

**Multi-agency working in Sure Start projects:  
Successes and challenges**

**by**

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# Abstract

Atkinson et al (2001; 2002<sup>1</sup>) highlighted the potential yet complexity of joining up services. They emphasised the investment needed in terms of finance, time and staff resource to develop new ways of working and the attitudinal shift required in successful initiatives. The key factors in effective practice and the kinds of challenges identified by the team were used as the basis for designing a questionnaire to survey a range of professionals working in four, multi-agency Sure Start projects<sup>2</sup>.

In total, eighty-three questionnaires were returned from team members from the programmes, the Accountable Body, that is the city Primary Care Trust, the Lead Agency, in this case the City Council, as well as members of the partnership boards, including parents. Analysis indicated that the vast majority of respondents believed Sure Start facilitated multi-agency working in terms of staffing arrangements, teams' expectations and priorities, and programme aims. Moreover, an overwhelming majority agreed that there was a need for the development of a common language across professional groups in Sure Start local programmes. Respondents did note, however, that the aims of specific agencies might compete with Sure Start local programme aims and views were divided as to whether local authority structures and boundaries facilitated or hindered multi-agency working. They were also divided as to whether existing confidentiality and information-sharing strategies between various agencies hindered or facilitated multi-agency working. Issues around roles and responsibilities were raised, in particular, with regard to conflicts over areas of responsibility. Indeed, the majority recognised the need for understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others as well as effective communications and information sharing.

Views were quite mixed about the challenge existing financial arrangements posed to multi-agency working, with some concern being expressed about conflicts within or between agencies. The need for creating more effective use of resources and overall sustainability of the services was noted. Availability of non-financial resources created challenges concerning allocation of time, provision of staff and physical space to work together effectively. Moreover, the majority agreed that poor communication within and between agencies and between different local government departments created problems for those working at management and delivery levels. It was also thought that differences in the policy and practice of the 'parent' agency hindered the development of shared practice.

On the positive side, Sure Start local management strongly promoted multi-agency working and encouraged like-minded individuals to work in new ways to meet shared goals. The importance of the leadership role of individual Sure Start managers was stressed. Additional multi-agency training opportunities were to be welcomed though respondents were divided regarding the need for multi-agency or 'single agency' development delivered from the base of the parent agency. Findings are discussed in the light of existing literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Atkinson, M. *et al* (2001) *Multi-agency working: an audit of activity*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Atkinson, M. *et al* (2002) *Multi-agency working: a detailed study*. Slough: NFER

<sup>2</sup> Sure Start programmes aim to draw together professionals from a variety of agencies and have them working together, in partnership, in order to provide better services for the disadvantaged families in their area.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research was undertaken as part of the evaluation of Sure Start Coventry and was funded by the four Sure Start Programmes in Coventry. Principal investigators were Chris Coe and Nick Spencer, with Maria Stuttaford as a named researcher. Carol Aubrey was a co-investigator, with Sarah Dahl as a researcher on the project. The study would not have been possible without the co-operation of the many respondents who agreed to participate.

# 1 Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen a rapid growth in multi-agency work in the childhood field. The *Children Act* (2004) which sets out plans to reform children's services has stressed again the need for integrated teams of health and education professionals, social workers and advisers providing advice and support for young people, based in and around schools and the newly-created Children's Centres that will provide 'joined up' child and family services. Whilst the idea of inter-agency collaboration has been generally welcomed, existing professional structures do not always facilitate the process. Experience over the 1990s has shown us that, in practice, co-operation between schools and education services, social services, health professionals, the police, as well as voluntary bodies in the interests of vulnerable children is not easy to achieve (Audit Commission, 1992 a and b; 1994; 1996; 1998).

Atkinson *et al* (2001; 2002) highlighted the potential yet complexity of joining up services. They emphasised the investment needed in terms of finance, time and staff resource to develop new ways of working and the attitudinal shift required in successful initiatives. The key factors in effective practice and the kinds of challenges identified by the team were used as the basis for designing a questionnaire to survey a range of professionals working in four, multi-agency Sure Start projects.

## 2 Context

A significant outcome of the Government's 2002 Spending Review was major new investment in childcare and services for children and families and the creation of a new – inter-departmental Unit – the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Unit, launched in December, 2002. The Unit was based in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and, at the time this study was carried out, it reported to the, then, new Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Minister, Baroness Cathy Ashton who was a minister in both DfES and the Department for Work and Pensions. The new Unit was intended to benefit children and families with a joined-up approach to childcare, early years education and family and health support in the coming years. At the time, 'Sure Start' had become synonymous with early education, childcare, health and family support and the Unit exemplified the Government's commitment to deliver the best start in life for every child, better opportunities for parents, affordable, good quality childcare and stronger and safer communities. It represented a cornerstone in the Government's commitment to halve child

poverty by 2010. The focus was on an integrated approach that offered families many services, bringing together universal, free early education and more and better childcare with greater assistance where there was greater need through the childcare tax credit.

Sure Start programmes, it was being reported, would have helped 400,000 children living in disadvantaged areas by 2004. Building on the Sure Start initiative, further integration is now planned through the creation of Children's Centres which will, again, bring together good quality childcare with early years education, family support and health services (see *Children Act*, 2004). The aim is that they will act as 'service hubs' within the community for parents and providers of childcare services for children of all ages. Existing services, including Sure Start, early education, the Early Excellence programme, the Neighbourhood Childcare Initiative and the early years services will be central to the new integrated approach. As we move into the new Children Centre era, it will be even more important to take stock, and take account of lessons learned – successes and challenges – that accrue from Sure Start schemes.

### **3 Questions**

Whilst such integrated approaches that characterise Sure Start have been presented as an unqualified 'good', questions are raised about such work:

1. how much do we really know about effective multi-agency working; and
2. what are the key factors for their success and what kinds of challenges are raised?

With the publication of the first major evaluation of the Sure Start programme revealing no overall improvement in the areas targeted by the initiative, such questions become even more important.

## **4 Method**

### **4.1 Participants**

Team members from four local Sure Start programmes in a large Midlands city took part in a survey of multi-agency working. The Accountable Body, in this case, the City Primary Care Trust (PCT), the Lead Agency, that is the City Council or Local Authority, (LA), as well as members of the partnership boards including parents, took part. The programmes

concerned varied in the length of time they had been in operation from three and a half years old to one that was still in the process of being set up.

## **4.2 Materials**

Questionnaires were designed which drew upon reports from Atkinson *et al* (2001; 2002) and Tomlinson (2003) from an NFER study of multi-agency working, involving professionals from education, social services and health sectors of local authorities which focused on models of multi-agency activity, together with the challenges and the key factors for their success. A series of relevant fixed choice questions was devised with opportunities for respondents to elaborate on their views. Areas covered included common aims and objectives, sharing and access to fiscal and non-fiscal resources, roles and responsibilities, communication and information sharing, professional and agency cultures, management and leadership, training opportunities, willingness to be involved and involving relevant personnel, and competing priorities. Participants were asked to identify their role within the Sure Start programme concerned and, if possible, to specify their role still further. Questionnaires were colour coded to allow for the possibility of comparing the responses of different programmes, as well as participants with different roles. Questionnaires were distributed for comment to professionals with a number of different backgrounds, for instance, health, education and psychology.

## **4.3 Procedure**

The survey was introduced at partnership board meetings in each of the four programmes and help was offered for parents whom, it was thought, might find the content and terminology used less accessible. In the event, no requests for help were received.

## **4.4 Analysis**

The data sets were explored initially by recasting them in terms of frequency tables and histograms with related qualitative responses analysed for themes, issues and surprises in order to illuminate further.

# **5 Results**

A total of 79 questionnaires were returned from a total of 159 staff and partnership board members from the four programmes, giving an overall response rate of 50 per cent. Three responses were also obtained from the Lead Agency and one from the Accountable Body.

Whilst some had commented that the questionnaire was not easy to complete, there was a satisfactory return and many reflective comments were made. Several people who returned the questionnaire felt that they had not been involved in Sure Start long enough, or in sufficient depth to make comment about some of the questions. Key findings are appended below, both quantitative and qualitative.

### Question 1: LA Structures and boundaries

Regarding LA structures and boundaries, views as to whether these constituted a facilitating factor or a hindrance were mixed with rather more respondents feeling they facilitated than hindered multi-agency working and with a sizeable minority reporting that they had no particular influence (see Table 1).

In terms of qualitative responses, the factors thought to facilitate multi-agency working within Sure Start were related to being able to use systems and people already in place in order to advise or to promote this type of work.

Working relationships within the teams and with the parent agencies of team members, as well as other voluntary and statutory agencies, were seen as both facilitating and as a force for development of multi-agency working, thus enabling Sure Start programmes to deliver services that were needed.

Working closely with other organisations enables Sure Start to 'fill the gaps'.

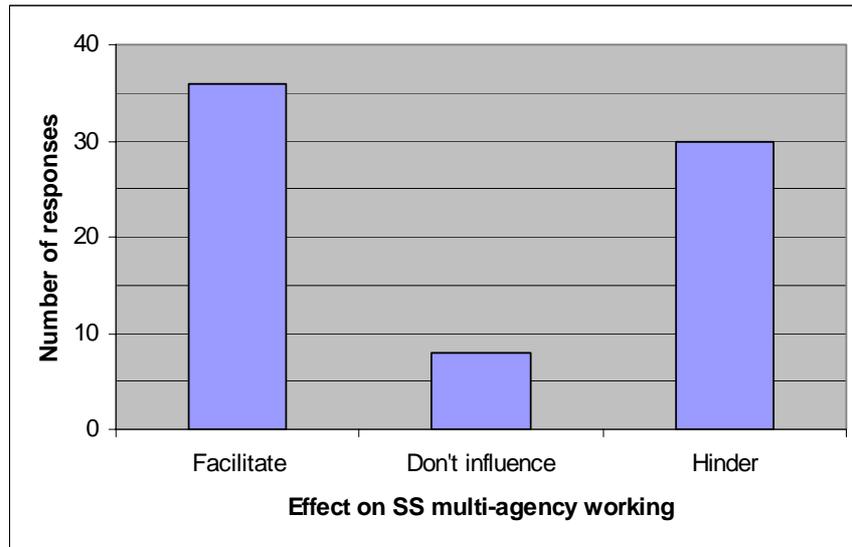
Practical factors thought to hinder Sure Start multi-agency working related to geographical boundaries, where these were different for the various agencies involved with Sure Start. Where various staff employed to work with Sure Start adhered to different terms and conditions of contract, holiday allowance, pay scales and policies and procedures, staff employment matters were also highlighted. These factors, however, were thought to be temporary.

Structures change too frequently and do not meet needs of clients for a one-stop approach  
- or Sure Start's.

Other hindering factors were thought to be associated with the lack of understanding, with certain organisations appearing not fully to understand the role they were to take or working to an agenda incompatible with that of Sure Start.

In my view the Local Authority has its own agenda that it is trying to push through via Sure Start. There is also a conflict of interest between LA and PCT.

**Table 1: Local Authority structures and boundaries:**



Question 2: Staffing arrangements and time investment of Sure Start local programmes

The majority of respondents thought that resources in the form of staffing arrangements and time investment were facilitative of multi-agency working (see Table 2).

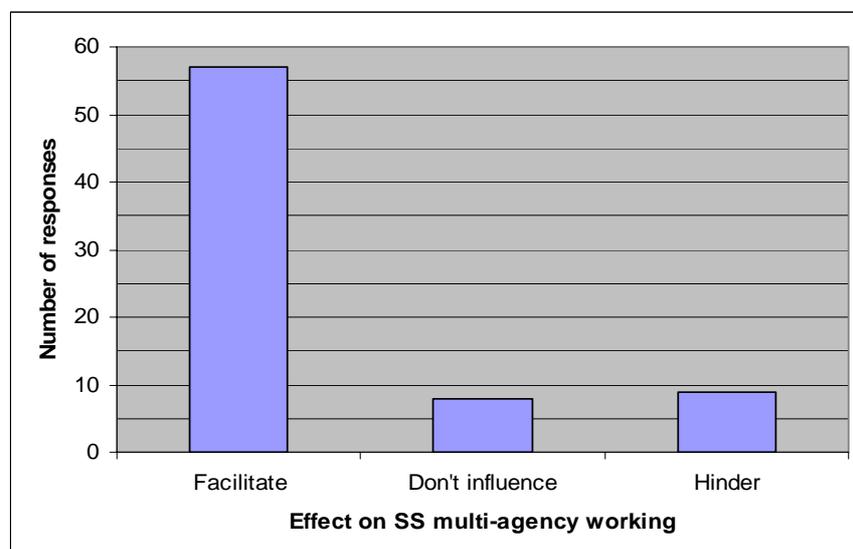
Qualitative responses suggested that time given to setting up new services was seen as essential to enable them to get going with staff working together to establish joint working.

Being able to work closely with the multi-agency team influences our work together.

One respondent, however, noted the difficulties that could arise from split-site accommodation.

Two different sites ... Early Years on one site, everyone else on the other. Team split...

**Table 2: Staffing arrangements and time investment of the SS local programme**



Question 3: Individuals' and Sure Start local programme teams' expectations and priorities

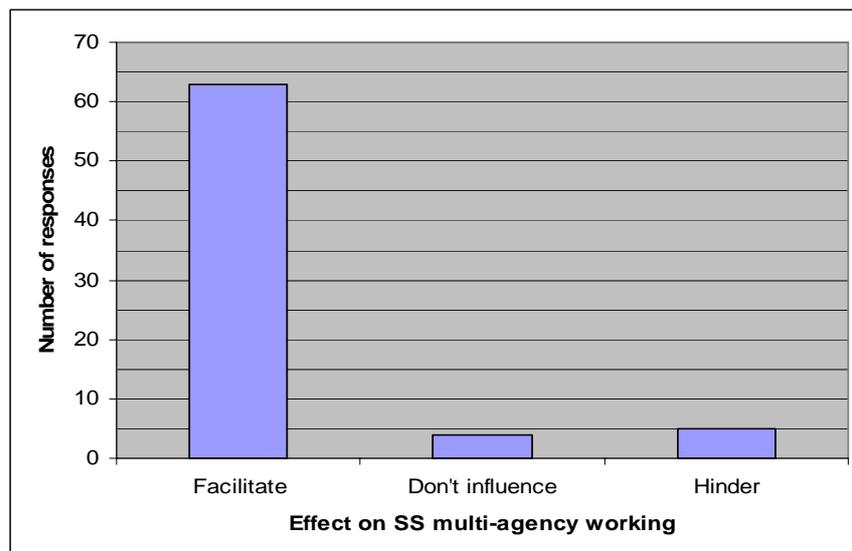
The vast majority of respondents thought that resources in the form of staffing arrangement and time investment in Sure Start programmes facilitated multi-agency working (see Table 3).

In terms of qualitative responses, it was felt that, staff had a high expectation of working as a multi-agency team. The development towards a fully integrated and multi-agency team, however, appeared to be slower than desired. This was felt to be due to several factors. Staff not being clear about their roles within the team was considered a concern. Concern was also expressed regarding the management of staff who, in many cases, remained with the parent organisation and the tensions or problems this could cause.

The development of multi-agency working has been slow. 'Baggage' brought by the local programme members and in some cases, the professional management being maintained within the statutory agencies has needed to become overcome.

Several people commented on the links made to other agencies/services which facilitated both Sure Start and the other agencies' agendas. By contrast, it was also highlighted that "some expectations may oppose the working of other agencies".

**Table 3: Individuals' and Sure Start local programme teams' expectations and priorities**



Question 4: Aims and objectives of Sure Start local programmes

Aims and objectives of local Sure Start programmes were regarded by the vast majority as facilitative of multi-agency working (see Table 4).

Qualitative responses emphasised that the point of Sure Start was to empower and provide a service for the communities they served, reflecting their needs.

The aim of Sure Start is to deliver services in a different way, responding to community needs to work with families at most risk to ensure their children have the best possible access and start in life.

It was generally agreed that Sure Start aimed to work in a multi-agency manner. Sure Start has also acted as a conduit, bringing together, and helping other agencies in adapting to a multi-agency style of working.

A number of agencies in the area would not get together formally if it was not for Sure Start programme.

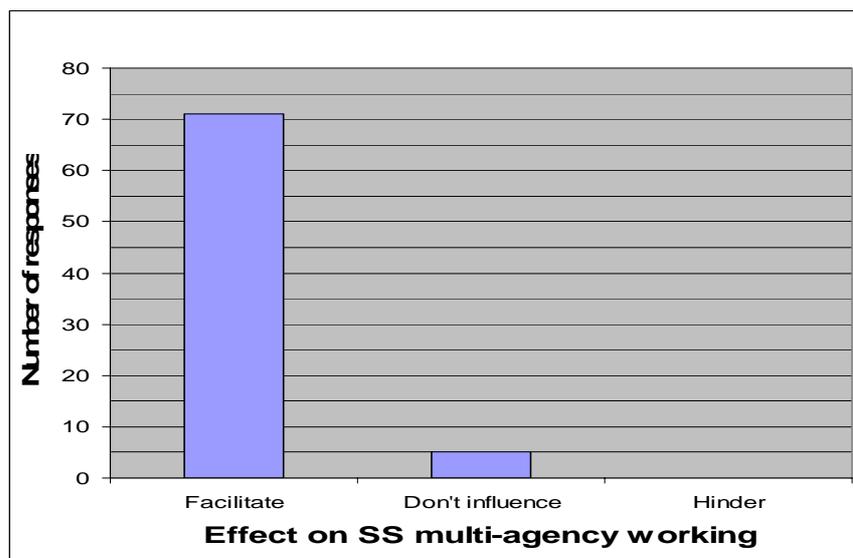
Several team members also felt that their 'home' agency aims or objectives were complementary to those of Sure Start, thus, further assisting work in partnership.

Planning ensures complementary working to clear aims and objectives.

Others, however, felt that reaching this stage of shared objectives and working together was being hindered by some organisations.

Lots of the working agreements are not agreed and in place.

**Table 4: The aims and objectives of Sure the Start local programme**



### Question 5: Confidentiality and information sharing strategies between the various agencies involved

Views concerning the effect of confidentiality and information-sharing strategies between the various agencies on multi-agency working were mixed, with rather more respondents thinking that they facilitated than hindered such work and a minority feeling that they had no influence (see Table 5).

In terms of qualitative responses, whilst a couple of respondents had not experienced this type of information sharing and therefore could not comment, several had a positive experience of this process.

Confidentiality and information sharing reflect the regeneration of services.

It was acknowledged, however, that this was a problem for all four programmes being evaluated and that systems and protocols needed to be developed to reduce the amount of time wasted for staff (and therefore families) on this matter.

Strategies need to be in place to facilitate Sure Start multi-agency working. Organisationally, different agencies have different strategies that are not mutually understood.

Broader changes, it was thought, might have an influence. Some existing work was said to be already established along these lines.

The Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) system should address the issue and the Children's Bill should remove organisational boundaries.

In terms of hindrances, these appeared to occur both across organisations that worked with Sure Start and across the multi-agency team itself, due to the nature of Sure Start team members' employment conditions.

Due to who employs which team members - i.e. [Accountable Body] or [Lead Agency] - information sharing across the team is hindered.

The Accountable Body was highlighted by several respondents as a hindrance.

The lack of information sharing has ground to a halt several very positive programmes we have tried to put into place. Mostly on behalf of the [Accountable Body]!

In one instance, the Sure Start local programme was described as being more 'cagey' than other statutory agencies. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that certain Sure Start team members were employed by agencies that had a very tight policy on information-sharing.

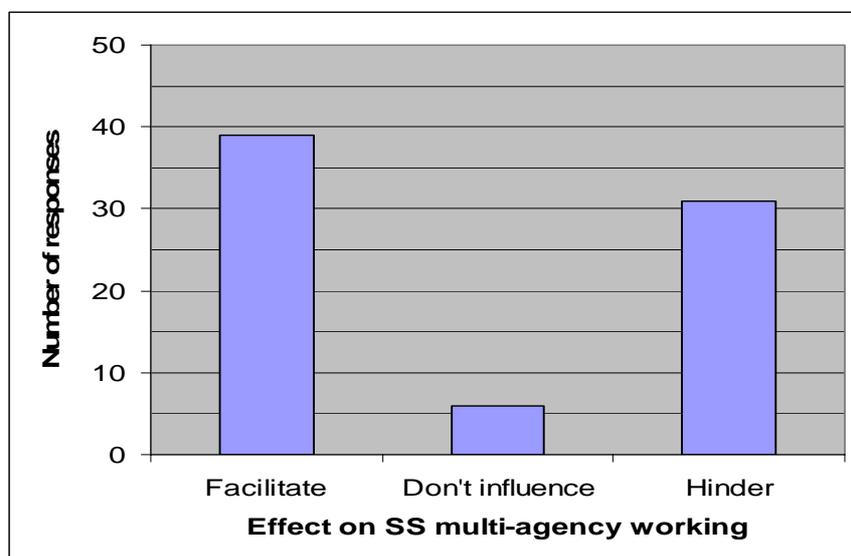
The need for sharing information was seen by many as essential in order for the services to provide successful services.

Understanding when and how to share information ensures our work is as effective as possible.

The urgency of the need for an agreement on information sharing was expressed by one person who also highlighted the lack of progress made in the area in which the four Sure Starts were located.

We need [an area-wide] agreement on information sharing protocols urgently, especially with [Accountable Body]. The first Sure Start [in the area] started 3 years ago - why does it take so long?

**Table 5: Confidentiality and information-sharing strategies between the various agencies involved:**



Question 6: The need for development of a common language across professional groups working in Sure Start local programmes

The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that there was a need for a common language across professional groups (see Table 6).

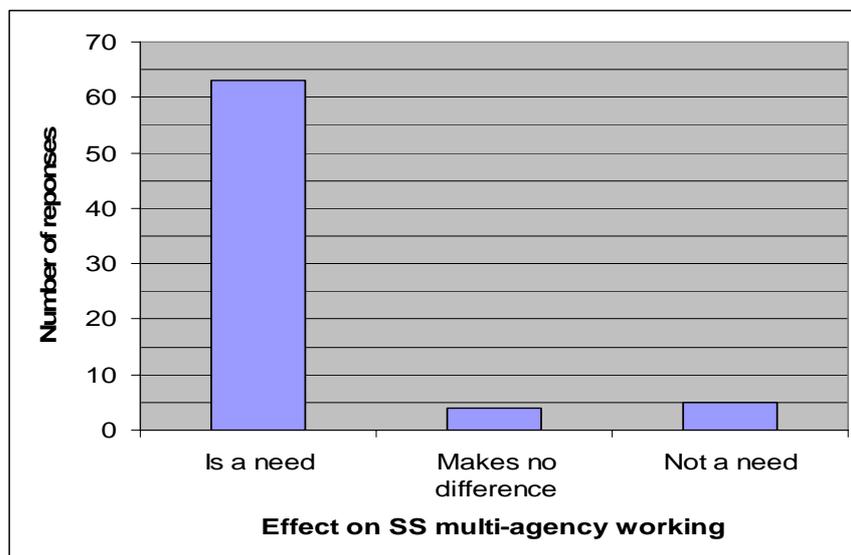
Qualitative responses threw up a particular concern that was related to the need to ensure that definitions of certain terms or phrases were compatible.

Common language reduces isolation and increases partnership working which is essential in order to be effective.

There was also a strong sense that the language used should be accessible for parents.

Overall, issues were highlighted about the difficulty in developing a universal language across professionals, representing different disciplines. It was also suggested that “effective communication channels [could] overcome issues of different 'languages'.”

**Table 6: The need for development of a common language across professional groups working in Sure Start local programmes**



Question 7: Budgets and financial arrangements

Views regarding the challenge that budgets and financial arrangements posed to Sure Start multi-agency working were mixed in respect of the impact of conflict within or between agencies providing Sure Start staff, concern about general lack of programme funding and sustainability of services and the creation of more effective use of resources (human and material) by the reduction of repetition and overlap (see Tables 7-10).

Problems specifically between the Lead Agency and Accountable Body and their respective responsibilities were highlighted by qualitative responses. There was believed to be a need to establish good agreements between the two in order to reduce possible conflicts of interest.

There is always concern about conflicts when partnership working is in place, however, a good agreement reduces the prospect. Duplicate services to parents means a waste of resources.

Conflicting interests of those involved was thought by one respondent possibly to jeopardise the sustainability of services. Competition was felt to be an issue by a few

people. An approach that would enable agencies to collaborate was thought to be needed.

We need a more radical approach to reduce competition and ensure collaboration across agencies

It was noted by more than one programme that services were started when the programmes did not have their own buildings to run them from. This was felt to be unacceptable.

To start programmes with no buildings or venues is ludicrous.

It was also highlighted that administration procedures regarding finance were not supportive of the work to be done. Ordering supplies was mentioned by one as a cumbersome process.

Financial arrangements are a nightmare for all staff involved!

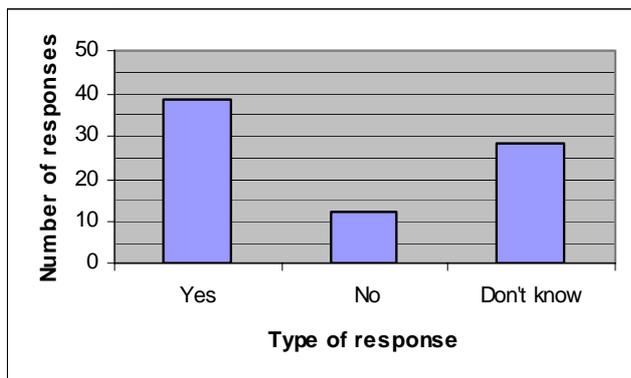
It was explained by one person that simply reducing the amount of overlap and repetition of certain services was not always optional.

Sometimes a service is wanted in multiple venues, or from different perspectives.

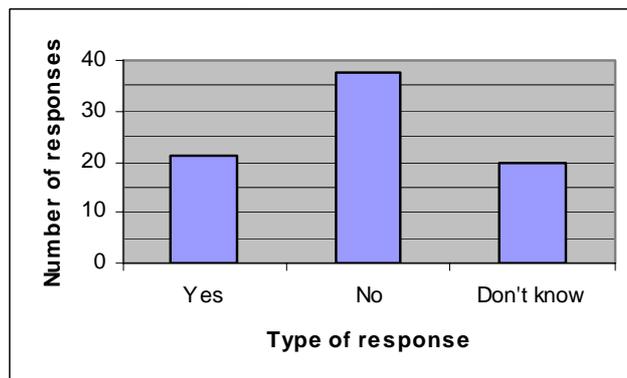
The 'mainstreaming' issue was raised by one person. As Sure Start programmes roll out into Children's Centres they will be funded through the local authority. Certain services may then be added to the main service rather than kept separately as they are in Sure Start.

**In practice, budgets and financial arrangements create a major challenge to Sure Start multi-agency working through:**

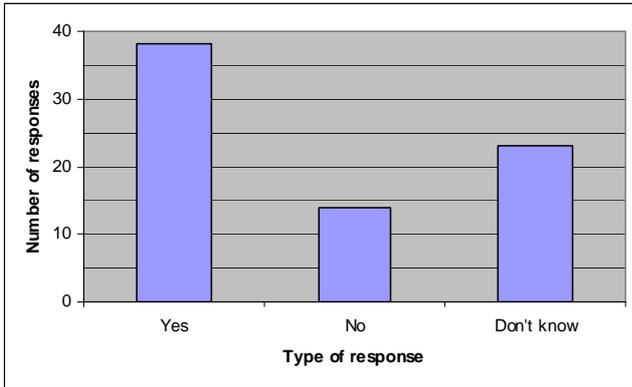
**Table 7: Concern about conflicts within or between agencies that provide Sure Start Staff**



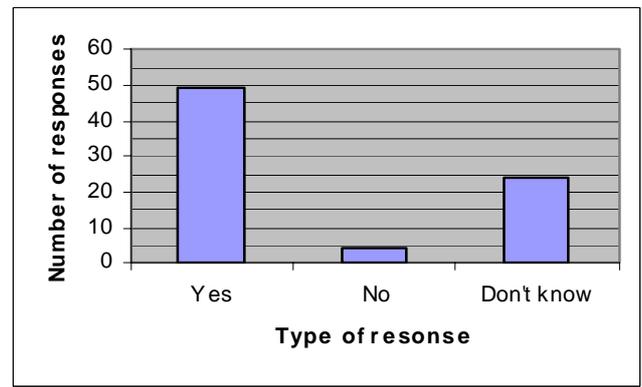
**Table 8: Concern about general lack of programme funding**



**Table 9: Concern about sustainability of the services and, thus, uncertainty of funding**



**Table 10: Creating more effective use of resources (human and material) by reducing repetition and overlap**



Question 8: Roles and responsibilities adopted by individuals working within Sure Start

The majority of respondents felt that issues around roles and responsibilities adopted by individuals working within Sure Start concerned understanding of the roles of others, conflicts over areas of responsibility and the need to go beyond existing roles to work in new ways (see Tables 11-13).

Several people noted in their qualitative responses that the original aims and objectives, set out in the plans for each programme, were created without full consultation with operational level staff. It was felt necessary that Sure Start aims and objectives were revisited and refined.

The plan was developed prior to appointment of staff with no real knowledge, it was based on theory, not practice.

It was felt by some that understanding others' roles and responsibilities, as well as the need to work in new ways had proved difficult in the past.

These have all been challenges to most of the individuals and agencies involved.

This was felt to be an area in which most felt the need to continue improving.

It is vital that all team members understand the role of others in order to effectively offer service.

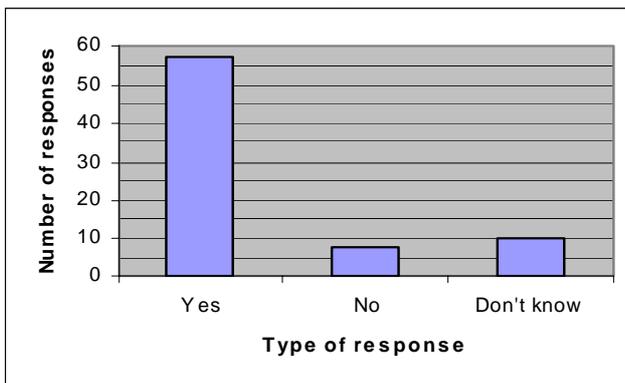
Several respondents, all with different roles within Sure Start understood the initiative to be about "blurring the edges of your role to take new responsibilities and to work in a new way".

An area that appeared to need addressing was that of communication at all levels. The programme manager was viewed by one as an important facilitator in the process of team members learning about each others' roles and being clear about responsibilities.

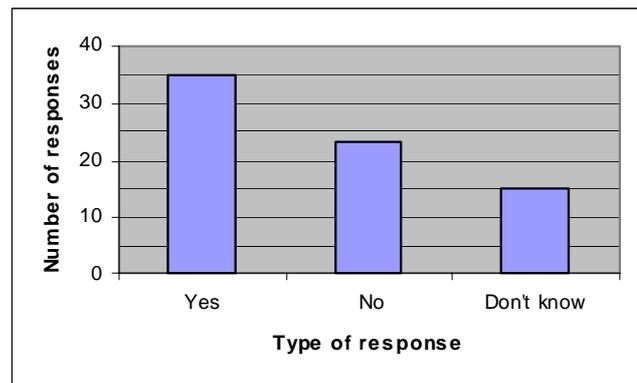
Lack of clarity on this, to do with communication and the need for much greater sharing in the process of identifying priorities - at all levels - national, regional, local.

**Issues around roles and responsibilities adopted by individuals working within Sure Start concern:**

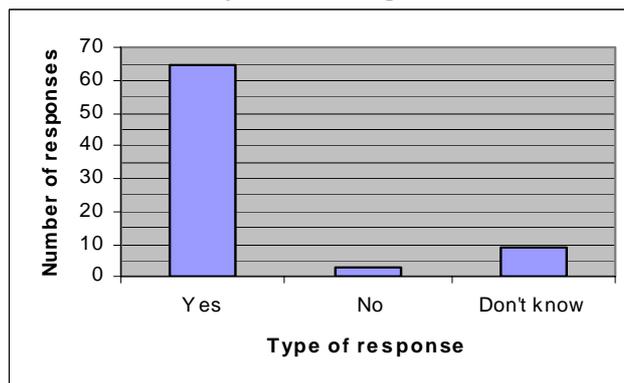
**Table 11: Understanding the roles of others**



**Table 12: Conflicts over areas of responsibility**



**Table 13: The need to beyond existing roles to work in new ways**



**Question 9: Aims of specific agencies competing against Sure Start local programme aims**

Respondents were mixed in view and less certain whether or not aims of specific agencies competed with local Sure Start programme aims as a result of different Government targets, differences in target groups and different emphases on preventative versus crisis intervention (see Tables 14-16).

It would appear from qualitative responses that the aims of some agencies were regarded to be identical to those of Sure Start, with others they were seen as different. This situation was viewed as one that need not result in competition. As a few people

highlighted, Sure Start programmes were intended to find 'gaps' and not duplicate services already existing:

Targets are different from [agencies] which need not be a cause of 'competition' but complementary.

Others recognised that complementary working, although ideal, was hindered by existing working cultures:

A strategic approach would have been helpful. But a culture of competition for initiatives/funding creates this.

The uniqueness of what Sure Start could offer was also felt by one to be overlooked by the services/agencies around.

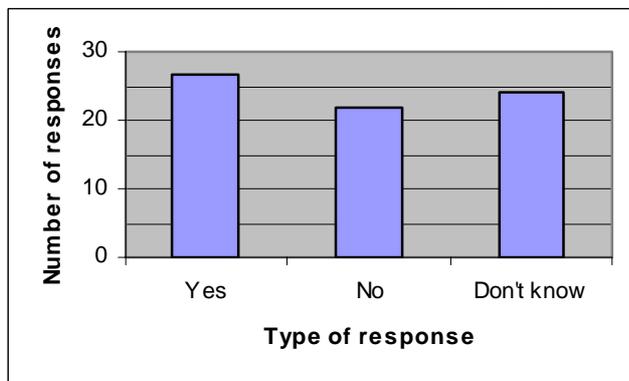
The flexibility provided within Sure Start to achieve targets with new ways of working, many of which, being successful have not been recognised by main stream services.

Several respondents expressed the view that the ethos of all agencies was changing and becoming much more prevention-focused.

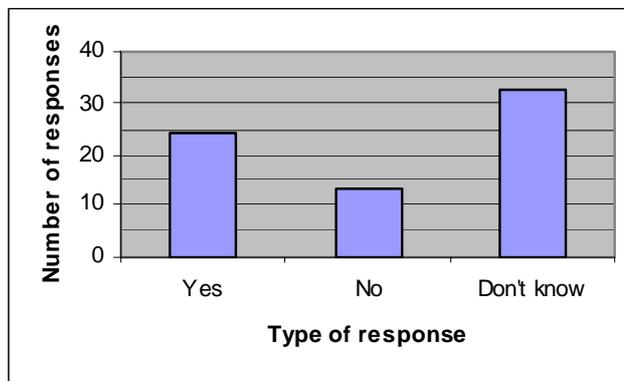
There is a general move towards preventative work which places Sure Start at the heart of the government's agenda - which all agencies are beginning to recognise.

**The aims of the specific agencies compete with Sure Start local programme aims due to:**

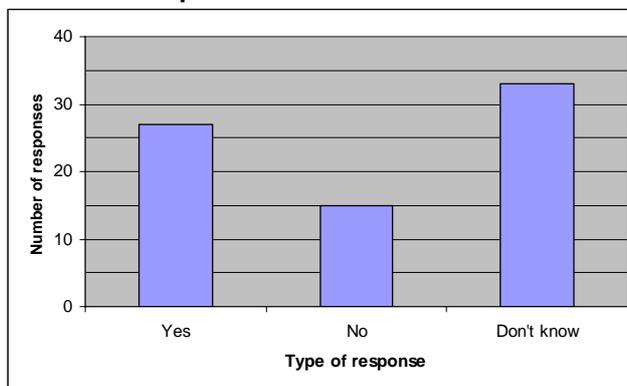
**Table 14: Differences in the target group/s**



**Table 15: Different Government targets**



**Table 16: A focus on preventative work versus crisis intervention**



Question 10: Non-financial resources creating challenges

The vast majority of respondents felt that non-financial resources such as the allocation of time, provision of staff and physical space in which to work together effectively, created a challenge to multi-agency working (see Tables 17 to 19).

Qualitative responses revealed that availability of non-financial resources were thought to create a challenge within Sure Start, resulting in a less effective delivery of services than might otherwise be the case. Both buildings/venues to work from were slow to become available and recruitment of staff to carry out work was slow.

Physical space in which to work was perhaps the largest problem across all Sure Starts. Programmes became operational without their own or adequate facilities to work from. Even when Sure Start facilities were open there might not be enough space for all staff.

New offices, but no storage and teams too large for premises.

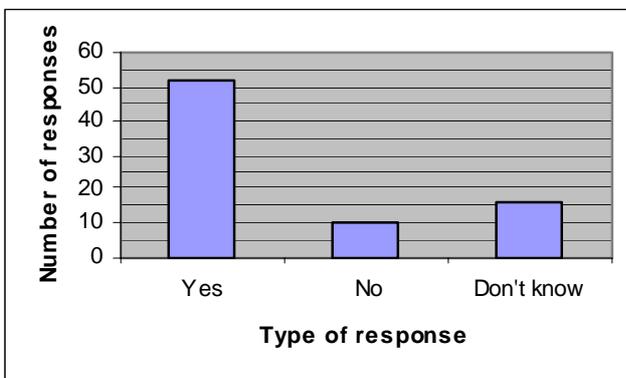
We barely have enough room to work now. Building work due now is intended to reduce our space further. There is insufficient room to meet with parents/groups at present site. It is against safe working practices to leave anyone working in the office on their own.

Time, as with other resources, was thought never to be sufficient. Exasperation was expressed at the wide-ranging remit of Sure Start staff.

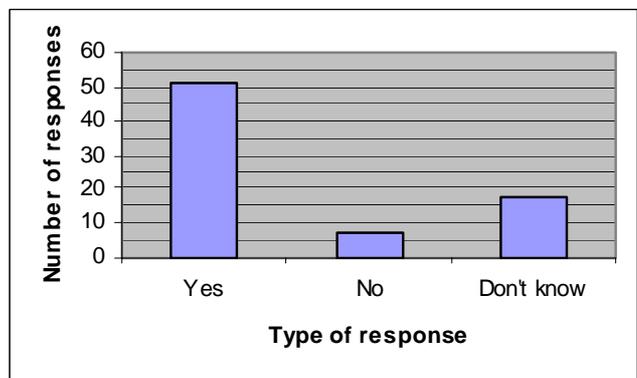
One solution to accommodation problems suggested by a couple of respondents was to use buildings, such as schools that were under-capacity or other council buildings such as those run by Health and Social Services in order to facilitate some of the work carried out by Sure Start.

**Non-financial resources create challenges concerning:**

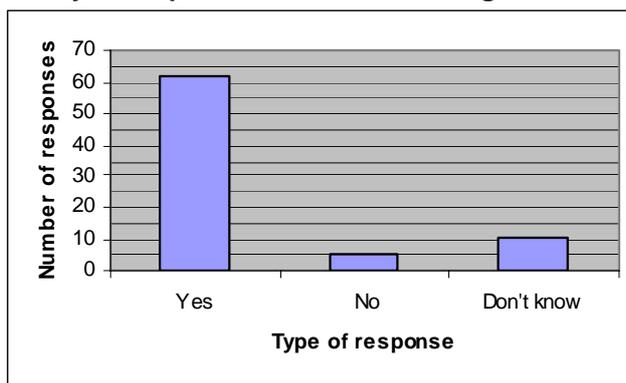
**Table 17: The allocation of time**



**Table 18: The provision of staff**



**Table 19: Physical space in which to work together effectively**



Question 11: Communication within and between agencies involved with Sure Start local programmes

The majority of respondents felt that poor communication within and between agencies involved with sure Start created problems between those working at different levels within agencies, could lead to different availability of professionals from different agencies and undermined successful multi-agency work through poor communication between different local government departments (see Tables 20 to 22).

A clear understanding of each others' roles and the cultures of the agencies from which they originated was felt to need addressing in order to alleviate some of the problems, or potential problems that might occur within the teams. In some cases this was felt to be due to a lack of communication between the agencies involved.

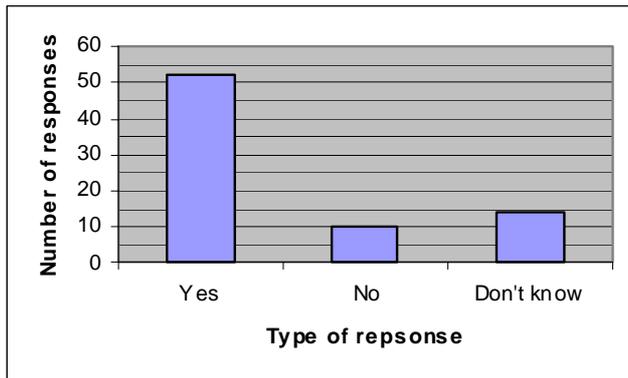
Because protocols have still not been agreed.

It was also highlighted by several respondents that despite these problems at the strategic level, the local programme teams were delivering services in a multi-agency manner.

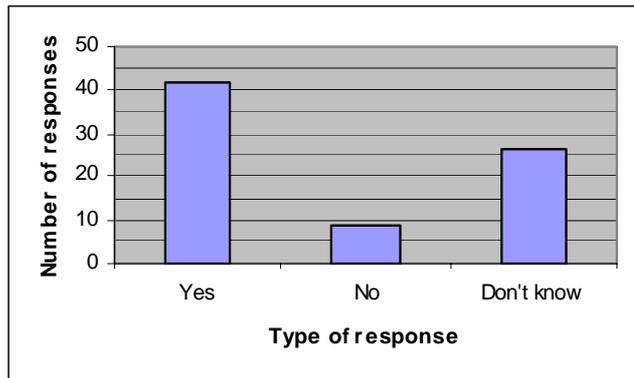
Although we are made up of different agencies we all work very well as a team.

**Poor communication within and between the agencies involved with Sure Start:**

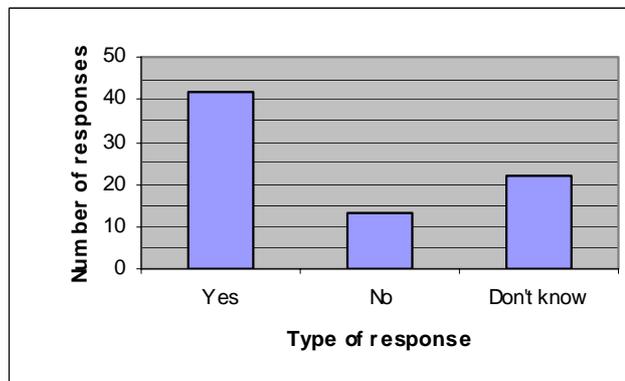
**Table 20: Creates problems between those working at different levels within agencies**



**Table 21: Creates different availability of professionals from different agencies**



**Table 22: Undermines successful multi-agency work through poor communication between different local government departments**



Question 12: The effect of professional and agency culture on Sure Start practice

Respondents' views on the effect of professional and agency culture on Sure Start practice were mixed. The majority felt that multi-agency working did not disrupt existing agency cultures, values and ways of working but did feel that specific policy and practice differences hindered shared practice. The vast majority felt that different data management systems affected information sharing and did impact upon shared practice (see Tables 23 to 25).

There was a range of qualitative comments regarding the culture of agencies involved with Sure Start with the need for transparency between them highlighted in order to eliminate lack of trust, in order that services accountable to more than one agency could work to one set of policies or protocols, and so that everyone involved was clear about what each agency could or could not provide for Sure Start.

Agencies need to clarify and be transparent about what their policies and practice can and cannot offer so that professionals can make informed decisions.

There were also several comments made concerning the autonomy of staff and, in particular, the programme manager. It was felt that there were unnecessary constraints placed on the staff, resulting in their feeling that their role was being limited.

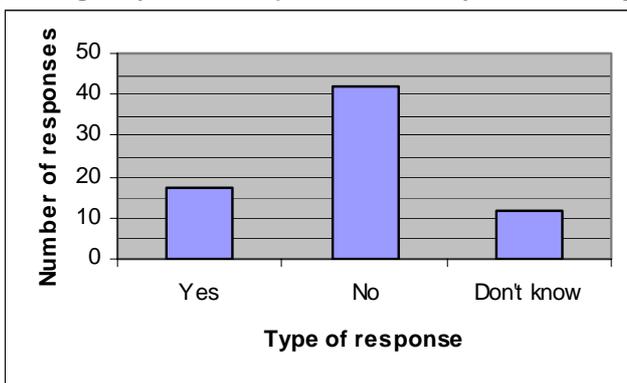
Professional bodies need to learn to give autonomy and flexibility to Sure Start programme.

Sharing information between professionals working for Sure Start as well as within agencies involved with Sure Start was regarded as problematic, with comments suggesting that staff were 'still awaiting some of baseline information'.

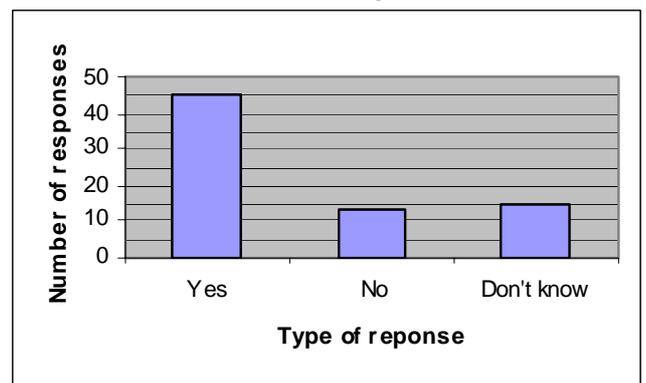
It was noted that attempts were being made to eliminate such problems.

**The effect of professional and agency culture on Sure Start practice:**

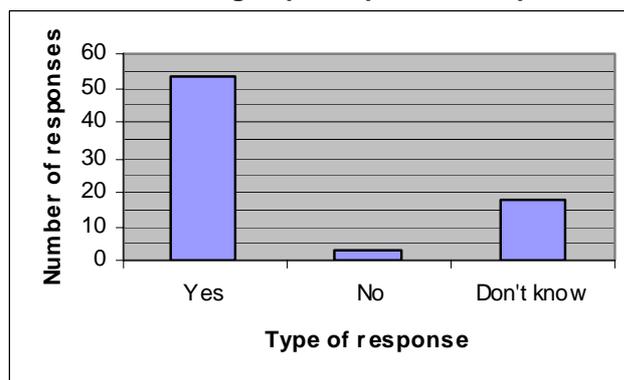
**Table 23: Multi-agency working disrupts existing agency cultures (values and ways of working)**



**Table 24: Specific policy and practice differences hinder shared practice**



**Table 25: Different data management systems which affect information sharing impact upon shared practice**



Question 13: The strategy of the management in the Sure Start local programmes

In terms of management strategy, the vast majority felt that multi-agency working was strongly supported and promoted at management level in order to remain credible at delivery level but were less sure whether management strategy drive was organised carefully in order to carry along the various participants from each agency. A majority did feel that the Sure Start management strategy encouraged like-minded individuals who sought new ways of working in order to meet shared goals and work across existing management structures (see Tables 26 to 28).

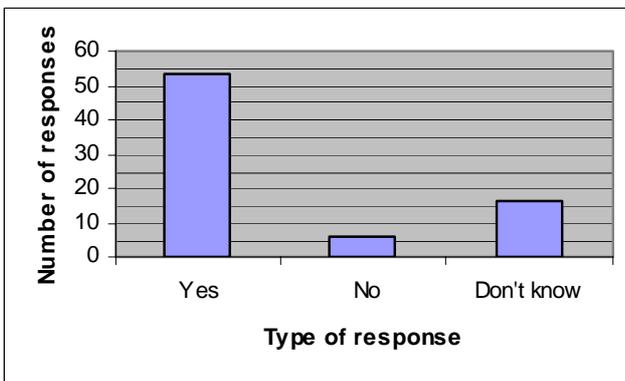
Overall qualitative responses showed that it was felt that the strategy of the management of the Sure Start local programmes supported multi-agency working and these new ways of working were imperative to a successful programme.

There were felt to be problems at Lead Agency/Accountable Body level, whereby the work at local programme level was being hindered.

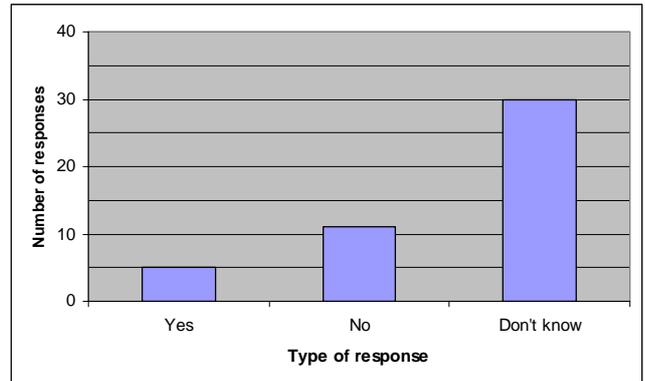
I don't believe that there is enough discussion and agreement at senior management level. However, there is a willingness to make it work lower down - at Programme Manager level

**The strategy of the management in the Sure Start local programme/s.**

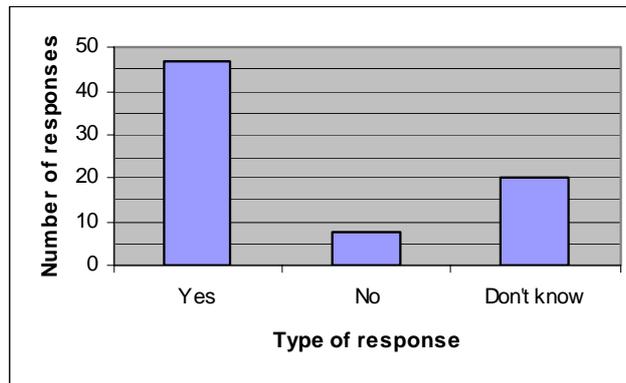
**Table 26: Multi-agency working is strongly supported and promoted at management level in order to remain credible at delivery level**



**Table 27: strategy drive is organised carefully in order to carry along the various participants from each agency**



**Table 28: Management strategy encourages like-minded individuals who seek new ways of working in order to meet shared goals and work across existing management structures**



Question 14: Training opportunities for Sure Start team members

The vast majority believed that additional multi-agency training to meet the extended role of agencies would be helpful and shared an active desire to engage with other agencies at the delivery level. Views were mixed as to whether professional development should be single agency, developed at the home base (Tables 29 to 31).

Qualitative responses indicated that it was generally felt training in a multi-agency manner was necessary in order for team members to develop understanding of each others' roles:

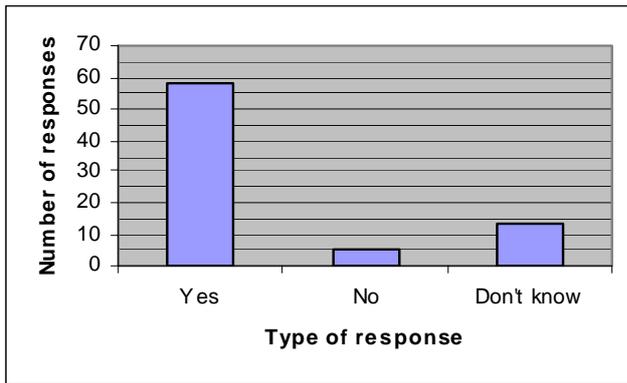
Knowledge is vital to the success of the project; this can only be gained by sharing of information through training.

Furthermore, several people felt that this type of information sharing was beginning to occur.

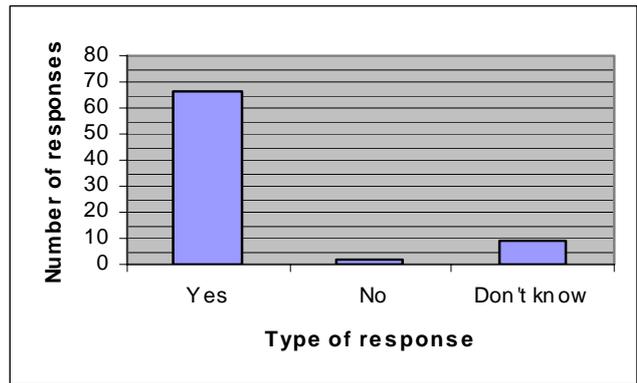
This is being developed and opportunities have arisen where this has occurred.

**Training opportunities for Sure Start team members**

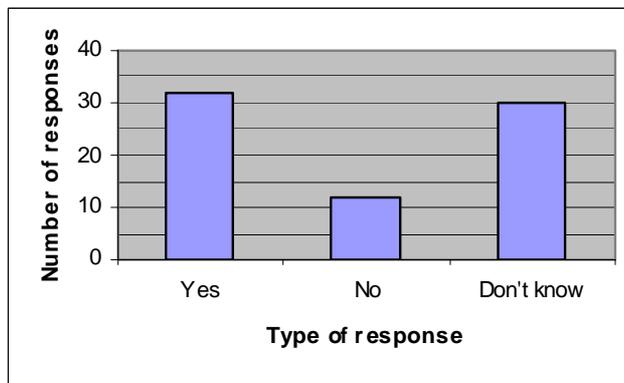
**Table 29: Additional multi-agency training to meet the extended role of agencies**



**Table 30: Training to enhance knowledge and understanding of other agencies**



**Table 31: Professional 'single-agency' development delivered at the home 'base' of the agency**



**Question 15: Commitment and willingness of Sure Start team members to be involved in multi-agency work being sustained**

The vast majority of respondents believed commitment and willingness of Sure Start members to be involved in multi-agency work was sustained by an active desire to engage with other agencies by a 'bottom up' as well as 'top down' management approach (see Tables 32 to 34).

Qualitative responses indicated strongly that there was a willingness to be involved in multi-agency work at both the strategic and operational level and that both helped to sustain the work.

'Bottom-up' allows practitioners to feed back voices of the local community and to identify gaps in provision. 'Top down' allows for clear protocols and clear line management in areas of emerging practice to be clarified.

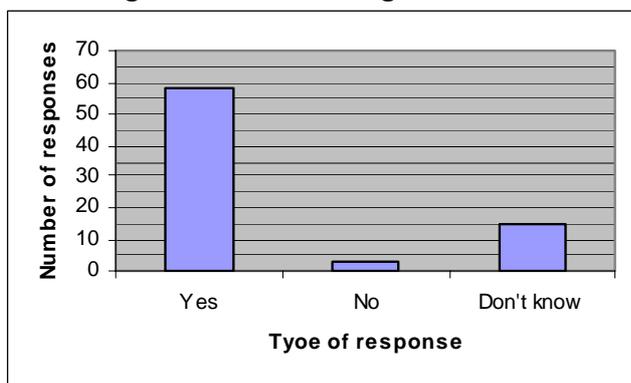
It was also noted that this approach brought certain problems with it.

This happens and is encouraged. However, it often requires additional time to 'inform' and create an understanding of the programme, its benefits and limitations.

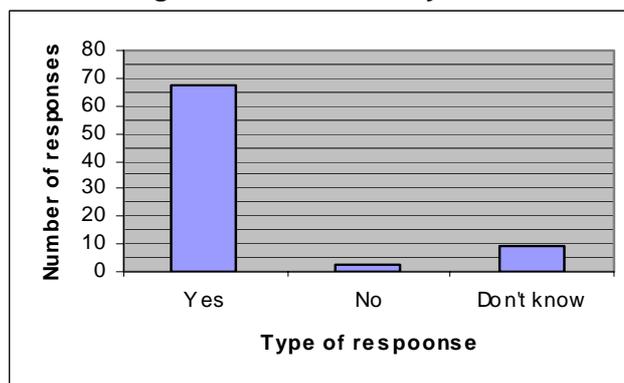
Different approaches appeared to be taken in order to maintain the multi-agency team work. One respondent noted that they were keen for 'unnecessary organisational structure' to be minimised.

**Commitment and willingness of Sure Start team members to be involved in multi-agency work is sustained by:**

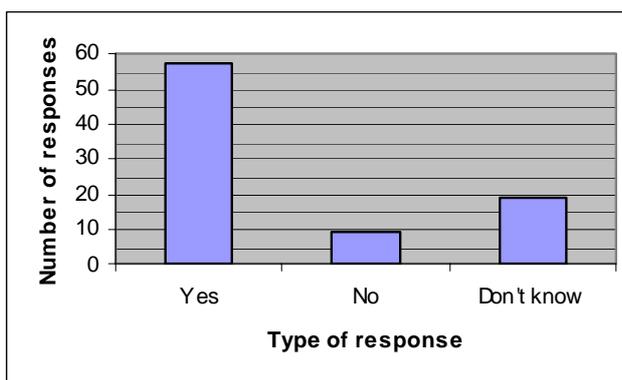
**Table 32: An active desire to engage with other agencies at the management level**



**Table 33: An active desire to engage with other agencies at the delivery level**



**Table 34: A commitment/active desire to engage with other agency by a 'bottom up' as well as 'top down' management approach**



Question 16: Understanding the roles and responsibilities of others

In terms of roles and responsibilities, the vast majority believed that there was a need for a clear understanding of what was expected so that different agendas were not pursued, there was a need to understand the constraints on other agencies so that expectations were realistic and a need for mutual respect for the professional roles of other agencies and their contributions (see Tables 35 to 37).

From qualitative responses came a high sense that an understanding of each others' roles within the Sure Start local programmes was necessary in order to create effective partnership working. This was noted to be an area for development.

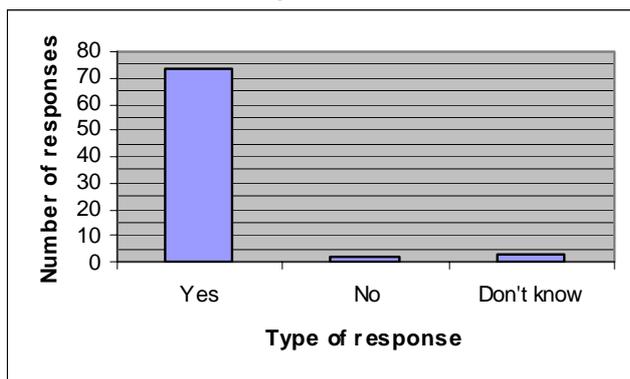
Cooperation and collaboration are necessary in multi-agency working.

Certain other issues were also highlighted. These were minority views but poignant. Respect and valuing the partnership with parents and community members are equally important.

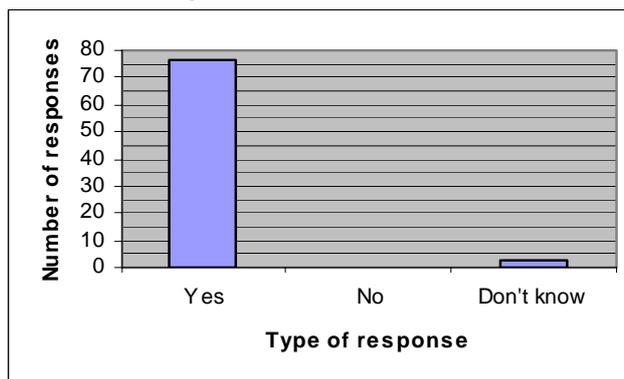
There is a pronounced suspicion within VIP sector of, in particular, statutory organisations such as LA and their intention regarding multi-agency working.

### Understanding the roles and responsibilities of others

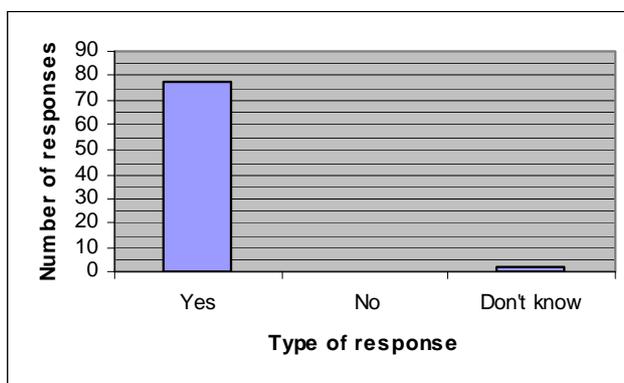
**Table 35: The need for a clear understanding of what is expected so that different agendas are not pursued**



**Table 36: The need to understand the constraints on other agencies so that expectations are realistic**



**Table 37: A need for mutual respect for the professional roles of other agencies and their contribution**



### Question 17: Common Sure Start aims and objectives being achieved

The majority believed that common Sure Start aims and objectives were being achieved by the programmes through the recognition of a need for common ground and like-minded people, for a real purpose to joint working and a needs-led approach that replaced agency-specific agendas (see Tables 38 to 40).

In respect of common aims and objectives, there were no strong themes that arose from the qualitative responses. It was highlighted that there was a consultation process that

helped to identify the needs of each area but one respondent felt that public consultation was limited and that professionals made the final decisions.

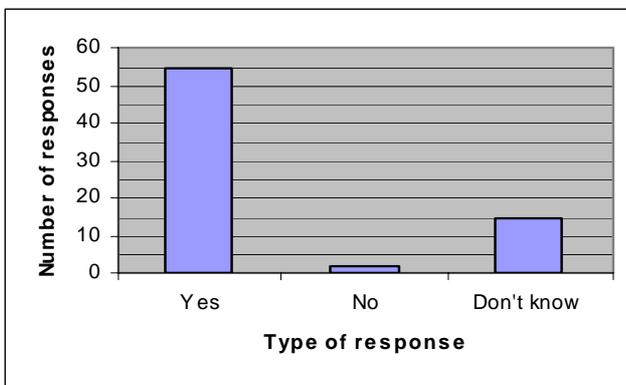
Another person noted that it was not always possible to recruit like-minded people but that this might not have a negative impact.

Like minded people' are not always a possibility and often it is the different perspectives that generate creativity and challenge the status quo.

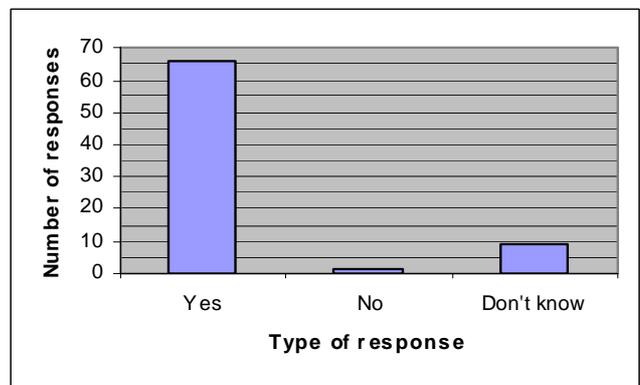
Having a 'needs-led' approach that replaced agency-specific agendas was considered by one to be "a very good way of expressing where we should be!"

**Common Sure Start aims and objectives have been achieved by the programme/s through:**

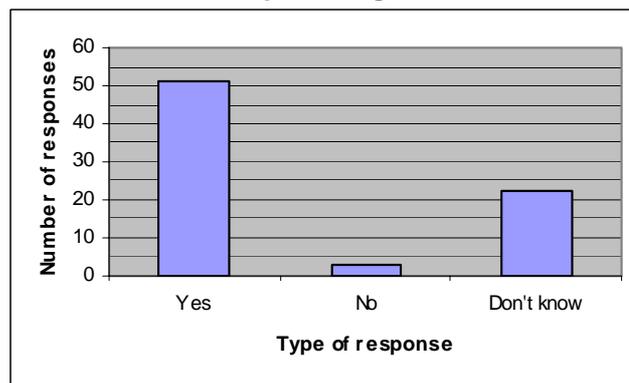
**Table 38: Recognition of the need for common ground and like minded people**



**Table 39: Recognition of the need for a real purpose to joint working**



**Table 40: A needs-led approach which replaces agency-specific agendas**



**Question 18: Communications and information sharing within Sure Start local programmes being supported**

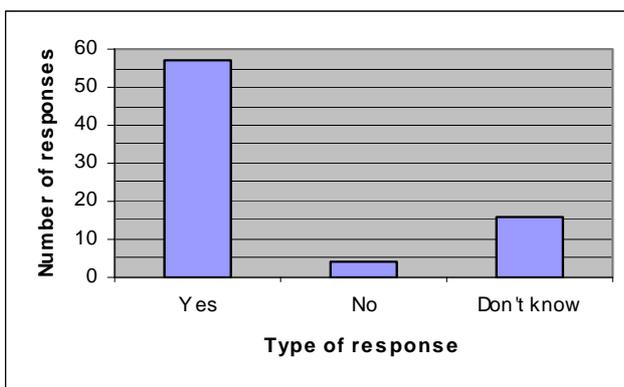
The vast majority of respondents felt that communication and information-sharing within the Sure Start local programmes had been supported by opportunities for dialogue and open communication between agencies being achieved, personal relationship building and

procedures and systems of communication and information dissemination (see Tables 41 to 43).

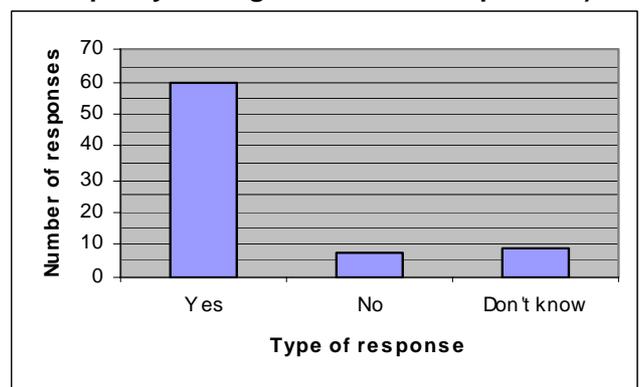
There were very few qualitative comments made for this question. It was felt that there was support for information sharing and communications within and across the Sure Start teams. There was some hint that these areas could also be improved.

**Communications and information sharing within the Sure Start local programme/s has/have been supported by:**

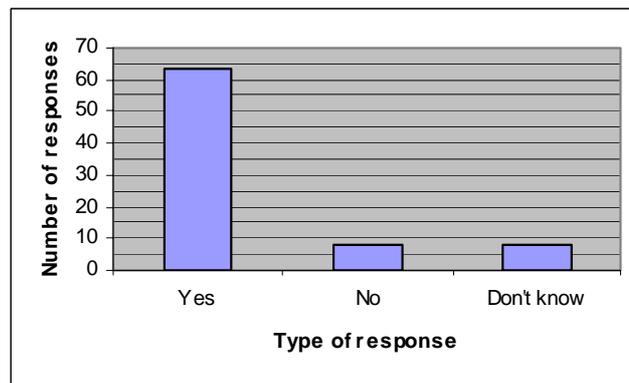
**Table 41: Opportunities for dialogue/keeping open communication between agencies being achieved**



**Table 42: Personal relationship building (communication skills, listening skills, the capacity for negotiation and compromise)**



**Table 43: Procedures and systems of communications and information dissemination (such as circulating meeting minutes) being in place**



**Question 19: Leadership or drive of individual Sure Start Programme Managers**

The majority felt that leadership or drive of individual Sure Start programme managers demonstrated clear strategic direction, showed tenacity to overcome obstacles to progress and could bring together the Sure Start team in order to bring about change and overcome obstacles (see Tables 44 to 46).

Overall, respondents were very positive about the leadership of the programmes. Some of the problems that have had to be dealt with were highlighted as examples of the strength of the programme managers.

Delivered services without having buildings. Operated without adequate, or no base - homeless.

A few comments related to the lack of direction for team members (this came from one particular Sure Start programme).

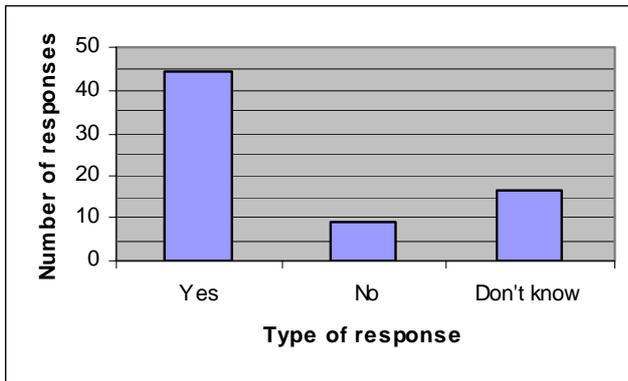
The manager may have very clear direction, but is not forthcoming on a day-to-day basis.

A couple of people highlighted one difficulty that the managers had to deal with. This related to the various agencies involved with the programmes and how the agency-specific agendas were not always compatible with those of Sure Start.

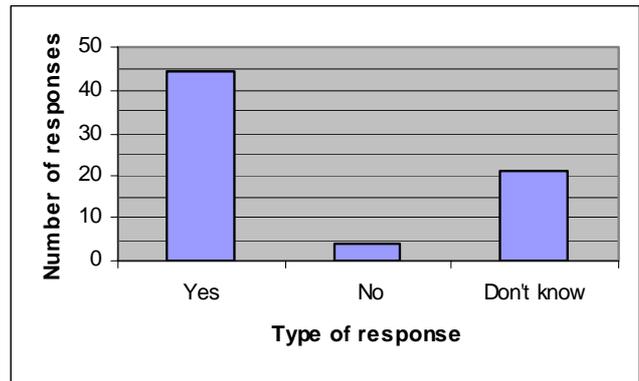
People working to conflicting agendas and blaming one another when anything goes wrong.

**Leadership or drive of individual Sure Start Programme Manager/s:**

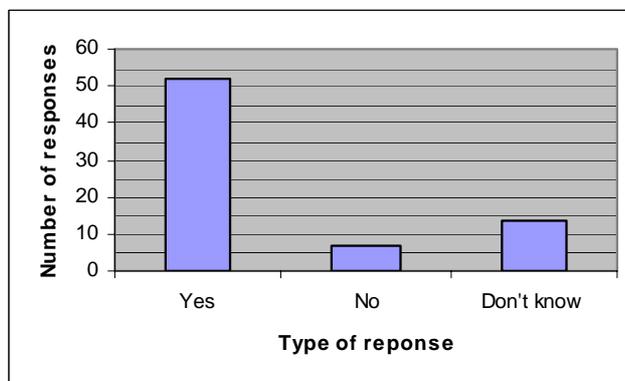
**Table 44: Show/s clear strategic direction**



**Table 45: Has/have the tenacity to overcome obstacles to progress**



**Table 46: Can bring together the Sure Start team in order to bring about change and overcome obstacles**



Question 20: Involvement of relevant personnel

Respondents' views were very mixed regarding the involvement of the right personnel from specific agencies on the Sure Start local programme, at the right level of responsibility to make the necessary decisions and activate the right services, with the right priority being given to the work of Sure Start by individual agencies (see Tables 47 to 49).

Several respondents felt that problems appeared to occur where people involved on the Sure Start Partnership Boards were either too senior or not senior enough to make relevant decisions on behalf of the organisation they represented.

(This) ... differs according to agency and their situation ... we need to continue to develop our relationships with individual agencies.

It was echoed by several people that, in some cases, the work of Sure Start was not seen as an integral part of the agency and that, therefore, the level of commitment was not high enough. It was also viewed that, in some cases, it came down to individuals and their own personal commitments to move things along.

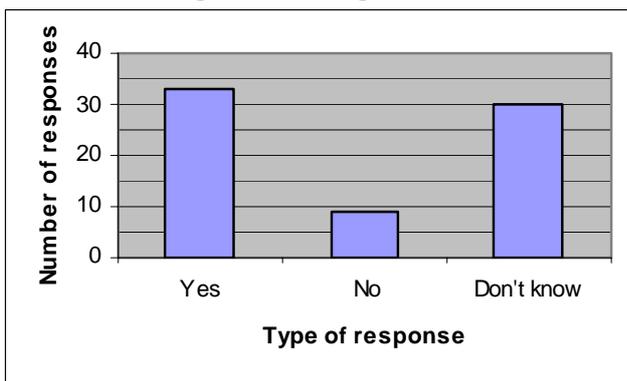
The work at individual level has depended upon the commitment and interest of individual practitioners.

One evocative comment was made.

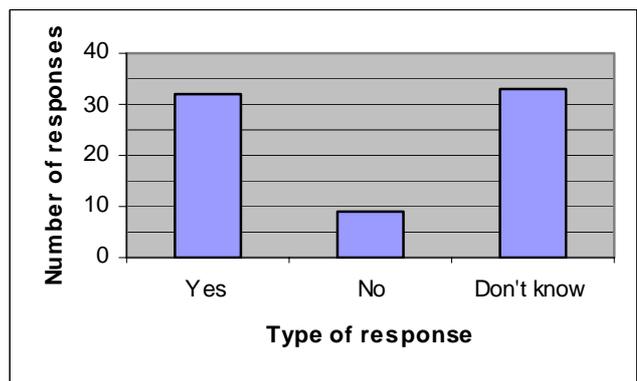
Sometimes you have to work with what you have got and still deliver services/bring about change.

**Involving the right personnel on the Sure Start local programme/s has led to:**

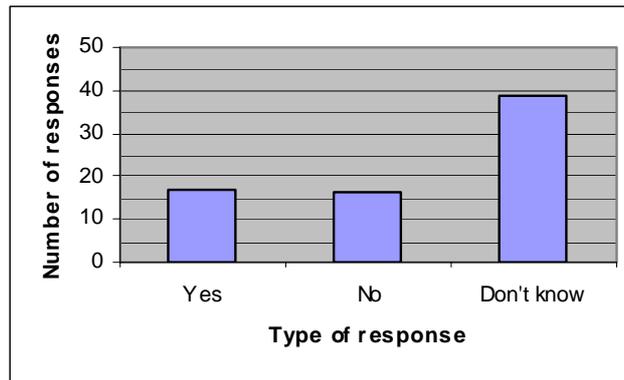
**Table 47: The right personnel from specific agencies being involved**



**Table 48: Personnel at the right level of responsibility to make the necessary decision and activate the right services being involved**



**Table 49: Priority being given to the work of Sure Start by individual agencies**



### Question 21: Other comments

Despite some comments that the questionnaire was difficult to understand and/or complete and help being offered, there was a good return and many reflective comments were made. Several people who returned their questionnaires felt that they had not been involved in Sure Start for long enough, or in sufficient depth, to make relevant comments about some or all of the questions. Several people commented about their pleasure with and achievements of the programme they were attached to.

In addition to comments made regarding specific questions, many took the opportunity at the end to discuss issues of working in partnership with other agencies. Some felt that the original problems had been or were being resolved. There were examples given of the successes of working in partnership.

We have worked with the local Sure Start ... to secure the quick wins. ... We have begun to work alongside newly appointed Sure Start staff so that they can take over these groups eventually.

There were also examples given where it would appear that agencies involved in Sure Start were considered to be hindering progress.

However the tensions between [Accountable Body] and [Lead Agency] are visible and are hindering the work on the ground level. Sometimes it feels as though we are 'pawns' in games being played between the [Accountable Body] and [Lead Agency].

Sometimes I think the Lead Organisation tends to overlook certain 'needs' because it is convenient to do so or if something does not suit them rather than the needs of those for whom Sure Start was introduced, i.e. children 0-4 years.

Despite the views of success and the frustrations of being “caught in the middle” of other area-wide issues, there was a recognition that complacency should not set in. One respondent’s view echoed several other participants’ opinion that “I still feel we are failing in getting the message over to the community and make them aware this service is available to them”.

## **6 Discussion**

The Green Paper (*Every Child Matters*, DfES 2003) recognised the need for services to work together effectively and an existing failure to pool information and resources was highlighted. Indeed, the need for integration of children’s services to become more widespread has been enshrined in the *Children Act*, 2004. Despite the real enthusiasm of the Sure Start programme members concerned, the respondents suggested that effective multi-agency working had not always been easy to achieve. Multi-agency work of its very nature could disrupt existing professional and agency cultures and conflicts over areas of responsibility could arise. Establishment of common aims within and across agencies was regarded as essential but, in practice, was not always easy to achieve, with new roles and responsibilities needing to be made explicit at all levels and effective communication developed to increase understanding of these. Practices established to protect confidentiality were still creating tensions and information-sharing strategies might still be improved. Allocation of budgets and financial organisation, as well as non-financial resources, has created a major challenge to Sure Start multi-agency working. That said, the vast majority believed that Sure Start facilitated multi-agency working in terms of staffing arrangements, teams’ expectations and priorities. Staff training was seen to have an important function in developing new ways of working.

## **7 Conclusions**

The results highlight the complexity of the challenge facing multi-agency Sure Start workers, and for the future, Children Centre workers. In this case, co-locating staff from partner organisations to work together when they were still employed by that parent agency with different terms and conditions, working hours, pay scales, holiday allowances and information sharing strategies, created particular tensions. Different models of joint working are possible, as noted by Atkinson *et al* (2001; 2002). Though staff clearly had an appetite for the new and ‘hybrid’ professional that was being thrown up, many of the tensions described here relate to the particular Sure Start model of multi-agency working,

where staff from a particular organisation are co-located to work together but are still employed by their own agency. Formation of an independent legal entity, where agencies come together to form a separate organisation employing its own staff might be particularly suited to large partnerships but this is not to happen in the case of the new Children's Centres' agenda. If existing services are to be brought together to act as a 'service hub', in response to the *Children Act, 2004*, without separation from their parent organisations, it can be envisaged that existing tensions will not be eradicated. Finally, the findings serve to remind us of the investment needed in terms of finance, time and staff resources in order to develop new ways of working.

## 8 References

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