Sharing Evaluation Findings:

Disseminating the Evidence

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why is Dissemination of Sure Start Local Programme Evaluation Findings Important?

Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) are required to undertake local evaluations of their services. Local evaluation is an important part of your programme for a variety of reasons. For example, evaluation evidence helps to assess how well you are doing, and how far you are reaching your targets and addressing the needs of your population.

Evaluation in SSLP involves a range of activities. These include thorough selection criteria for evaluators, be they internal or external, a comprehensive strategy and planning process and a mechanism for reviewing the evaluation process and outputs as well as examining the benefits and changes that have occurred as a result of programme activity. Evaluation will need to use appropriate methodologies, high quality data collection, analysis and interpretation. The evaluation process will assist programmes in understanding how a programme and services are performing, and where you may need to make changes. However an additional focus of any evaluation process must be the way in which programme evaluation findings are communicated to all stakeholders. These of course include programme beneficiaries, staff and board members but they must also include appropriate bodies and people who will be interested and need to take note of them.

Therefore, no research is complete until the findings are reported. Evaluation of SSLP services really does not exist until the results have been disseminated in a number of ways and for a range of purposes to different stakeholders. Evaluation findings can be reported in a variety of ways. The purpose of this guidance is to illustrate a range of dissemination methods that programmes can adopt to bring their findings to the widest audience, whilst at the same time focusing on those audiences that have a vital role to play in the continuance of the SSLP.

1.2 The Goals of Dissemination

The main goal of dissemination is to share with others the knowledge that the evaluation has produced. The particular audience to which the information is directed may determine the dissemination method. There is a need to communicate evaluation results in a way that is credible and clear for particular audiences. Just as there are many reasons to evaluate, there are equally a variety of reasons to disseminate and share what SSLP evaluations have revealed about the programme. The following classification is one way of thinking about them and is adapted from Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund NCT Project Briefing No 2.

Dissemination for Awareness
The need to reach the maximum number of parents and children in the programme's geographical area has meant that programmes have been very

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effective in developing a local profile, usually co-ordinated by the programme's information officer. Disseminating results of evaluation for the goal of raising awareness of Sure Start also enables the programme and programme staff to celebrate what they have achieved. Dissemination then can act as a marketing or profile building exercise for the programme.

Dissemination for Understanding
This goal can be associated with the need to share with others the rationale for certain projects or services and the reasons why short-term impacts have been attributed to the intervention or not. Sharing with others so that they are able to understand what has been undertaken and what has resulted enables them to take on board the lessons that have been learnt. This can be particularly useful for other programmes considering a similar project. Equally important is the goal of informing the programme decision makers of credible and accessible findings. Programmes need to be accountable for the resources that they have received. Audiences need to understand how that resource has been utilised.

Dissemination for Action
A primary reason for conducting and then reporting on evaluation is to show partners what the programme has achieved. A goal of dissemination therefore must be to encourage action from the audiences listed below. Action may take the form of recognising the outcomes of a particular activity and incorporating such an approach into mainstream services. It may be that once a Sure Start local programme extends into a wider geographical area that funding support will be needed to provide services to that area. Evidence can then influence a decision or action that will be needed to achieve the desired goal of the boundary extension. To achieve this it is necessary to ensure that the quality of such evidence has the power to influence.

The three goals – Awareness, Understanding, Action - are not mutually exclusive; one or all of the goals mentioned above may be relevant to each potential audience. For example an audience who can affect mainstreaming decisions will need to be exposed to findings for the purpose of awareness, understanding and some form of action. Another example might be the need to share with programme staff for understanding and for the purpose of action. Table 1 highlights how different goals can be reflected in the different audiences for dissemination. This in turn may influence the dissemination method chosen for that goal and audience.

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Table 1. Audiences & Goals for Dissemination

Dissemination Audience	*Possible Dissemination Goal*
The Partnership Board	Awareness, Understanding, Action
Programme Staff	Understanding, Action
Parents, Carers and Children	Awareness, Understanding, Action
The Wider Community	Awareness
Sure Start Unit and Regional Teams	Understanding
National Evaluation of Sure Start	Understanding
Local Authority, including elected members	Awareness, Understanding, Action
Statutory Agencies and Partners	Awareness, Understanding, Action
Future Funding Organisations	Awareness, Understanding, Action
Other Interested Professionals	Understanding

This list is not exhaustive but illustrates the diversity of audiences and hence the range of goals associated with dissemination to such diverse audiences.

It is important to recognise that audiences will vary for different pieces of evaluation. Not everyone will be interested in every detail of evaluation methodology found in a full report. It should also be noted that not everyone would wish to access just one form of dissemination. Dissemination then has a range of audiences to achieve a range of goals.

A dissemination strategy

Dissemination is an integral part of the evaluation strategy and should be thought about at the time that evaluation questions are planned and methods developed. Decisions will need to be made about the level of dissemination to be carried out. Programmes need to develop a dissemination strategy and ensure that it is adhered to. In this strategy programmes must be clear about why certain groups have/ need access to differing levels of information.

The strategy must also reflect dissemination methods that are appropriate to different audiences. For those who wish to access the whole range of dissemination outputs barriers should be recognised and efforts made to remove them. A strategy should for example take note of the manner in which information is shared in popular media and what audiences are likely to read and notice. This is true of staff, managers and councillors as well as parents and carers. Surveys of social workers for example, state that while few read lengthy reports or books, a high proportion will read short articles in magazine style journals. There is therefore a need to develop a range of dissemination methods to share evaluation findings.

Evaluation findings when shared and disseminated provide many opportunities to convey an array of information about the programme, its achievement and what it is learning. These may include:

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Information about Programme Morale and Development
- Evaluation is a means of providing evidence of the programme's successes so results need to be shared with staff, board members, parents and other stakeholders.

- Evaluation evidence can be used, not just to prove but also to improve the programme's activities.

- Evaluation evidence can show how the programme is acting in an accountable and transparent way and how it is learning from what evaluation has discovered.

- The impact of the service may be wider than the original objectives of Sure Start. A competent evaluation has the power to tease out the unexpected impacts of service provision.

Evidence of Fiscal Responsibility
- Evaluation information shows how well or otherwise the resources, in terms of finance and personnel, are being used.

- Identification of the most effective elements of the programme will be relevant to highlight those areas that may need to be reshaped or decommissioned.

- Evidence for successful elements of the programme can help to attract funding in the future and feed into the evidence base for mainstreaming. The importance of evaluation as a tool to influence should not be underestimated. Evaluation of SSLPs was always intended to contribute to developing children's services not just within the programmes' locality but also more widely.

- High quality evidence has always been seen as a route to both influence the practice of mainstream service provision for children and families by sharing in the lessons learnt from SSLPs, and also by encouraging mainstream partners to continue to support the innovative ways that SSLPs may be providing services within their areas.

Sharing Good Practice
- Evaluation provides information to others about both good practice and about good evaluation strategies. A good piece of research really does help to spread ideas and should not be kept within the programme.

- Good practice that has been captured by robust and rigorous evaluation can be used by other SSLPs, as can the evaluation methodology.

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- Services provided by SSLPs have had their genesis in consultation with parents and communities. Evaluation results can demonstrate to the community and parents that their aspirations have been met.

Dissemination then can convey to a variety of audiences the evidence associated with programme activity.

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2. Ways of Sharing Evaluation Findings

There are many ways in which Sure Start local programmes can share what they have learnt from their evaluations. In this section, as well as the more traditional methods of dissemination such as report writing, other innovative ways of getting the message across of how SSLPs are performing are also discussed. Whichever method is employed it should be remembered that the greatest influence is exerted when the results being presented are the result of robust, methodologically appropriate and high quality evaluation – this will make the findings far more persuasive. Credible findings should be presented in such a way that every audience is able to acknowledge that the conclusions and recommendations associated with an evaluation are being made on the basis reliable evidence. This section discusses a range of methods to share evaluation findings:

- Formal Reports
- Using the local media
- Newsletters
- Static display boards
- Conferences
- Academic journals
- Specialist and professional press
- Briefings
- Performance and Role-play
- Children as Guides
- Videotapes

2.1 Formal reports[1]
Formal reports need to be a key element of evaluators' and programme managers' strategies for sharing findings. Certain evaluation outputs are produced under guidance from the Sure Start Unit. They request that programmes provide an annual evaluation report as well as a more comprehensive three-year summary report. Reading the annual report is one way in which the Sure Start Unit and regional management staff are able to learn from your programme's experience. Formal reports inform the process of wider policy development. Most importantly evaluation reports can describe the lessons learnt in the process of designing and implementing your project. Whilst it is important to share findings widely programmes should not forget that evaluation remains an important tool with which to improve what is happening within the programme. Reports should be produced with this in mind, ensuring that the information is directed towards conclusions and recommendations that assist in programme development.

Annual Reports. These are required by Sure Start Regional Teams and should be submitted in January of each year for the entire life of the

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[1] See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for more pointers, a checklist to assist in report writing and features of a typical report.

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programme. Annual reports should describe the evaluation activity to date, synthesising key findings and summarising current and planned evaluation for the coming year. The report should also show how the learning from evaluation findings has been put into practice. These reports should also be sent to Patrick Myers in the NESS team to help with their work on synthesising evaluation findings.

Three-Year Summary Reports. In the January after the end of your three-year measurement point a more detailed evaluation report is required. The report is required to critically consider the achievements and progress of the programme and once again will need to reflect on the learning that has taken place over the life of the programme and the evaluation.

Reports of Findings
Good practice suggests that every piece of evaluation (e.g. observations of quality in a child care setting; a survey of speech therapists; a parent focus group) should be written up as a separate report. Writing up individual evaluation studies is important, as it will enable you to act on findings more quickly and facilitate the regular flow of findings into the programme. This key evaluation output should be included in any contract or Service Level Agreement providing evaluation services to the programme. [2]

The reports should be of a sufficient quality that key decision makers are able to understand and feel confident about the quality of the evaluation as well the results that are being reported. Other guidance is available from NESS about evaluation and methods. Here we examine the best format to present evaluation activities and findings in formal written reports.

General guide for annual evaluation, three year report writing and findings reports

Bear in mind that reports will not be the most appropriate form of communication for many audiences. Nevertheless they remain an important management tool as a means to explain why the evaluation has been undertaken, to describe in detail the methods used in the evaluation and the findings that have emerged.

Annual reports should refrain from describing project activities in detail but instead focus more on the lessons learned and significant local outcomes. They fulfil a vital function in the planning cycle of both the local programme and the national context in which the work of Sure Start features. This format would work equally well with the three-year report.

Three-year summary reports, however, are required to 'critically consider the achievements and progress of the programme over the first three years' and

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[2] The National Evaluation Support to Local Programme team will from time to time request summaries of evaluation activities. With programmes' consent, they will place these and any reports of findings on the NESS website, in order to share the results of SSLP evaluations with a very wide audience.

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as such may need to adopt a more reflective style in synthesising and summarising the programme and evaluation activity over that period.

Findings reports on the other hand focus on specific and discrete pieces of evaluation work. They can also make an important contribution to disseminating evidence about how the programme is doing. Programmes should not shy away from examining areas that they believe are not performing well. Dissemination is about conveying the learning that has taken place as a result of evaluation and how the programme has changed as a result of what has been discovered.

In general there are common features to all these types of reports but different sections may be amplified or minimised depending on the report function. For example if the report is simply reporting on one piece of evaluation, (as in a findings report), it may not be necessary to include very much contextual data as background as opposed to an annual report which may wish to state more contextual detail.

In general reports should follow a traditional evaluation/research report format and that means some things need to be considered before writing and compiling a report. Writing evaluation reports requires attention to certain details and it is wise to structure the report in advance. This means knowing what you want to say before trying to write. In order to avoid confusion every sentence should contain one idea only with sentences following logically. A well-written text then becomes a "chain of ideas". Most importantly keep your readers and audience in mind when writing. This may mean providing a map of your document so that readers know what to expect, and placing verbal signposts in your text to explain what is coming next.

Also before you start writing, it is worthwhile thinking a little about style. The formal report follows some standard report writing etiquettes. However there are some very simple issues of style that can be adopted that assist in the production of a professional looking report. It is very important to be interesting and informative when writing an evaluation report, and this can be achieved by writing in a way that is easy to read. Navigating the report is important so always use a contents page, use clear headings, and sub headings. Do not be tempted to use overly elaborate language, keep it simple wherever possible, avoid the use of jargon and acronyms, and try to be concise and precise.

Evaluation reports and executive summaries are important documents. As such it is worthwhile taking a little time to reflect on the content, style and quality of the report. Below are some tips for examining the evaluation report in order to ensure that the report maximises the opportunity for learning and action based upon its contents. Some of these items also provide tips for evaluating the evaluation thus giving an opportunity to think about how others may view what has been achieved in the conduct of the evaluation.

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Tips for Evaluating your Evaluation Report
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Meeting Needs	Does the report meet the needs as laid out in the Sure Start Guidance and the SSLP expectations?
Relevant Scope	Has the scope of the programme been captured in the evaluation?
Defensible Design	Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions.
Reliable Data	To what extent are the primary and secondary data collected or selected appropriate and comprehensive, offering an adequate degree of validity and reliability for the intended use?
Sound Analysis	Is the quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed, according to professional standards so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?
Credible Findings	Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?
Impartial conclusions	Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personnel or stakeholders views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?
Clear Report	Does the report clearly describe the programme or issue being evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?

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Source: Mournier (1997) reported in Clarke (1999)

A word about Executive Summaries

Last, but certainly not least, all kinds of reports should have an executive summary. Evaluation reports are an important part of any programme's dissemination strategy. However programmes should be realistic about how many people will be able to read the document from cover to cover. Executive summaries that distil the key findings into a much shorter document can ensure that the most pertinent findings and recommendations are drawn to

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the reader's attention. Other programmes use a letter that accompanies an evaluation report to encourage recipients to delve into the full report. Executive summaries should be concise, clearly focused and not over lengthy.

Although reports are often the main vehicle for sharing evaluation findings they should not be seen as the only way. A wide range of audiences is entitled to have access to an assessment of programme performance. These include people whose primary language is not English and those that are non-literate. After all, this is public money, and the programme must respond in a transparent and accountable way to the wider population for the resources that have been received. Other forms of dissemination can be utilised to achieve this ambition. These other methods may be more appropriate for certain audiences since they often have the power to attract more and wider attention than a report alone.

2.2 Other Dissemination Methods:

This section will cover some of the other ways SSLPs might wish to consider sharing their evaluation findings. These include:

- Using the media
- Newsletters
- Static Display Boards
- Conferences
- Academic journals
- Specialist and Professional press
- Briefings
- Performance and Role Play
- Children as guides
- Videotapes

Using the local media and other publications

Programmes are effective in publishing events and activities through the press but should place as much effort into using this medium to disseminate evaluation findings. Many Sure Start local programmes have well-established links with the news organisations in the area. Some programmes use news coverage as a performance indicator for the effectiveness of their information strategy and the productivity of the Information Officer. A well-crafted press release detailing in a succinct and interesting way what the programme has achieved will usually make good copy for a local newspaper.

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Sure Start *Bridgwater* in collaboration with Bridgwater Education Action Zone.

Sure Start Bridgwater funds activities for playgroup children at a forest school held in woodland in the Quantock Hills of Somerset. At the time of its inception this was an innovative service that sought to incorporate numeracy and literacy learning by bringing the classroom into the outdoors. This service, which has been positively evaluated in terms in terms of parental satisfaction and good short-term outcomes in the playgroup, featured on a regional television news programme. The success of the service was therefore disseminated to a very wide audience, substantiating the investment in young children with real life experiences of how the programme is working in their locality.

Effective press releases require attention to detail and presented below is a suggested step-by-step way of writing a press release.[3]

Decide what the story is:
- Be Specific

Who will be interested?
- List publications and specific programmes on radio and TV.

When will they be interested?
- Give them enough time to write the story.
- If you want a dissemination event covered make sure that they have at least a weeks notice so it can be put in the newsroom's diary
- Avoid days when the full council/planning meeting will be reported
- Monday may be a poor news day-can you help fill their columns

Presentation:
- Use headed note paper with:
- Full address, full title of programme, full name of who is in charge and always include telephone number, fax number, mobile and e-mail.

Content:
- What is it about?
- What have you done?
- Why have you done it?
- When, if you are looking for attendance at a dissemination event?
- What have you found?
- Further information can be gained from -- Name whom.
- Photo Opportunity: when and where there will be a chance to take photos and who the photographer should speak to?
- Note for editors: background information, information which puts the

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[3] Adapted from Wilton, Practical Pre School Magazine (2003)

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             news item in context
- Sentences should be no longer than 21 words
- Keep the language simple
- One side of A4 is sufficient
- Why not follow it up with a phone call?

Newsletters

Programmes use newsletters extensively. Evaluation findings should be disseminated to the widest possible audience for awareness purposes. Using the newsletter to spread the word about what is working is an ideal format. Programmes will also be able to report to the wider community about how the programme is learning from its evaluation by reshaping and developing services to become even more outcome orientated.

The reports in the newsletter of course will need to be brief. However the use of charts and graphs can be used to display many aspects of the evaluation. (Guidance on displaying data can be found in the NESS Guidance, Using Existing Data http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/395.pdf). It is important that the details of the evaluation in the newsletter are accessible so it is important to be concise and use simple languages.

Some programmes have issued a report in newsletter format that supplements the regular newsletter. The benefit of this is that it can be disseminated more widely and used to raise community awareness of the programme's activity and evaluation results. Also make sure that any newsletter finds its way onto the programme's web site if it has one. Newsletters can also direct readers to your website for further details or access to other dissemination outputs.

Newsletters should be distributed and placed in a wide variety of settings including:

- GP Surgeries

- Libraries

- Pre School Settings

- Council Offices

- Voluntary Sector Organisations

- Religious organisations

- Special interest community groups

- Self Help groups

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Example Report

Sure Start *Euston* has prepared a report that incorporates a range of information sources. The report provides some description of what services the programme has provided, a sample of the monitoring data and the results of the evaluation. Most importantly the report is eye catching, well laid out and informative. This is a good way of making sure a wide range of audiences have access to the findings of the programme's evaluation.

http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/AnnualReports/636.pdf

Static Display Boards

Disseminating evaluation findings also affords programmes with the opportunity to publicise the programme. Using static display boards in libraries, shopping centres, school entrances, wherever families are likely to be is an effective way of raising the awareness of the evaluation. Indeed this will also have the benefit of acting as a publicity exercise for the programme. Remember to make the displays eye catching. Make use of headline type displays and be concise. Let other dissemination methods add the detail should your audience wish more information. Again the use of high quality graphics that report activity and outcomes perhaps in charts and graphs should be incorporated into the display. Don't forget to make sure some of the newsletters are placed at the stand so that people have the opportunity to take information away. It is worthwhile also informing the press that a photo opportunity is available to them.

Conferences

Conferences can be organised as part of the evaluation strategy or alternately evaluators can contribute to conferences organised by others. There some important points to consider if organising a conference from scratch and there are many organisations that can assist in this process. However here is list of things that will need to be considered:

- What is the purpose and reason for the conference?
- Is there a need and demand for such an event?
- Who will organise the event, an individual or a team?

Conferences can be arranged for a variety of audiences. Before planning all the practical aspects, however, take some time to think about why the conference is being held. Your first step should be to go through all the evaluation findings for your programme and decide whom your target audience is and if there will be a theme. For instance if you are bringing together Sure Start staff you might present results that will help them to see how their actions can lead to evaluation findings (e.g. ways to extend the importance of monitoring data; innovative methods of involving hard to reach

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families). Possibly you want to present some results to local families. This may be a good time to join with another programme in your local authority if you both have results on a similar topic (e.g. parent satisfaction with home visiting; the impact of book reading to infants). The purpose of the conference might be to share findings with local organisations, funders and agencies in which case your focus could be on cost-effectiveness. If you have been working with external consultants or a university, think about including both external speakers and Sure Start staff. While the external evaluator will have more technical expertise, the Sure Start staff will be able to provide more context.

Once you have decided on the theme, and hopefully found volunteers willing to present the findings, there are many practicalities that also need to be considered:

- Finding a venue
- Establishing a budget
- Travel and Accommodation arrangements
- Childcare
- Marketing and Administration.

Example for Staff
The Sure Start Programmes in *Staffordshire* organised an event for staff that was entitled 'Sharing Best Practice'. The event was attended by about 300 staff that came together for the opportunity to discover what was working in their programme around a variety of themes. Staff participated in workshops as well as listened to how the evidence base was being compiled into what was effective in the delivery of services for young children. The contents of the day were received enthusiastically and the effect was to open up further opportunities for workers in programmes to meet within their individual specialist areas.

Example for Parents
Sure Start Chelmsley Wood held an annual review day that incorporated parents and staff sharing their experience of being involved in Sure Start. Story telling was used to illustrate how Sure Start has changed their lives and the effects that the programme has had upon their families.

Example for wider dissemination
Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority have organised an Effective Early Intervention in Children's Services Conference. Sure Start programmes feature prominently on the agenda, talking about and sharing what evaluation has found to be effective. This is an important forum for dissemination of evaluation findings. Indeed all programmes need to be aware of the opportunities that exist by speaking at others' conferences. Running workshops at other events is also an effective way of getting the messages across about what is working.

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> **Example for wider dissemination**
> *Barking and Dagenham, Sure Start Marks Gate and Havering, Sure Start Hilldene and Goosehay* share an evaluator who has sought to use a range of methods through which to disseminate findings to different audiences. Initially findings are reported back to staff by way of internal presentations, before they are provided in a report format. This provides time for the programme to discuss the findings. Parents and carers are involved in aspects of these evaluations and have participated in the dissemination of findings. This has required training and support, and some parents have presented at larger conferences. Dissemination to the wider professional and academic community is also taking place with publications of journal articles.

Academic Journals
Once you have presented your results to a live audience (who may well have asked questions), or to more than one group, the next stage could be to write up the findings in a more formal way so that they can reach a wider audience. Research will receive most credibility if other researchers in 'peer reviewed' journals have reviewed it. This can be daunting but these reviews can be most useful in suggesting ways to present the results more accurately, or in providing ideas for other ways to analyse the results. If you have been working with a University partner they may in fact suggest that a paper be written. Make sure that someone in the Sure Start programme is involved, that programme staff are given authorship, and that final papers are not submitted without being seen by the Management Board.

When the decision has been made to publish it is important that several questions and key points are addressed.

1. Who would be interested in what we have to say, and who needs to hear what we have to say. Is the subject matter of interest to academics, practitioners or commissioners of services? This is important, as it will decide the nature and type of publication that you choose to submit articles to.

2. Which journal or publisher? This is very much determined by the answers to point one above.

3. All academic and specialist publications have author guidelines. This lays out what the expected length of the article should be, appropriate headings, style of referencing etc.

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Sheffield, Foxhill and Parson Cross

Using storysacks to talk with parents about young children's literacy learning

This report, by Jo Weinberger and Anne Stafford, documents a conversation focusing on a grid to discuss the educational content of storysacks with parents. It has been published in Education 3-13, Volume 32, Number 1, March 2004 pp 31-38.

Specialist and Professional Press

In addition to academic journals, there are many specialist publications that are written for a range of professionals interested in a particular topic or discipline. These tend to present information in a more 'readable' format such as one might find in newspapers or magazines. Examples are 'Young Minds' magazine (http://www.youngminds.org.uk/magazine/) which is described as "Essential and entertaining read for everyone who works with children and young people from mental health professionals to teachers, Connexions personal advisors to social workers", and the 0-19 magazine which focuses on issues about children and include much on the early years arena. (http://www.zero2nineteen.co.uk). Many professional groups (e.g. Nursing Times; The Journal of the Community Practitioners' & Health Visitors' Association) have similar publications that are suitable for publishing results of research with a focus on their applications in practice.

Briefings and Presentations

Key players in your locality may not be able to attend half or full-day conferences. Their diaries are likely to be full of last minute meetings and, even if they are really committed to finding out about your programme, events may prevent them. Thus you should make a concerted effort to plan both written briefings and short, concise presentations.   A dissemination strategy needs to identify those who make decisions in relation to the arena in which Sure Start operates and meet them. The mainstreaming of Sure Start will occur through the effective dissemination of evidence, using opportunities to persuade with the use of robust and reliable evaluation findings and a professional approach in making sure these reach the eyes and ears of those who matter.

Your briefing paper will probably be based on the Executive Summary of your most recent annual evaluation report – which is why executive summaries are so important.   More information than that is unlikely to be easily communicated in a short time. However, take some time to amend the summary to that it catches the eye of your target audience. If they are involved with child welfare then put those findings at the top. Add a little about the national context. The formal presentation (train up someone in the

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programme to be proficient at PowerPoint) needs to be logical, thought provoking and colourful if it is to be remembered. Remember that, while you are immersed in the Sure Start world some members of your audience may not be so a small amount of background can help. However, always remember the golden rule – Less is More. An overhead with 20 lines of text will have much less impact than one with four bullet points.

Be creative (and flexible) in your strategy for planning a briefing. A Working Breakfast, for example timed and situated to allow people to continue their day's work, can be used to report on particular evaluation findings. For example if your programme has identified through reliable and robust evaluations that targeted activities are impacting on registrations or re registrations on the Child Protection Register, a breakfast meeting with the locality Children Services Managers will ensure those who need to hear the results gain access to them. If your smoking cessation intervention is yielding results then the learning from the evaluation can be shared with health service colleagues.

The key is to make these meetings very focused and functional. It is very important that they are time limited and when you invite decision makers make sure they know that the meeting will not exceed for example 1 hour. If you are making a presentation at this event, practice and check your timings. If this is to be a regular mechanism for dissemination people are likely to attend if they see that the meetings are conducted in a business like way and they can be assured of the time commitment they need to make.

TIPS
The Dale Cone of Learning states that people remember only about 25% of what they hear. This is enhanced to up to 75% when there is some visual support to what is being discussed and the audience are involved in some way. To be effective it is necessary to use visual aides when presenting.

When designing a presentation remember:

- Use simple readable fonts
- Few points per slide or overhead
- Overhead slides should have a light background, computer ones dark
- Do not use too many slides or overheads
- Make sure you prepare carefully your own speech

Presentations can be conceptualised as having a beginning, middle and an end.

A beginning
Introduce yourself
Outline the presentation
Tell the audience how long the presentation will take
Perhaps start with a question, or make a statement or tell a story to

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contextualise the presentation

The Middle
This is where you convey the message of your presentation - for example this could be how the programme has developed its approach to speech and language

The End
Summarise, in the example above, the problems faced, the actions taken and the results of the approach.
Thank people for their time and attention

Also it is worthwhile keeping in mind your own composure:

Stand comfortably
Breathe properly
Modulate your voice
Be natural
Get the environment right

If using PowerPoint don't forget to take a spare set of overheads. You never know what might happen!

Performance and Role-Play

Evaluation need not be disseminated only in written form as the information prior to this has illustrated. There are many new, novel and innovative approaches to make dissemination fun and accessible. Many approaches involve those who have supplied the data to participate in the dissemination of what the data has revealed. The methods are very appropriate so that non-literate stakeholders and community members gain access to the programme's evaluation findings.

Some researchers have turned their evaluation reports into scripts that are presented more as a performance than a presentation. It is important to bear mind that these innovative ways of dissemination will still need to be based upon reliable and rigorous evaluation. Academic presentations follow a format whereby the audience can navigate the research endeavour. Reading research outputs as performance is nothing more than paring away some of the technical jargon and replacing them with simpler more ordinary terminology. Some research performers make use of humour to engage the audience. This can be an innovative way of presenting findings at events that have been designed to celebrate the Sure Start local programme, making it another opportunity to market the programme in dynamic and creative ways. Detailed below is an illustration for using such innovative ways of sharing what your programme had found through evaluation.

A programme may have found that a particular approach to post natal depression had resulted in quite dramatic reductions in scores on the

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Edinburgh Post Natal Depression Scale (EPDS). Some parents enact via role-play an illustrative session with the health visitor who supported the group. At intervals a narrator interjects with an explanation of what is going on. The narrator may also use some qualitative comments that came from the evaluation to illustrate particular things that people reported as being beneficial as they occur in the role-play.

The audience for this dissemination method not only gains some insight into what the service or intervention may look like but are also provided with an oral representation of the evaluation findings. This role-play method provides access to those who may be unable to read the evaluation reports for whatever reason. This method can provide dramatic impact and certainly engages with audiences in ways that a normal presentation of evaluation findings does not. This dissemination method can supplement other approaches. Indeed it could be incorporated into the briefings described above.

Children as Guides

The Sure Start centre has opened and the children have spent time in the building. The older children are able to inform the evaluation of the best aspects of the building and explain why and what they like to do. It may be that the sensory room has engaged their imagination or that the outdoor areas provide some very good experiences. With permission, consent, and of course adequate attention to risk analysis, decision makers can be given a tour of the facility through the eyes of the child. Efforts in evaluation should be made to record and make use of children's views. The children can demonstrate the areas that are important to them and give reasons for their preference. Providing children with the opportunity to share what they have said to the evaluator is a good experience for them as well as providing a powerful medium for evaluation findings to be presented to decision makers.

Videotapes

Some programmes have used audio and visual methods to record the outcomes of their evaluation journey. For some this has been used to record one aspect of the evaluation, for others the summary of the whole evaluation process and findings are recorded. Videos and photographs can allow viewers to access directly people engaged in activities that have been evaluated. Where parents are willing they can retell their story of the Sure Start experience, conveying feelings and emotion that can be lost when simply reading text. In addition, these participatory methods are seen as continuing the Sure Start ethos of working with, rather than on or for, families. Encouraging dissemination that brings the viewer closer to the reality of Sure Start ensures the evaluation maintains its participatory credentials.

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3. Conclusions

Dissemination, just like evaluation, is something that needs to be planned. A strategy that identifies the audiences for the sharing of evaluation findings, considers appropriate methods to achieve this, and develops appropriate time lines for it to be achieved will ensure a successful conclusion to this part of the evaluation journey.

However just as evaluation is an ongoing, rolling and integral part of the programme then dissemination logically must follow the same path. Evaluation findings do not have to wait for an annual report to be prepared. Individual evaluation reports specific to programme services need to be disseminated quickly if lessons are to be learnt from the findings. Equally, sharing positive findings to decision makers will demonstrate the programme's commitment to developing an evidence base of what works. Good evaluations, where outcomes of services have been measured in credible ways, are more difficult to ignore.

Dissemination fulfils the programme's responsibility to share what it has found through evaluation. Participants involved in evaluation, be they providing data and being part of the analysis of the data have a right to see their efforts recognised through dissemination. Dissemination therefore is crucial to recognising the input that individuals have had in the evaluation process. Even when evaluation reveals uncomfortable findings we have a responsibility to ensuring that these findings are listened to, reported and acted upon. Dissemination therefore should not be seen as a choice. The programme is accountable for the resources that it uses. It is required to justify decisions that have been made in a transparent and open way. Sharing evaluation findings is nothing more than living up to that ideal.

Further Support

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) team provides help and advice to programmes on carrying out their local evaluations. This includes a NESS Regional Support Officer (RSO) assigned to each region. Your RSO will be able to provide advice and information on a range of issues covered in this report, including methodologies, data collection and analysis, report writing, dissemination and the use of evaluation findings. The list of RSOs is included in Appendix 4.

Accompanying this guidance will be a workshop programme that will examine the issues raised in this document and provide further training on incorporating existing data in SSLPs' local evaluation. The dates of those workshops in your region will be conveyed to you, as workshops are organised.

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References

Clarke A. (1999) Evaluating Research. Sage Publications. London

Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund NCT Project Briefing No 2.
www.ncteam.ac.uk accessed Friday, 12 March 2004

Wilton G. (2003) Practical Pre School Magazine. Media Workshop

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Appendix 1   Report Writing Aids

From: http://grcpublishing.grc.nasa.gov/editing/chp9.cfm

As an aid in outlining and drafting your report, try to answer the following questions before starting to write:

- What are the purpose and scope of the report? Do you have something worth reporting?
- Who will read the report? What do you want your readers to learn from the report? What do they need to know about the subject to understand your results and conclusions?
- What are the *most significant* results and conclusions of your work? Do these all fall within the stated purpose of the report? What is the order of importance of the results and conclusions?
- How can the important results best be presented to the readers? Should figures and tables be used? If so, what should these show? Should the results be presented and discussed by:

  1. Decreasing order of importance (Usually preferred)
  2. Increasing order of importance?
  3. The chronological order in which they were determined?
  4. Some other logical order of development?

- What is the minimum information needed to support the major results and conclusions? What additional information do you have? Should any of this be included in the report, or will it detract from your readers' comprehension of the major points? If any additional information should be included, should it be in the main text or in an appendix?

After you have prepared your report draft, review it with the following questions in mind:

- Are the purpose and scope of the report clearly stated? Has the purpose been fulfilled?
- Does the Introduction give your readers the information they need to understand the results (or tell them where to get the information)? Are your assumptions clearly defined?
- Did you say what you wanted to say? Do you mean what you said? Can your readers misinterpret what you said?
- Will the important results be clear to your readers? Is the order of importance clear?
- Are the limitations of the conclusions clearly stated?
- Is the information presented so as to emphasise the most important results rather than the difficulty of the work?
- Have you clearly separated facts from opinions? Can your readers easily distinguish between these?

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Appendix 2 Report Writing – a checklist of structure, style and content

From: http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/tskills/reports/checklist/pdf

Reports: persuade, inform, record, and provide evidence, based on facts only. Each section must stand on its own as it may be read out of context.

Reports should be: Correct, Clear, Coherent, Concise, Complete, Considerate of the reader.

Aims and objectives
Should appear at the beginning of the report
Must be agreed and be specific
Should set limits on the study and the scope of the report

Introduction
Introduce issues and problems; explain any gaps in procedures when work was done
Set the scene but be focused on aims
Broader 'background' information may be appropriate but should be in a separate, preceding, section

Main body of report
Use past tense, 'passive' voice
State methods for collecting evidence
Avoid anything irrelevant or out of scope
Always reference secondary evidence (evidence you did not directly collect)
Depersonalise – never use 'we' as it implies author's opinion and is not allowed
Depersonalise – never use 'you', use 'one'

Conclusions
Refer back to aims and objectives
No new evidence or information to be introduced at this stage
Use past/present tense
Avoid 'should' – implies a recommendation, not conclusions
Refer back to body of report and evidence presented there

Recommendations
Use past/present tense
Must refer back to body of report and evidence presented there

Summary
Put at front of report
Usually called 'Executive Summary'
Should contain main aims, procedures used, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

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Appendix 3   Typical features of an evaluation/research report

1. Title Page and Contents.

Remember that not everyone will know exactly where a Sure Start local programme is by the creative name it was given. Include the District and the Region. This will be useful for wider dissemination and reading.

2. Executive Summary.

This is an important summary of what is contained in the report. It needs to be clearly focused and written in a concise and accessible way. This section should be written after the main report has been completed (see section on executive summaries later).

3. Background and Introduction

Readers of the annual report will need to know a little about the context in which the programme is operating. This will be a brief summary of some of the features of the locality, some demographics and comment on the range of services within the area. It may also be useful in certain reports to offer a short description of the services that the programme is offering to supplement and extend other services provided in the area. This section should be brief and to the point and not be a lengthy and detailed description of personnel and every service provided. This also may not be needed for a findings report,

The introduction should also provide the rationale as to why the evaluation is being undertaken. For example in findings reports it may detail why the evaluation sub group has chosen this particular area for investigation. It may be that an innovative type of service justifies the evaluation input or equally it may a service that is not achieving the outputs laid down in the provider's contract or service level agreement. Whatever the reason the reader should have access to the motivation for this aspect of the evaluation strategy.

It is not necessary to duplicate the aims and objectives of Sure Start Local programmes in any introductory section. Local evaluation reports are very much focused at the programme level.

Where the report is focusing on findings of one particular piece of evaluation it is important to be clear about what the aims of this part of the evaluation is. It is essential to identify the research question that has underpinned this evaluation. The research question will of course influence the methodology and therefore will impact on the credibility of your findings. The reader must be able to assess how far the question has been answered in the course of this piece of evaluation.

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4. Methods

This is the section where an explanation of sampling and methodology will be undertaken. Reporting on a sampling strategy and how many participants are included in the study is vital if readers are to be able to assess the quality of the evidence produced. Equally, a clear exposition of the methods employed will allow the reader to assess the appropriateness for their use to answer the research question posed. Sharing good practice is integral to SSLPs and this includes the practice of evaluation as well as the practice of providing services for families and young children, and so another Sure Start programme or children's centre may want to carry out research on the same topic either independently in collaboration with other programmes in the region. This might be around speech and language referrals and how speech and language services have been developed. Having access to existing methodologies and the details of how the research was conducted provides useful information for others investigating the same or similar areas. This detail will also provide others with an understanding of the evaluation methods and the research process involved thus providing some insight into the scope of the research and in turn the usefulness of the results.

It is important that the reader is able to understand the rationale and methodological approach to the work. However it is useful to place detailed methodological procedures in an appendix.

5. Results and Findings

This section is primarily reporting on the findings and evidence that has been generated from the evaluation activities within the programme, be they one service if this is a findings report or the overall findings over a certain time period for other types of reports. It is worth trying to make this section as interesting as possible with the use of graphs and photographs (make sure consent has been provided by those people in any photograph used in the report).

There are many ways that the findings and evidence can be reported. The findings can be categorised under the five PSA objective headings or they can be reported around some of the other evaluation themes such as partnership working, cost effectiveness etc. The aim of this section is to direct people's attention to what the evaluation in general has found. For annual and three-year summary reports this may mean synthesising all evaluation outputs (including the separate findings reports).

The type of data that you have collected will influence the presentation and interpretation of results and findings. Reporting on the results of a satisfaction survey for example will require the use of charts and graphs alongside some commentary to state what the graphs are revealing. Always ensure that you provide the numbers contributing to results. Stating and displaying that 95% of people thought a service was good when only 9 or 10 people provided the data can be misleading if you do not allow the reader access to the sample size.

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Qualitative data is aimed at capturing the voice of the participants and sometimes developing a sense of fit between two or more accounts usually revealed as themes. Quotes should be used to support those themes that have been developed through careful reading of transcripts and field notes. The presentation of qualitative data needs to be a result of thorough and proper analysis rather than a quick skim to find quotes that seems to offer a colourful portrayal of what is being reported. (Future NESS guidance will assist in this endeavour).

6. Discussion.

The discussion section of a report should analyse the findings and comment on what they mean in the context of the programme. As such the discussion should focus on specific local issues. The discussions will lead to the next section that will report on the learning that needs to take place based on what the report has presented. Where possible it is also worth discussing the results in the wider context of theory, perhaps speculating on why something has worked. For example self-esteem is recognised as contributing to ameliorating the effects of some forms of mental distress. The results of a confidence-building course could be discussed in relation to the theoretical basis of this assumption. This is also the section where any qualifications or limitations of the research are discussed such as small sample size, potential bias if any have been identified etc.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The amount of detail in this section will vary according to the audience to which the report is directed. Nevertheless it needs to be accessible to all so once again be precise and concise. An evaluation report must offer some recommendations based upon the findings it has stated. In some instances the recommendation may be that the evaluation needs to take place again if the research did not work out as well as intended, although essentially this section is about recommendations for service delivery based on the findings. If evaluation is to have utility to the programme then it needs to inform practice and/or add to the evidence base of what does or does not work. This is quite a tall order but one which evaluators must embrace if they are to shown to be effective, and a good use of resource. These recommendations should be discussed and considered by the evaluators, programme managers and the programme board.

8. Annexes.

Information too detailed for the main body of the report should be included in this section. This would include some aspects of the methodology such as questionnaires used etc and other pertinent information.

Additional information

In annual and three year summary reports SSLPs should consider some

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additional information to include thus maximising the influence of their evaluation. Some additional sections are detailed below:

1. How productive has the programme been?

Here it is useful to incorporate some programme statistics about the number of parents and children with which the programme works. The numbers of families registered as well as the number of families that regularly attend various activities could also be included. This provides the reader with some insight into the services that have been evaluated. Monitoring information is the foundation of much evaluative work. In this context it informs the reader of the reach of the programme and the equality of service provision across the programme population. It is also foundational to understanding what the programme has achieved and puts any short-term impact evaluations in context. This section will also need to relate to the demographics reported in section one in reporting the success or otherwise of the programme's ability to reach all sections of the community. It is important to show how diversity within the community has been recognised and how the needs of different sections of the community have been met.

2. Future Evaluation Activity.

Evaluation and reflection are keys to developing evidence based and responsive services. The commitment to the evaluative process by the programme will be stated if the next stage of evaluation is clearly laid out for the reader. This section should include the areas and methods of future evaluation activity alongside a timeline of outputs and publications. Programmes should also detail the next stage of dissemination and the methods that will be used to provide the widest audience with access to the evaluation findings.

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Appendix 4. NESS Support for Local Evaluation Team

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