evaluations. This will be helpful for local evaluations that would like to work together with evaluations from other programmes and will provide comparable information. Information about standard software for quantitative and qualitative analyses will also be available.

## 6) Links

The website will contain a number of links to websites of other organisations and programmes of relevance to local evaluations. These will include:

- Local Sure Start programmes' web pages
- Sure Start Unit website
- Web pages of evaluations for other government initiatives, such as the Health Action Zones and Communities that Care
- Other relevant evaluations such as Early Head Start
- Sites that provide research and evaluation support such as the American Evaluation Association and the UK Evaluation Society. It is intended to develop a comprehensive annotated list of Internet resources relevant to the evaluation of Sure Start.

## 7) Future website developments

- Online discussion groups so that evaluators can discuss problems, methods and good practice with each other
- Reports and publications of NESS and local evaluations.
- Regional web pages that will give information about activities such as meetings and workshops that will be held regionally.

This is not a comprehensive description of the website. The exact nature of the website will be negotiated with local programmes and local evaluators so that it meets their needs and allows maximum participation within the budget and time constraints of the national evaluation. It is expected that the website will develop and evolve over time, and that this development will be undertaken in consultation with regional support workers and local programmes.

## Regional Support Units

NESS has developed its partnerships with the universities who are hosting the Regional Support staff. These units are staffed by one full time equivalent post who is employed half time as a Fieldwork Supervisor for the Impact study and half time to support local evaluations. These posts have been located to follow the distribution of Sure Start programmes. Each postholder covers between 40 and 45 local programmes.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Institution</b>
<b>London, South East and South West</b>	Royal Holloway/Birkbeck
<b>East Anglia/East Midlands</b>	University of Luton
<b>West Midlands</b>	Keele University
<b>North East</b>	University of York
<b>North West</b>	Lancaster University

The role of the Regional Support Units include:

- Making contact with local evaluators once the initial mapping of plans has been conducted, and discussing the issues arising from local/national interface.
- Advising local programmes on specific issues of methodology

- Disseminating examples of good practice in evaluation and monitoring activity. This will enable good practices to be shared between programmes at an earlier rather than later stage.
- Organising regional workshops of Sure Start evaluators on the basis of need to address issues such as research methods, instrumentation, costing of services and action research. The training itself will be provided by either members of the national evaluation team, the regional team, or by other academics associated with MRC. There may also be provision for practitioners to attend some of the workshops if there is demand. NESS would expect to run at least one workshop for each region per year although two regions may combine if this seems more appropriate.
- Maintaining links with regional structures of Sure Start plus Health Action Zones/ Education Action Zones/ New Deal for Communities/ Neighbourhood Renewal Fund/ On Track etc. It is possible, for example, that joint workshops will be held with evaluators of other government initiatives if this is seen to be an efficient way of sharing resources.
- Co-ordinating and advising on the in-depth evaluations which will be conducted in collaboration with local evaluators.

The Regional Support staff will take these themes and others raised at the workshops and develop expertise in specific areas so that they can work with the local programmes in smaller groups than the national workshops.

For example, one may specialise in ethics, tendering and commissioning; another in key methods and approaches with particular attention to the methods being used in the National evaluation; a third may be responsible for involvement of community members in evaluation, ownership in relation to partner organisations and the avoidance of ‘over-researching’; a fourth for designs strategies, planning local evaluations and outcome measures. Invitees to the workshops will be programme managers and local relevant staff and local evaluators.

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TO DATE**

The National Co-ordinator for Support (Jane Stuart) has been appointed

Two national conferences were held in July 2001.

The five Regional Support staff have been appointed: London, South East and South West – Juliet Henderson (Royal Holloway), Katrina Wilkins (Birkbeck); East Midlands – Isabelle Brodie (Luton); West Midlands – Rachel Morgan (Keele), North East – Sarah Ellison (York); North West – Rachel Morse (Lancaster) .

The Regional Support staff have made email contact with the programmes in their areas

The website is operational.

Contact has been made with evaluators of other national ABIs and a workshop arranged in October.

The mapping questionnaire for local evaluations has been developed and piloted (see Appendix).

## TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES TO FEBRUARY 2001

(New timetables will be produced annually for the annual workplan or in each progress report)

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Initial phase of Database of evaluators completed	X										
Protocol for website completed			X								
National and London Co-ordinators start		X									
Piloting of evaluation questionnaire					X						
Evaluators' Questionnaire administered						X	X	X	X		
Questionnaire analysed				X							
Regional co-ordinators appointed			X	X	X						
National Workshops			X								
Website on line – information pages			X								
Second phase of website								X			
Initial Guidelines for in-depth local studies									X		
ABI seminar						X					
Regional workshops										X	
In-depth evaluations initial topics identified											X

## References

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# APPENDIX

1. Questionnaire - details of local evaluation
2. Information sharing between NESS and programmes

## 1. Questionnaire - Details of Local Evaluation

Round

Contact Details (of the main contact within the programme who is responsible for evaluation).

First Name	<input type="text"/>	Surname	<input type="text"/>	Title	<input type="text"/>
Job Title	<input type="text"/>				
Address	<input type="text"/>				
Email	<input type="text"/>				

Are you willing for your details to be made available on the website?

### Evaluators

Contact 1					
First Name	<input type="text"/>	Surname	<input type="text"/>	Title	<input type="text"/>
Job Title	<input type="text"/>				
Address	<input type="text"/>				
Email	<input type="text"/>				

Contact 2					
First Name	<input type="text"/>	Surname	<input type="text"/>	Title	<input type="text"/>
Job Title	<input type="text"/>				
Address	<input type="text"/>				
Email	<input type="text"/>				

## Relation to Sure Start Programme

This section of the questionnaire asks about issues which will not be displayed on the database, but which will be used by NESS to understand the range of local evaluations.

In what sort of institution does the evaluator work (as the Sure Start evaluator)?

Within the Sure Start programme	<input type="text"/>
Academic Institution	<input type="text"/>
Commercial research company	<input type="text"/>
Freelance, no institution	<input type="text"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

What is the relationship between the programme and the evaluator(s) in terms of designing and conducting the local programme evaluation activities?  
(please mark with an X)

Day to day line management by Sure Start staff <input type="text"/>	Some autonomy in line management <input type="text"/>	Sure Start staff control the focus of the evaluation but not the methods <input type="text"/>
Independent <input type="text"/>	Other <input type="text"/>	

Do you have a steering group for your evaluation? Yes/No

If 'Yes', who is represented on the group (mark all those that apply):

Sure Start staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers from agencies in the partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent researchers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents of children 0-4 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other community members	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Who is involved in the evaluation?  
(mark all those that apply)

Researchers in the Sure Start programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Sure Start Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
University based researchers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Researchers from one of the constituent agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Researchers from an independent consultancy or who are self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other community members	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

If yes to 'parents' to what extent are they involved?  
(mark all those that apply)

	Full participation/control	Consultation	No involvement
Designing the evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dissemination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## About your evaluation

We hope that the searchable database on our website will enable you to disseminate your findings and publications, and allow you to access those of other local programmes.

Are you willing to allow information about your evaluation to go on the NESS website?  
Yes/No

## Your Evaluation:

Please give a short narrative account of your evaluation (up to 200 words).

[To be completed on a separate sheet]

Approximate start date of your evaluation

If you have an electronic version of your programme evaluation proposal or description of the work, or any other written documents (including annual evaluation reports) and would be willing to share them, please send to [regional co-ordinator]

### Your methods

Are you using any of the following methods in your evaluation?

Method	Details
Analysis of administrative data	
Focus groups	
Postal questionnaire/surveys	
Staff self evaluation	
Participant observation	
Action research	
Other	

If using questionnaires, are you using pre-existing measures or have you developed your own?

Pre-existing Yes/No

Developed Yes/No

Are you willing to share your own questionnaires with other evaluators? Yes/No

If so, please give a description (and attach a copy of the questionnaire(s) and guidance)

Do you have any written guidance/protocols on any of the following:

Ethics	
Accessing children/parents	<input type="text"/>
Sampling	<input type="text"/>
Informed consent	<input type="text"/>
Confidentiality/data storage	<input type="text"/>
Child protection	<input type="text"/>
Feedback to participants	<input type="text"/>
Information to participants	<input type="text"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

Are you willing to share them? Yes/No

If 'yes' please send to [regional co-ordinator] stating your programme name

### **Links with other local Sure Start programme evaluators**

What are your links with the evaluations of other local Sure Start programmes?

Your programme shares the same evaluator	<input type="text"/>
If 'Yes' please state which programmes	<input type="text"/>
Are you part of a network of local evaluators?	<input type="text"/>
Are you linked with other area based initiatives such as HAZ, EAZ etc.?	<input type="text"/>
If 'Yes' which initiatives?	<input type="text"/>

### **The NESS Website at [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk)**

One of the main sources of support will be our NESS website. It will have discussion groups, links to other material, connections to other local evaluators etc. It would be helpful to know what access you have to the Internet and what use you make of it.

What access do you have to the Internet?.

	Programme Manager	Evaluator
Unlimited permanent access		
Need to dial up		
Limited access		
No access		

Familiarity:

	Programme manager	Evaluator
Confident on the web		
Occasional web user		
Novice		

THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING THIS INFORMATION

Are there any comments that you would like to make about sharing information with other programmes or with NESS?

## 2. Information sharing between NESS and programmes

In agreement with the Sure Start Unit, data will be shared as follows:

- a. In the case of **Local Context** data, we will release everything we can -in terms of individual Sure Start areas - to all Sure Start programmes. Thus, each programme will be in position to review comparable data from all other programmes.
- b. In the case of **Implementation** data that is of a quantitative nature (from the surveys), NESS will provide a measure of central tendency (mean, median, and/or ranges) for all programmes (or for each programme wave: TB, Wave 1, Wave 2), perhaps adjusted for an appropriate constant (e.g. per size of geographic area or per child resident in the community—such as number of volunteers per 100 children), as well as the corresponding figure for each particular programme. But each programme will only see its own individual figure. Thus, each programme will get central-tendency data on a larger number of programmes and the corresponding figure for their own programme.
- c. In the case of **Implementation** data that is qualitative in nature (e.g. case studies), all programmes will receive an overall summary of findings.
- d. In the case of **Impact** data, we will adopt the strategy outlined in 2b above, providing every programme (including those not participating in the impact study) with central tendency data (on Sure Start communities, not control communities) and those participating in the impact study with their own corresponding data.
- e. In the case of **Cost-benefit** data, we will follow the plan outlined in 2b, providing all programmes with central tendency data and the corresponding figures from their own particular community.