

ANNEX 6: SURE START – INFORMATION ON EVALUATION

Introduction – The evaluation strategy for Sure Start

A6.1 Sure Start is new and exciting. Its scale and complexity means that it is aiming to achieve what no other early intervention programme has ever set out to do. Such a large scale investment demands full and proper evaluation in order to establish what works for young children and their families and the Government are committed to this. Evaluation needs to answer the question what is effective, for whom, in what circumstances and why. This will provide crucial evidence to inform future policy making and service delivery at all levels.

A6.2 There are two main elements to the evaluation strategy for Sure Start. These are:

- A comprehensive, long term national evaluation of the impacts, implementation and economic cost of the programme as a whole
- Local level evaluation of individual Sure Start programmes carried out by local programmes themselves and their evaluators.

A6.3 These two elements are intended to complement one another, with minimal duplication. Section 1 of this note sets out the Sure Start Unit requirements of local evaluation while Section 2 describes the aims and objectives of the national evaluation and summarises the approach and methodology.

A6.4 This note, and other information on evaluating Sure Start can be found on the Sure Start website – www.surestart.gov.uk and on the Sure Start National Evaluation team’s website – www.ness.bbk.ac.uk.

1) LOCAL EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

A6.5 This section provides a starting point for Sure Start programmes considering how to carry out local evaluation of their activities and progress. More detailed guidance on possible approaches and methodology to local level evaluation is available via the national evaluation team’s website at www.ness.bbk.ac.uk. This can also be accessed through the Sure Start website at www.surestart.gov.uk. The national evaluation team’s guidance document ‘Getting Started with a Sure Start Local Evaluation’ should be particularly helpful.

A6.6 Local programmes need to evaluate what they are doing so they can:

- understand how well their services are performing
- keep track of progress in meeting the objectives and targets for Sure Start
- make changes to their programme as a result of evaluation findings.

A6.7 Evaluation at local level is an essential tool for maintaining and raising the quality of services and for planning new developments. It needs to be planned from the very start and implemented as an integral part of each programme. When programmes take part in the annual review process with the Sure Start Unit, they will be expected to provide firm evidence that

decision-making has been informed by robust monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation evidence will also help determine the future of Sure Start services when Sure Start grant starts to tail off.

A6.8 There is a clear distinction to be drawn between the national evaluation and local evaluations. The national evaluation will answer the questions: 'what difference did Sure Start make to the children in it, and which activities made the most difference?', The answers will be used to decide questions of national social policy. Local evaluations on the other hand, will deal with the questions 'what are we doing and how well are we doing it?' The answers will be used to decide on local activities and policies. It follows that only local programmes can decide exactly which activities to evaluate as only they know what the relevant local questions are. However, there are some common standards that they need to adopt so that the results of their local evaluations can be used more widely – for example, in monitoring progress for the PSA, and in spreading best practice. Programmes will become involved in the national evaluation, but they are not expected to match its scope or methods in their own evaluations.

Assessing progress

A6.9 The purpose of any evaluation is to answer key questions about an intervention: is it working, how well is it working and what helps or hinders its effectiveness? Local Sure Start programmes are expected to search for answers in three main areas:

- Carefully monitoring their progress towards the objectives and targets set for Sure Start in the Public Service and Service Level Agreements (PSA/SDA) and in reaching other milestones and targets identified in their plans
- Reviewing the working practices and processes through which Sure Start is being delivered
- Assessing whether the services being provided achieve good value for the public money invested in them.

A6.10 Programmes need to find out whether they are reaching local children and families in the way intended and whether their services are having the desired effects. But local evaluation should also focus on ways that the design and implementation of services can be improved. To do this, programmes will not only need to assess their performance against the national targets, but also in observing the key Sure Start principles. These are to:

- co-ordinate, streamline and add value to existing services
- involve parents, grandparents and other carers
- avoid stigma by ensuring that all local families are able to use Sure Start services
- ensure lasting support by linking to services for older children
- be culturally appropriate and sensitive to particular needs
- promote the participation of all local families in the design and working of the programme.

A6.11 Local evaluation has a crucial part to play in identifying good practice examples that will not only benefit the Sure Start programme, but can also be shared with other programmes and

organisations working with young children and their families. Local evaluations will produce a great deal of valuable information about how Sure Start is working at the local level and the national evaluation team will be collecting together local evaluation reports so they can feed into the national evaluation.

MONITORING

A6.12 Good monitoring information is an essential basis for good evaluation. All programmes need to routinely collect information on what they are doing to provide the partnership and programme manager with information to manage the programme effectively. This information will provide the basis on which to make key decisions about the future of the programme.

A6.13 As a minimum, programmes will need to routinely collect information on the numbers of children and families they are providing services to. They will also need to monitor progress towards national and local targets and objectives as measured by quarterly and annual milestones and measures related to the PSA and SDA targets. In addition, they will need to collect information on the costs of particular services. They may also wish to identify and collect other information to help them manage their programme and assess their progress. The national evaluation team will be working with Sure Start programmes to identify other possible outcome measures to add to those in the PSA and SDA. Some will be collected from programmes for national level monitoring, while others will be collected by the national evaluation and shared with local programmes. Information on the output and outcome measures that programmes must collect to monitor progress towards the PSA and SDA can be found in Annex 5 of this guidance.

A6.14 To provide accountability to the Government on how the money has been spent programmes have to regularly send the Sure Start Unit information on the numbers of children and families accessing services and on progress being made towards the national targets and objectives. This information is used at individual programme level by Sure Start Unit regional team members working closely with programmes to ensure that good progress is being made and the money properly spent. It is also used at aggregate level to update Parliament on the progress that Sure Start as a whole is making towards the national targets and on other areas of accountability. This information is also very valuable for the management of individual programmes, and partnerships and programme managers will find it very helpful for informing their decisions about the future direction of their programme. The national evaluation team will work with programmes to provide guidance and support on using routinely collected monitoring information as part of local evaluations.

A6.15 Monitoring systems for Sure Start will be complex. The issues that programmes need to consider are described in section 4, 'Running your Sure Start programme' and Annex 5 of 'Delivering Sure Start – Sixth Wave Edition'.

Collecting start-point data

A6.16 Robust monitoring systems are crucial for local evaluation. But the information that programmes routinely collect on their progress towards national and local targets will only be valid if it starts from reliable baseline measurements. Good quality start-point data – as described in Annex 5 of 'Delivering Sure Start – Sixth Wave Edition' – is an essential building block for any reliable assessment of a local programme's achievements and whether it delivers good value for money.

REQUIREMENTS OF LOCAL EVALUATION

A6.17 As a minimum, all programmes must carry out an assessment of processes, outputs and short term outcomes as part of their local evaluation. It is essential that local evaluations look at cross cutting processes such as partnership working, community and parental involvement, access to services and service quality. Evaluation findings should be drawn together into an annual progress report covering the programme as a whole. This report will be vital in informing the planning of the programme for the coming year and beyond. A 'rolling evaluation', feeding into the annual evaluation report, is likely to be the best model for this. Annual evaluation reports should be completed by the end of January each year so that they can feed into annual reviews which take place in quarter four of each year.

A6.18 This type of evaluation does not need to be overly detailed. At its most basic, for each project or activity and for the programme as a whole, it will entail looking at monitoring data in more depth and attempting to understand this in context of processes, outputs, outcomes and costs. This is very similar to the Best Value approach (see paragraphs A6.27-28 below). Views of parents, the community, as well as those working to deliver the programme will be needed to supplement and contextualise the 'hard' monitoring data. Programmes might also wish to consider how they can sensitively and appropriately include the views of children.

A6.19 As well as looking at the programme as a whole, local evaluations may wish to look at a sample of individual services in more depth at different stages in the programme. Factors to take into account when prioritising will include taking a view of which projects and activities are most innovative and which are most problematic. Monitoring data will help to identify them. Another option would be to look at sets of projects or activities that relate to a particular target or objective.

A6.20 Detailed evaluation reports are not expected in the first year but a clear evaluation strategy should be in place within 6-9 months of the programme being approved. However, the Sure Start Unit will need to be assured that some evaluation and review has taken place in year 1 and that this has informed the planning of the programme for the following year. The Sure Start Unit do not require you to submit annual evaluation reports to them, although your regional contact will need to be assured that an effective evaluation is underway and that the findings have been used to make changes to the programme and inform future planning.

A6.21 A more in-depth evaluation report, that critically considers the achievements and progress of the programme over the first three years is required at the end of measurement year three of the programme. This will consider how far the targets and objectives have been achieved and the processes that have been instrumental in this. Evaluation findings at this stage will play an important part in deciding how the programme can be taken forward over the next three years. The evaluation should be designed to address these issues. Evaluation will need to continue beyond the first three years and this point will be a good time to reconsider your evaluation needs and approaches.

A6.22 Sharing information on effective practice with other Sure Start programmes and those delivering services for young children and families, is a key part of Sure Start. To assist this the national evaluation team have set up a searchable database accessed via their website where local evaluation reports and findings can be shared more widely. This can be found at www.ness.bbk.ac.uk. You are encouraged to submit your evaluation findings to the national evaluation team for inclusion on this database.

Evaluating outputs and outcomes

A6.23 The targets set out in the Sure Start PSA and SDA (Annex 2 of 'Delivering Sure Start – Sixth Wave Edition') will form a large part of the measures needed to assess the short term impact of Sure Start. Some of these relate specifically to short-term targets. Others are concerned with the medium and longer-term outcomes that Sure Start is designed to achieve. Although these latter may seem less immediately relevant, programmes should still think about

how they intend to collect the relevant information. Definitions and possible data sources relating to each measure can be found in Annex 5 of 'Delivering Sure Start'. Measures will need to be collected at the start of the programme - the baseline - and then at regular intervals over the course of the programme. The exact interval will depend upon whether the measure is intended to measure short, medium or long term outcomes and how readily available it is.

A6.24 Programmes also need to specify and collect data relevant to local milestones or targets they have identified in their plans – for example, an improvement in immunisation or breast-feeding rates within the Sure Start area. This will usually require a combination of 'output' indicators (such as attendance and take-up rates) and 'outcome' measures concerned with whether the lives of children and their families changed. In selecting these measures, programmes should choose indicators that focus on the target and make the most of existing information. Planners should always have an eye to the burden that excessive assessment procedures and data collection would place on local families and staff.

Process evaluation

A6.25 It is important to know whether a local Sure Start programme is meeting its targets. But that information will be of limited value without some further understanding of why a target is, or isn't, being met. By routinely monitoring and reviewing their working practices and processes, programmes will be in a strong position to improve their performance and make timely, 'mid-course corrections' to a service when necessary. This part of each local evaluation will need to look at issues such as:

- the effectiveness of the partnership
- the role and involvement of local parents and the wider community – including minority ethnic groups
- how individual services and activities are delivered
- service quality
- how professionals from different agencies work together
- whether management structures support the achievement of Sure Start's objectives and key principles.

A6.26 Effectively examining these issues will mean obtaining the views and experiences of parents and carers, workers, volunteers, community members, partnership members, staff in partner agencies and possibly children.

Assessing value for money

A6.27 Money can always be spent in many different ways and programmes need to review their services to ensure they are delivering good value for money. In doing this, programmes should pay particular attention to the principles of Best Value. Originally developed as part of the Government's proposals for modernising local government, they specify an approach that can usefully be applied to other public services. In particular, service providers should:

- **challenge** why and how a service is being provided
- secure **comparisons** with the performance of others across a range of relevant

indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers

- **consult** local taxpayers, service users, partners and the wider business community in the setting of new performance targets
- **consider** fair competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

A6.28 Information gathered about effectiveness in reaching the national targets will provide the central pillar for any review based on these '4Cs'. The qualitative element in the evaluation will help to answer other fundamental questions about local needs and the way services are being procured and delivered. But partnerships are also expected to analyse the economy and efficiency of their services. In addition, when partnerships are looking to renew contracts they will need to analyse the local market for providing services, consulting with providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors on the scope for improving value.

A6.29 Understanding how resources are being allocated will help programmes make important decisions about the future allocation of scarce resources. It is the responsibility of local evaluators to advise programmes whether or not the services and outcomes which are being delivered justify the priority they have been given. Local evaluators are not expected to provide all the answers on local cost effectiveness. But they are expected to inform local partnerships about the areas in which their use of resources could be challenged, or should be examined in more depth. As a minimum, programmes are expected to assess the cost effectiveness of the following core services:

Universal home visits:

- ante natal visit
- Two month visit
- 18-24 month visit

Childcare:

- Full day care
- Crèche sessions
- Playgroups

A6.30 However, partnerships may also find it useful to assess the cost effectiveness of other major core services as this will be very helpful in deciding the future direction of the programme. The cost effectiveness of any single core service costing more than 10% of the total Sure Start revenue grant should also be thoroughly assessed.

A6.31 Further guidance on estimating cost effectiveness at the local level has been compiled by the Sure Start National Evaluation team. This can be found on the National Evaluation team's website (www.ness.bbk.ac.uk). The National Evaluation team will also facilitate discussions on comparative costings of particular services through their website and through regional seminars and events.

Local evaluation methods

A6.32 Evaluation of a Sure Start programme will require a combination of 'quantitative' methods – measuring 'outputs' and 'outcomes' – and 'qualitative' methods that investigate the way that the programme is perceived and valued by those involved. In other words, programmes need to keep track of who used their services and find out what happened as a result. But they also need to know what users and staff thought of those services – for example,

through parental satisfaction surveys (see below).

Managing local evaluation

A6.33 Day-to-day responsibility for evaluation is likely to lie with the programme manager, overseen by the partnership. However, there are different ways in which programmes may fulfil the evaluation requirement in practice. For example:

- they may choose to co-ordinate and facilitate evaluation themselves
- they may use a researcher employed by the programme or a partner organisation
- they may buy-in expert advice or research time from local educational institutions or consultants
- they may use a combination of the above.

Programmes will need to think carefully about the approach to take and how to ensure evaluation is objective and robust.

Local ownership of evaluation

A6.34 Whichever model is preferred, it is important that everyone involved in a local programme should understand the purpose of evaluation and its importance in delivering better services. In the case of staff, evaluation should be accepted as an integral and routine part of their responsibilities and work activities. Wherever possible, parents and other members of the local community should also be actively involved in evaluation. With training and support where necessary, this could include a role in collecting information, as well as providing it, through interviews and questionnaires.

Links to evaluations of other initiatives

A6.35 Evaluation must be sensitively planned to avoid placing excessive burdens on front line staff and users. Sure Start may not be the only local initiative needing their support for evaluation. Through consultation with other initiatives it may be possible to minimise the demands on individual's time by collaborating on some of the evaluation activities – for example, by sharing surveys and other fieldwork. Programmes may also wish to consider whether there is scope to collaborate with other Sure Start programmes in close proximity on particular elements of evaluation.

Costs of local evaluation

A6.36 The cost of local evaluation should be commensurate with the size of the programme. It is important to allow sufficient resources for evaluation: between 3 per cent and 5 per cent of revenue is likely to be about right. No evaluation should cost more than 5 per cent of the total revenue grant, including the cost of any surveys. If a programme wishes to carry out a more ambitious evaluation than this level of resources allows, they will need to obtain additional funding from other sources. Another way of making evaluation resources go further is to 'join-up' evaluation activity with that of other initiatives in the area, or in alliance with other, nearby Sure Start programmes. However, the requirement is for local evaluation of individual programmes, not a sub-regional or regional assessment.

Evaluating innovative practice

A6.37 Sure Start programmes include a great deal of innovative practice. One of the main purposes of local evaluation is to capture the best of these service developments so they can be shared with other Sure Start programmes and organisations delivering services for young children. However, there will be pioneering services in some areas that need – and deserve – evaluation using rigorous research methods to establish whether they 'work' as intended.

Assessing their effectiveness will normally require a research design where the outcomes for children and families who receive the service are compared with those for a similar group of non-participants. Some local programmes and their evaluators may be keen to carry out this type of evaluation themselves – with external funding, where necessary.

Support from the national evaluation team on local evaluation

A6.38 The national evaluation team have been contracted by the Sure Start Unit to provide advice and support to local Sure Start programmes on approaches and methodology for carrying out local evaluation. Most of this support will be provided via a website where written guidance, discussion forums and a searchable database of what programmes are doing on local evaluation can be found. Further support will be in the form of regionally based seminars, workshops and training events. These will be facilitated by regional co-ordinators based in a network of universities. All programmes can access the website material but at the moment the seminars, workshops and training event only covers Round 1 –4 programmes though this intention is to extend it to R5 and 6 programmes by Autumn 2002. Each round 1-4 programme has been allocated to a region and the co-ordinators in each region will keep programmes in their region informed of events. The regional co-ordinators will also help to ensure there is maximum integration between the national evaluation and local programmes and their evaluation. Further information on this is available at www.ness.bbk.ac.uk.

A6.39 The national evaluation team have already produced guidance on getting started with a Sure Start local evaluation, evaluating cost effectiveness, conducting ethical research and carrying out user satisfaction surveys. Further guidance on user involvement in local evaluation. methods for local evaluation; working with other initiatives to evaluate activity at local level; data analysis; disseminating and using local evaluation findings and using monitoring information in local evaluation are due for publication between now and the end of 2002.

Points and principles for local evaluation

A6.40 In summary, programmes should pay attention to the following checklist of points and principles that programmes should keep in mind when planning and carrying out their local evaluation:

- Start by specifying what you want to find out from the evaluation. Be realistic about what you can measure and what you hope to demonstrate.
- Be realistic about what can be achieved with the level of resources available.
- Think about the ways that different outputs and outcomes can be measured and how those indicators will help you discover whether services are meeting their targets.
- Consult and involve as many people as possible in planning the evaluation, especially front-line staff, managers and parents.
- External researchers can help you to design and implement an evaluation that provides dependable answers to the questions you want answered.
- Consider forming evaluation links with other Sure Start programmes in the local area – maybe sharing an outside consultant.
- Avoid evaluation strategies that are over-elaborate, disproportionately expensive or that needlessly replicate the national evaluation.

- Keep surveys to a minimum to ensure that the local population is not over-burdened with requests for information. Maximise the use of existing data sources. Where possible, join forces with other initiatives that need to collect data from the same area.
- Be mindful of data protection issues and set up mechanisms to ensure confidentiality and data security.
- Remember that reliable and detailed baseline data is crucial.
- Establish a robust monitoring system from which data can be easily extracted to inform the evaluation.
- Monitor and review the processes for planning and delivering local services so that timely, mid-course corrections can be made if needed.
- Build a cost-effectiveness element into the evaluation. Applying the Government's *Best Value* principles will help you to demonstrate that the programme offers value for money.
- Ensure that there is a strategy for informing partner agencies and the local community about the evaluation's findings and for responding by making any necessary changes to services and the way they are provided.
- Use the evaluation results to take a strategic view of the programme. Has the programme made progress in tackling the priorities identified at the start? Are there new priorities that need to be addressed?

Further Information

A6.41 For further information on evaluation of Sure Start at both the national and local level contact Sam Mason (tel: 020 7273 5131 e-mail: samantha.mason@dfes.gsi.gov.uk) or Elizabeth Green (tel: 020 7273 4829 e-mail: elizabeth.green@dfes.gsi.gov.uk) in the Sure Start Unit, Level 2, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA.

A6.42 Both the Sure Start website: www.surestart.gov.uk and the National Evaluation team's website: www.ness.bbk.ac.uk contain information about national and local evaluation of Sure Start.

Further reading and information about evaluation

A6.43 The following publications include information and ideas relevant to local evaluation:

- Charities Evaluation Services (1999/2000) *Evaluation Discussion Papers* (Purpose of evaluation / evaluation methods / involving users / use and misuse of performance indicators/ outcome monitoring etc.). Charities Evaluation Services, 4 Coldbath Square, London EC1R 5HL
- Department of Employment, Transport and the Regions (1999) *Local Evaluation for Regeneration Partnerships - Good Practice Guide*. The Stationery Office. (or from www.regeneration.detr.gov.uk/info/gp/lerp/lerp01.htm)
- Department of Employment, Transport and the Regions (1999) *Local Government Act Part 1, 1999. Best Value*. DETR Circular 10/99, 14th December. The Stationery Office. (or from www.press.detr.gov.uk/9912/1208.htm)

- Grimshaw, R. (1999) *Parenting education and support: Guidelines on evaluation*. National Children's Bureau Enterprises, 8 Wakely Street, London EC1V 7QE (020-7843 6000)
- Rossi, H. & Freeman, P. (1993) *Evaluation – a systematic approach*. London: Sage Publications.
- Utting, D. (ed.) (2001) *Made to Measure? Evaluating Community Initiatives for Children. Children & Society Special Issue*. Vol. 15 (1). National Children's Bureau / Wiley
- Van der Eyken, W. (1992) *Introducing Evaluation: A practical guide to evaluation in early childhood projects*. Bernard van Leer Foundation.

2) THE NATIONAL EVALUATION

A6.44 A national evaluation of the first phase of 260 (Round 1 – 4) Sure Start programmes began in January 2001. This will measure the short, medium and long-term outcomes of Sure Start for children, families and communities. It will look at *what* works, for *who* it works, *how* it works and *why* it works. It will also make a national assessment of the programme's cost effectiveness. A range of rigorous research methods will be employed to compare the outcomes for children, families and communities who experienced Sure Start with similar groups who did not. The evaluation will be carried out by independent researchers with this first 6 year phase by a consortium of academics, consultants and practitioners from relevant fields of expertise, led by Professor Edward Melhuish of Birkbeck College, University of London (see below for further information about the team).

A6.45 There will also be some national level evaluation of the 262 second phase programmes (rounds 5 & 6) though the exact focus of this is still being developed. More information on this will be available later in 2002. It is unlikely this evaluation will follow the same format as the first phase evaluation. While it may decide to follow a small cohort of children over time it is most likely to focus on key themes and activities identified as a result of the first phase evaluation and changes in policy. As with the first phase evaluation, programmes will be expected to participate in the national evaluation.

A6.46 The (first phase) national evaluation is organised into five integrated components, which will each inform one another:

- Implementation evaluation
- Impact evaluation
- Cost-effectiveness
- Local context analysis
- Support to programmes on local evaluation

Implementation

A6.47 The implementation module examines what is actually being done in local Sure Start programmes. That is, how is the mandate to change and improve existing services being realised? What are community agencies actually doing? Through these activities, the following

will be investigated:

- Management and co-ordination
- Access to services
- Quantity of services, including intensity and length
- Allocation of resources
- Quality of services, including degree of appropriateness
- Community involvement
- Toward these ends, the implementation component of the evaluation will consist of three core activities:
 - A national survey of all 260 local Sure Start programmes (by means of internet technology), which will be repeated three times over the course of the evaluation
 - An in-depth study of 26 local Sure Start programmes
 - A series of themed evaluations (e.g. partnerships with voluntary organisations, interface of education, health care services)

There will need to be a close, and mutually beneficial, relationship between the local programme, local evaluators and the national evaluators in the 26 areas to be covered by in-depth local studies.

Impact

A6.48 The impact component of the evaluation will assess children, families, and communities in Sure Start and non-Sure Start communities in order to determine which features of the Sure Start programme prove most effective in enhancing the lives of children, families and communities. In addition, the evaluation will investigate for whom Sure Start works best and under what circumstances.

A6.49 Toward these ends, the development and functioning of 12,000 infants (9 month olds) and three-year olds and their families, from 150 Sure Start communities will be compared with 3,750 similar children and their families from 50 communities selected to become Sure Start communities before the Sure Start programme begins.

A6.50 In a second phase of investigation, 8,000 of the infants from 100 of the originally studied 150 Sure Start communities will be followed up longitudinally, along with their families, when these children are 3 and 5 years of age (and beyond in the next phase of the evaluation). The development of these children and families will again be compared with that of similar children and families who reside in non-Sure Start communities using data from the Millennium Cohort Study and other sources. Comparisons of communities will also be made on the bases of health, education, employment and crime.

A6.51 Both the first and second phase of investigation will focus upon children's physical health, behavioural development and intellectual and academic functioning. They will also focus on parents' economic circumstances, mental health, parenting practices, parents' perceptions

of their communities and experiences of health, education and other community services available to themselves and their children. All these topics and others, both in the first and second phases of the impact evaluation, will be studied during the course of home visits to families and follow-up telephone calls. Before obtaining any information from families, the purpose of the research will be explained to parents who will be asked if they wish to take part, and their consent secured.

Cost effectiveness

A6.52 The cost effectiveness component of the national evaluation will examine the true cost of Sure Start. It will also determine whether the effects of Sure Start on child, family and community functioning justify the investment of resources and determine the most efficient way in which child, family and community outcomes were achieved. In addition, a cost-benefit analysis will examine positive and negative effects of Sure Start, direct and indirect effects and anticipated and unanticipated effects.

Local context analysis

A6.53 The local context analysis component of the evaluation will describe all 260 Sure Start communities (and 50 Sure Start-to-be communities for comparison purposes) in terms of the social, demographic and economic context of each community and the provision of local services. Changes in these community characteristics will also be studied over time in the 260 Sure Start communities. More specifically:

- Demographics - for example, family structure, age of parents
- Economic characteristics – for example, the local labour force and their qualifications; concentration of poverty; workless households
- Degree of danger and disorder - for example, crime rates, school exclusions
- Health of adults - for example, mental health problems, smoking during pregnancy
- Health and development of children - for example, rate of low birth weight, disability, hospital admissions, academic achievement
- Parenting and home environment of families - for example, children on an at-risk register, parental literacy
- In addition local provision of services will also be measured.

A6.54 Information on these topics will be secured from archival records such as the Census, Office of National Statistics, DfES, NHS Trusts, Local Authorities, Social Services. Some information will also come directly from the monitoring information collected by programmes. Where information is statistically reliable at the Sure Start area level this will be shared with programmes along with local and regional benchmarks where possible.

Support for local evaluations

A6.55 The support for local evaluations component will provide technical support to local Sure Start programmes who will be conducting their own local level evaluation. The national evaluation team will provide advice and support to local evaluators on issues of design, measurement and data analysis as well as ensure strong links between national level and local level evaluations. The team will also organise regional workshops to discuss these issues and provide a website forum for disseminating information on evaluation and stimulating

communication between local and national evaluators. Regional support units will be based at, and work in concert with, the national 'Making Research Count' university partnership (located at Luton, Open University, York, East Anglia, Keele). Further details in this support can be found on the National Evaluation team's website: www.ness.bbk.ac.uk.

Time frame

A6.56 Work on the national evaluation started in mid January 2001 and this first phase will run for 7 years, though it is the intention to follow up the children studied through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. As Sure Start programmes have been developed in phases, fieldwork will also be phased in. This began in Summer 2001 with Trailblazer and Round 2 programmes completing a survey to gather information about the set up and implementation of their programme. This will occur in 2002 for Round 3 and 4 programmes. The Round 1 and Round 2 programmes that will be studied in depth as part of the implementation study were selected in Spring 2002, and the Round 3 and 4 programmes will be selected in 2003.

A6.57 Fieldwork for the study of impact on children and families, will take place in 2003 for trailblazer and second round programmes, and in 2004 for Rounds 3 and 4. Children and their families in a sample of these communities will be followed up in 2005 (the longitudinal phase) and 2006 when they are 3 years and then again 2 years later when they are aged five years.

Reporting findings

A6.58 Regular reports on implementation, impact, community context and cost effectiveness will be published throughout the course of the evaluation. First reports on setting up and early experiences of delivering Sure Start were published in Summer 2002. The first report on findings from the survey of children and families will be published in early 2004. All reports will be available on both the Sure Start Unit website (www.surestart.gov.uk) and the National Evaluation team's website (www.ness.bbk.ac.uk). Reports describing the detailed methodology of the evaluation can be found on the National Evaluation team's website.

Evaluation team

A6.59 The Sure Start evaluation team is led by Professor Edward Melhuish, (Executive Director and Impact Evaluation Director), Birkbeck College. Other members of the team include Professor Jay Belsky (Research Director), Birkbeck College; Professor Jane Tunstill, (Director of the Implementation Evaluation/Support for Local Programmes) Royal Holloway College; Dr. Jacqueline Barnes, (Local Context Analysis Director), Royal Free and University College Medical School, London; Pamela Meadows, (Cost-Effectiveness Evaluation Director), National Institute of Economic and Social Research; Mog Ball (Investigator), Dr Zarrina Kurtz (Investigator); Professor Angela Anning, Department of Education, University of Leeds (Investigator); Dr Alistair Leyland (Statistician), MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow; Dr Martin Frost, Birkbeck College; Beverley Botting, Children and Families Branch, Office of National Statistics.

Sure Start Unit

July 2002

[Delivering Sure Start – 6th Wave Edition]

Table 1**Timing requirements for evaluation reports**

	Measurement year 1	Current PSA targets to be achieved by¹:	End Year 3 evaluation report completed by:
Trailblazers	2000-01	2003-04	2002-03
Round 2	2000-01	2003-04	2002-03
Round 3	2001-02	2003-04	2003-04
Round 4	2002-03	2003-04	2003-04
Round 5 (Groups A,B&C)	2002-03	2004-05	2004-05
Round 6	2003-04	2005-06	2005-06

¹ All programmes will start working towards the 2003-04 –2005-06 PSA/SDA targets from April 2003. All programmes will be expected to achieve these by March 2006.