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Sure Start

Synthesis Report

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Executive Summary

Sure Start – the subject of Peer Review in May 2006 – is the British Government’s flagship strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion, and thereby breaking patterns of disadvantage that diminish life chances and can lead to problems for individuals and society in the long term.

Launched in 1999, Sure Start represents a major financial investment designed to benefit children, parents and communities by increasing the availability of childcare for all, improving young children’s health and emotional development and supporting parents in both parenting skills and employment. This is done by assisting the development of services in disadvantaged areas, and offering financial help so that parents can afford childcare.

Community control, exercised through local partnerships, is the overarching principle, with no rules about how services are provided – only what they should achieve. Local programmes sign up to certain aims and are expected to offer core services such as outreach and home visiting, good-quality play, learning opportunities and childcare, child and family health care and support for people with special needs. Sure Start has linked up with other anti-poverty programmes such as the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative, creating over 11,000 new nurseries in poorer areas within three years.

Local programmes were launched initially in the 20% most deprived areas of England (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own separate arrangements), aiming for universal provision to avoid stigmatising certain communities. A study of 150 areas showed that programmes took longer than anticipated – about three years - to become fully operational. Sure Start set out to establish a holistic, integrated approach to delivering services, similar to the system in Nordic EU Member States.

The issue

The advent of a Labour administration in the UK in 1997 brought with it a new approach to public service provision, moving away from the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ ideology (most current in the USA) that the welfare of young children is the sole responsibility of individual families, and that public authorities have no role to play.

When the programme started, one-third of children in Britain were living in poverty. This has been significantly reduced, but is still far from the target figure. A poor level of early childhood services (care and education) existed by western European standards, and across the country provision for children under the age of four was very patchy. Furthermore, different departments were spending money without liaising with one another. Creating ‘joined-up government’ was therefore a major objective in the UK at the end of the 1990s.

Financial and institutional arrangements

The government has invested over £20 billion in early years and childcare since 1997, with spending on Sure Start programmes alone set to reach £1.8 billion in 2007-8. There is evidence also that it has triggered changes in the way departments and ministers share responsibilities for services for young children.

Evaluation

Sure Start has prioritised rigorous evaluation since the outset, with investment in a team of highly skilled researchers. The NESS has carried out expert monitoring and analysis and produced an impressive number of themed reports. This work is an example of good practice in itself, which could be taken up by other Member States.

Evaluation shows that trust is a vital component for parental engagement and takes time to build up.

The European context

Sure Start reflects EU strategy to combat social exclusion in aiming to improve the health and well being of young children and their parents in disadvantaged areas, cut child poverty, increase parental employment, and bring benefits to local communities. In the past, good practices in other EU Member States have had little influence in England, in particular, with policy driven mainly by domestic ideology. However, several experiences examined via the Peer Review Programme are relevant to its future development, notably in Finland (citizens' social support networks) and Ireland (money advice and budgeting).

The UK should also look more systematically at other Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policies and practices within the EU, more particularly those based on different types of welfare state regimes such as in France.

Peer Review and transferability

Peer Review group members from France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Poland, plus European stakeholder organisations ATD Fourth World and Eurochild, all shared a common commitment to promoting the best interests of children as an investment in the future. Among Sure Start's positive aspects, they highlighted the joined-up, integrated approach to providing services, and the active involvement of parents.

Discussion focused on how to gain public support, and to ensure quality of care, given that in the UK more than 50% of childcare is in the private sector.

The ongoing financial commitment was seen as a problem, with questions raised about how to ensure continuity and allow for long-term planning. The peer group was keen to recommend the evaluation and monitoring system.

Overall, the transfer of a programme like Sure Start is not easy because it does not respond to simple problems with single goals and predictable outcomes.

Conclusion and lessons

Sure Start represents an interesting experiment in social engineering, but may still reflect too strong a reliance on technical solutions ('interventions') to problems rooted deep in the social and economic fabric of UK society.

Child poverty and the social exclusion of children are of great concern in all EU Member States, and should form a top priority in their agendas for social inclusion.

At EU level, the issue of child poverty should be included in the 2006-8 National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/Incl) and even the EU's Lisbon reforms.

In tackling the problem, an integrated approach, building partnerships and involving local communities are crucial, as are political commitment and a guarantee of continuity.

1. The issue: Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP)

Sure Start is a cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The Labour administration (1997-2001) gave way to a noticeable acceleration and a new generation of government-funded integrated services, especially in (a minority of) disadvantaged areas. It is widely recognised that this introduced a new social agenda and has brought a new policy interest to the field. By doing so, it left an ideological position commonly held in Anglo-Saxon countries (at present still in the USA), that infants and children under school-age are the sole responsibility of their parents, and that the public authorities have no role unless children are at risk.¹

When the programme started, one-third of the children in Britain were living in poverty. This poverty level had been significantly reduced in the meantime, but nowhere near the target². The other initial driving force behind Sure Start was looking at the very patchy services available for children under the age of four. Different departments were spending money without talking to each other about the overarching aim. The issue of "joined-up government" was therefore another big theme in the UK at the end of the 1990s. Each of these provisions was organised by different departments or units, as were the health aspects.

The former head of Sure Start, said that its key themes in the early days aimed to reduce child poverty as well as the gaps in outcomes between children in poverty and the wider child population, besides developing an evidence-based policy and public services driven by consumers rather than providers³.

Overall, the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) can be looked at as a good example of a strong commitment and effort to curb a detrimental level of (child) poverty and poor early childhood provision in a EU Member State with such a high GDP. Since the late 1990s, the UK government demonstrates a new and strong commitment to give the early childhood years the attention and efforts they deserve in the best interest of children and of society as well (e.g. return of investments). The UK provision of early childhood services (care and education), starting from a Western European low base, meanwhile benefits from a quite radical reform of policy and from significant public funding⁴.

Sure Start had linked in with other targeted anti-poverty programmes, such as the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative. Much of the UK's childcare is run by the private sector, but people running these businesses would not invest in the poorer areas, because of the risk. So government gave them financial incentives in terms both of capital funding and of revenue support over three years. In this way, over 11,000 neighbourhood nurseries were created in poorer areas, some in conjunction with local Sure Start programmes.

¹ See Alhusen et al. (2006), Cohen et al. (2004); Melhuish (2006).

² E.g. Brewer et al. (2006); EC (2005); Hoelscher (2006).

³ Naomi Eisenstadt, Introductory comments – Peer Review meeting (London, 4-5 May 2006).

⁴ e.g. Melhuish (2006b); Moss (2001, 2004).

The most deprived 20% of areas were chosen for the original Sure Start local programmes making the service universal within that specific area and aiming that it was stigma-free. Districts for SSLP were selected centrally, based on the Office of Deputy Prime Minister Index of Multiple Deprivation. The Sure Start catchment areas were selected locally in response to the needs of the community.

There was no prescribed model at the start. Each programme signed up to certain aims and was expected to provide a number of core services: outreach and home visiting, support for families and parents, support for good-quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children, primary and community health care, advice on child health and development, and on family health as well as support for people with special needs. Each programme was different, due in part to the emphasis on community control. This was to be exercised through local partnerships including everyone in that community who was involved with children, such as health services, social services, education, the private sector, the voluntary sector, community groups and parents.

It represents an interesting experiment of social engineering (i.e. developing appropriate infrastructure, efforts to join up services, the management of various actors and stakeholders) providing worthwhile processes and mechanisms valuable to learn from as well.

The UK Sure Start may still too much be based on the conviction that there are technical solutions ('interventions') for problems that derive from conflicts in the economic and social realms of (UK) society⁵. This supports the plea for taking the perspective of primary prevention by offering a decent minimum of universal support and access to (affordable and good quality) early childhood services combined with appropriate targeted services.

Sure Start secures better outcomes for children, parents and communities by increasing the availability of childcare for all children, improving young children's health and emotional development and supporting the parents, both as parents and in their aspirations towards employment. This is done by assisting the development of services in disadvantaged areas, while providing financial help so that parents can afford childcare.

The question with which British childcare policy-makers were struggling most was "How do we work with parents in a way that there is no excessive State interference ('Nanny State') but which understands that the most significant contribution to children right through the age range is parental aspirations and expectations?" The issue was therefore what can be done that is acceptable, community-oriented and wanted by parents, but which still delivers for children.

Another measure is tax credits to lower-income families. There was and there remains debate in Britain about demand-side subsidy (giving parents the power) versus supply-side subsidy (a better lever for quality). Parents were sometimes not best placed to judge quality in terms of staff qualifications, which was the factor that research showed to be most significant in terms of educational outcomes.

The British government's 10-year *childcare strategy* now in place is driven by the principles of ensuring that every child has the best possible start, that parents – particularly mothers – can work and progress in their careers, and that families' legitimate expectation to control their choices in working

⁵ Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003); Moss (2004).

and family life can be met. It calls for the establishment of Children's Centres in England (3,500 by 2010). Children's centres will offer early learning (led by a qualified teacher) combined with day care provision; child and family health services (including ante-natal services); parental outreach; family support services; support for children and parents with special needs; and links to employment services. To achieve this, the centres need good multi-agency integration.

The strategy, moreover, plans a universal provision of free part-time pre-school education for 3- and 4-year-olds; extended school provision – from 8.00 to 18.00, Monday to Friday all year round – for all school children up to the age of 14; and initiatives to improve the quality of the children's workforce and the inspection regime.

The government is also increasing paid maternity leave to nine months, with a commitment to have 12 months' paid maternity leave by the end of the current parliament. Overall, all of these changes aim to be evidence-based policies.

A *Childcare Bill* is likely to become law by the summer of 2006. This would require local government to have standardised services, but to provide as well targeted support for disadvantaged children in the poorest areas. Another provision in the Bill is an integrated curriculum framework for children aged 0-5. In many cases, the least qualified staff were being put with the children aged 0-3 whereas, with a view for example to language development, these were the children who required the most qualified staff. So the Bill would bring the welfare requirements and the learning requirements for the whole of the 0-5 age group within a single framework, currently the subject of consultations

An important innovation in recent years had been the advent of a minister with responsibility for children in England. Responsibility for early education and childcare in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland rests with the separate devolved administrations. Responsibility for children's social care had been moved about two and a half years ago from the Department of Health to the Department for Education. So children's social care, child protection and education are now all covered by the same government department. The aim was that every child under 3 would see a health specialist, and every child aged 3 and up would be in some sort of school setting.

Ultimately, the aim was to achieve a whole-systems approach to service delivery, as in Nordic EU Member States. That was the direction in which British provision was now moving. The lessons learned from SSLP were highly influential in all the other policy developments described. The Sure Start local programmes became a brand name which was then applied to a whole raft of "early years" policies⁶. These involved:

- increasing the availability of childcare for all children
- improving health and emotional development for young children
- supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment.

To evaluate the impact, a study was made of 150 SSLP areas and of 50 areas that did not yet have Sure Start but had been selected for future programmes with similar demographics. Random samples were taken of families with a 9-month-old or with a 3-year-old child. Evaluations showed that it took longer than anticipated to set up SSLP. Most of them had taken three years to approach a fully operational level. In that third year, programmes had spent on average around £1,000 per child aged under four living in the area. Staff almost always said that they were well resourced and were not con-

⁶ Melhuish (2006a).

strained by lack of money. Economies of scale had proved important, with the bigger programmes spending less to achieve the same level of services⁷.

Two findings, however, bear special relevance for transferability of universal intervention programmes. The experience with SSLP indicated that deprived families with more 'human capital' made more use of services than the most deprived families and that Sure Start programmes for families with a 9-month-old child led by health agencies tended to be associated with greater involvement by fathers and with mothers' rating their families more highly. Greater reach within a programme tended to be associated with more supportive parenting⁸.

⁷ reports of the 'National Evaluation of Sure Start' (see www.ness.bbk.ac.uk).

⁸ Melhuish (2006).

2. The European context

At their Spring summit in 2006, European leaders issued a clear reminder that social cohesion is one of the central elements of the Lisbon Strategy. The Council stressed the importance of implementing growth and employment policies that could have a decisive impact on reducing poverty and social exclusion by 2010⁹.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion remains a major challenge for the European Commission and for all EU Member States. Among the seven key policy priorities¹⁰ adopted earlier several are reflected in the aims of the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP)

- Increasing labour market participation
- Tackling disadvantages in education and training
- Eliminating child poverty
- Improving access to quality services

Eliminating child poverty remains among the key policy priorities identified in the 2005 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. It is said that

“Particular focus is given to early intervention and early education in support of disadvantaged children; and enhancing income support and assistance to families and single parents. Several countries also put increasing emphasis on promoting the rights of the child as a basis for policy development¹¹”.

Which aspects of the EU strategy to combat social exclusion are addressed by the Sure Start policy? It aims to improve the health and well being of young children under 4 and their parents living in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in England. The Sure Start local programmes are intended to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and their local communities by promoting children’s development and increasing parental employment.

All SSLP are expected to provide core services of outreach and home visiting, support for families and parents, support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children, primary and community health care, advice about child health and development and family health, and support for people with special needs, including assistance in accessing specialised services.

In a relatively short period of time, the UK policy has already come a long way in its efforts to tackle child poverty and enhance child development. Till now, however, the practices in other EU Member States only had a minor impact on developments in the United Kingdom (especially in England). Influences from abroad have remained minor, with policies driven by domestic ideology, although noticing that UK Sure Start was strongly inspired by USA Early Head Start¹².

⁹ EU Document COM (2006)71 final.

¹⁰ EC Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2005).

¹¹ EC Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2005: 10).

¹² e.g. Raikes & Love (2002).

A number of previous EC Peer Reviews in the field of Social Inclusion provide good practices and experiences relevant for the further development of the Sure Start project in England. The work in **Finland** on citizens' social support network models (HYVE) represents a model for partnership among all actors¹³. It builds on local partnerships providing new forms of support and social services in partnership between NGOs and authorities at regional and local level. Within the broad national development objectives, local targets are specified through dialogue between all relevant actors. The mix of funds and pooled budgeting may also be relevant to the UK context. Project work in **Ireland** on money advice and budgeting also seems relevant as locally based companies help people to cope with debt and take control of their finances¹⁴.

A recent OECD comparative study¹⁵ on measures to reconcile work and family life recommended that the UK Government apply quality controls systems to more childcare facilities to ensure that day-care workers meet stringent qualifications and give home-based childminders access to support services provided by local Children's Centres.

At the risk that the type of welfare state regime (especially its models of care and education) differ too strongly, the UK programme could start to turn more instead to those EU Member States having developed different views of the role of public authorities, service provision and child welfare. Some Nordic Member States may inspire Sure Start with their provision of universal welfare services (including childcare), impressive policies on leave (including promoting the involvement of fathers) but also with the often vigorous debate on the place of children in society and on the meaning of childhood framed in understandings of equality and democracy¹⁶.

Time has come for the UK to look more systematically at other Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policies and practices within the European Union, more particularly those based on different types of welfare state regimes such as those from Western Europe (i.e. France). These Member States have developed national systems of publicly-funded and relatively well resourced ECCE services, together with a central system of quality evaluation. The extensive evidence of the benefits of pre-school education, and the cost-benefit evidence supports the proposition that universal pre-school education is an important part of the infrastructure for economic development (i.e. improving the development of human capital). The evidence on the effects of childcare for 0-3 years old for disadvantaged children indicates that high quality childcare can produce benefits, particularly for cognitive development and for language¹⁷.

Early Childhood Care and Education policies and practices can only be understood in their historical and social-cultural context. The development of such services usually suffers in countries experiencing socio-economic problems giving a low priority to ECCE. The higher levels of public commitment in the UK has resulted in a new social agenda and innovations that deserve due attention. The current system of ECCE in England seems to experience turbulence as it struggles

¹³ Keskitalo (2004).

¹⁴ Korczak (2004).

¹⁵ OECD (2005).

¹⁶ e.g. Cohen et al. (2004); Hwang (2006).

¹⁷ e.g. Penn et al. (2004); Melhuish & Petrogiannis (2006).

to find new patterns of service provision that suits better the needs of the most deprived and of children at risk of poverty.

3. The good practice example

3.1. Sure Start Local Programmes in practice

The SSLP are spread across England and based in the most disadvantaged areas (especially urban areas including inner city estates). Of the 524 SSLP operating at present, 15 are based in identifiable rural areas¹⁸. The 524 Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) who are established by 2004 offer services to over 400,000 children under four, including over 30% of children living in poverty. Individual programmes vary in size, on average reaching around 750 children (minimum 300– maximum 1,500).

At *national* level, the Sure Start Unit provides advice, guidance and performance targets for local authorities. The Unit became an integral part of the government's newly formed Children, Young People and Families Directorate, within the Department of Education and Skills (DfES). The unit has its HQ in London and a regional structure, with team based in each government office for the regions. *Regional* teams maintain direct relationships with local programmes. Strategic development officers support local authorities, while programme development officers work more closely with those delivering Sure Start services. *Local authorities* have strategic responsibility for the delivery of local programmes, and must plan their development in consultation with parents and other key partners, including primary care trusts and other health service providers. All SSLP are required to undertake an evaluation of their programme. For this, they can request support from the NESS.

Community control is consistently emphasised in the development of SSLP. The control is to be exercised through local partnerships. They provide local community influence for the design of each SSLP. There is no specification of how to provide services, only what they should achieve. The range of services delivered by a local programme reflects local need, but will include core services. All programmes must ensure that their services are accessible for those with special needs.

Children's Centres will build on existing successful initiatives. Aim is that all SSLPs will eventually be designated as Children's Centres. There are currently 850 Children's Centres (June 2006) serving over 662,000 young children and families.

There has been a net increase of around 617,000 registered childcare places since 1997. The stock of childcare places stands at over 1.25 million registered places - well over 90% more than in 1997. There is now a registered place for 1 in 4 under 8s (as opposed to 1 in 8 in 1997).

¹⁸ see Appendix, Table 2

At December 2005, 356,000 lower and middle income families were benefiting from the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (WTC). This is twice the number that benefited from Childcare Tax Credit (part of Working Families Tax Credit) at its peak, and more than 7 times the number that benefited from the childcare disregard in Family Credit at its peak in 1999.

The UK Sure Start does not keep information on the numbers of staff employed by programmes. Staffing arrangements depend on individual local need but typically includes a mix of part time and full time staff as well as staff seconded into programmes from partner organisations both from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

3.2. Budgets and institutional arrangements¹⁹

The Government has invested over £20 billion in early years and childcare since 1997. Spending on Sure Start Group programmes alone will reach £1.8bn in 2007-08, around double the 2004-05 total. General Sure Start Grant to local authorities totalling £3bn for 2006-08 supports development of childcare market.

At around £300m over 3 years to 2004, Neighbourhood Nurseries were the biggest ever single investment to expand childcare. 1,380 Neighborhood Nurseries were established, providing over 49,000 new day care places.

The planning is to have 1,000 Children's Centres by December 2006 (and 2,500 by 2008). At that time, all families in the most disadvantaged areas should have access. The longer term commitment is 3,500 Centres by 2010 - one for every community.

The Government is spending approximately £2.4 million each day subsidising the childcare costs of working families through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. The 2006 Budget raised the level of tax relief for which employer supported childcare qualifies to up to £55 per week. Also announced in the Budget were capital grants of £8.4m, for both 2006-07 and 2007-08, to help small and medium employers establish workplace nurseries.

The SSLP expenditure include capital and revenue expenditure²⁰. From 2006-2007, individual Sure Start funding streams were rationalised into the General Sure Start Grant including, for the first time, one single capital block making funding no longer separately ring-fenced and separately identifiable.

Started in 1999, the UK Government invested substantially into the SSLP or services (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk). This new programme was allocated a new budget line under HM Treasury. The Sure Start programme holds a supply side funding as well as a demand side funding as parents are assisted in paying for childcare through the Tax Credit system. The authorities provide over £ 2.4m a day. The Pre Budget Report 2004 announced substantial extensions to the Government's

¹⁹ Data and information provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (Family, Poverty and Work Division).

²⁰ See Appendix, Table 1.

support for childcare costs through the tax credit system. The limits increased to £ 175 per week for 1 child and £ 300 for two or more children from April 2005. The maximum proportion of costs that can be claimed rises to 80% from April 2006.

At the end of 2005, the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (WTC) is benefiting over 356,000 lower and middle income families; 67% are lone parents and 33% couples. This is twice the number that benefited from the previous Childcare Tax Credit at its peak (7x more the number that benefited from the system operating in 1999).

The UK Sure Start programme also seems to have triggered changes and new developments in various UK Departments and Ministerial responsibilities. Sure Start was established following the Comprehensive Spending Review in 1997 "Cross departmental review of provision for young children". At present, this new government Unit is led by a Minister for Sure Start in the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Work and Pensions. Meanwhile, the Sure Start programme needs to be set in the UK government's much wider and ambitious Ten Year Childcare Strategy (see "Every Child Matters") becoming part of a larger move to more integrated policy and provision.

The Unit works with local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Jobcentre Plus, local communities and voluntary and private sector organisations. Consultation with and involvement of the various actors has been developed considerably within the SSLP. Although the action is confined into catchment areas a larger diffusion of the principles and practices of the SSLP may be expected. It is worth investigating in more detail the possible spin-offs of this awareness raising (expectations and frustrations).

3.3. Evaluation and monitoring²¹

It is commonly observed that clear arrangements are mostly lacking for monitoring and assessing the implementation and impact of programmes within EU Member States on an ongoing basis. By contrast, the UK Sure Start Unit has allocated substantial funding for a strong capacity of highly skilled researchers.

The NESS was commissioned in 2000 (e.g. after the UK Sure Start programme started), be it by the same public authority commissioning Sure Start "to undertake a multifaceted evaluation of the Sure Start Local Programmes. NESS can be considered a valuable *asset* of the overall UK Sure Start programme. It constitutes a process within the process. With respect to the transferability of NESS as a separate exercise in UK Sure Start, it would be relevant to consider the feasibility of this additional work, for example in the context of the EC Peer review work in the field of social inclusion policies.

²¹ See Melhuish (2006a); in general NESS (www.ness.bbk.ac.uk)

NESS greatly facilitates a thorough and expert monitoring and analysis of work in progress. Till now, it developed an impressive number of extensive (themed) reports which already document various parts of the UK Sure Start process and its outcomes.

In the context of UK Sure Start, it may be relevant to screen the type of data collection of NESS more thoroughly by looking at the extent to which the philosophical and theoretical foundation of programmes is clearly articulated, whether all stakeholders are equally involved and different perspectives are taken into account (i.e. the perspective of *children*).

Assessing the obstacles and constraints can indicate the factors determining success. The NESS analyses point to various critical factors which seem to make a difference in terms of impact of effectiveness of the SSLP such as

- the importance of a Programme Manager (pivotal role) and of the (type of) Lead Agency
- the amount of personal resources (“children from *relatively* less disadvantaged families appeared to benefit somewhat from living in SSLP communities” .. “In contrast, children from *relatively* more disadvantaged families appeared to be adversely affected”
- a ‘*critical mass*’ of initiatives required in an area in order to make a substantial change in outcomes at the level of the community
- a commitment to robust *consultation* playing a vital role in the delivery of local services
- considerable problems encountered by newly formed SSLP to set up a completely new form of early childhood service. Moreover, participation on partnerships took more time and effort than anticipated
- good service delivery being highly dependent on successful inter-agency collaboration.

The results and experiences also point to the advantages of delivering universal based services for children and families. But the overall project work is confronted with clear *capacity problems*. The current workforce seems to be insufficient in size and sometimes in specific skills needed.

As SSLP are designed to operate within restrictive boundaries this may raise problems for children and families alike (e.g. increasing the risk of stigma). Area boundaries may exclude existing services, just outside the SSLP boundary. At present, for the development of Children’s Centres, the rigidity of these boundaries seem to be reduced.

Trust works out to be fundamental to parental engagement. Building trust is a long-term task for programmes, with cultural and ethnic dimensions that need to be taken into account. The overall project planning and funding needs a time frame in line with the substantial challenges and the type of targets set for UK Sure Start.

3.4. Future developments

A substantial adaptation started from March 2006 on as all SSLP need to be turned into **Children’s Centres**. All these SSLP are to become Sure Start children’s centres providing integrated services to parents and children up to the age of five²². But for the 3,500 Children’s centres

²² see Appendix, Table 3.

planned throughout England a significant difference may develop between those in SSLP ('poor' areas) and the rest of England as the latter will not have childcare and education as key roles.

They will bring together various services, including early education, childcare, family support, employment advice and health. The introduction of Children's Centres in Sure Start and other deprived areas represent an important and innovative policy development. The overall idea of providing integrated services to all families in a catchment area, an idea being around for some time now was given sustained and substantial government backing.

In Phase 1 (2004-2006), 136 of a total of 150 Local Authorities were involved in the programme. The majority of Sure Start Children's centres were developed from existing provision like SSLP, Early Excellence Centres, neighbourhood nurseries and maintained nursery schools. By end of Phase 2 (2006-2008), all 150 Local Authorities involved in the programme have to ensure all of the most disadvantaged families have access to children's centres services as well as begin to provide services to families living outside these areas in the 70% less disadvantaged wards.

Moreover, the Government expects the **Childcare Bill** to be passed in Parliament in September 2006; the first ever legislation in UK devoted to services for under fives and childcare. The Bill will place new duties on local authorities to improve child outcomes, to provide information to parents and to secure sufficient childcare for children in their area.

Additional to the investments in early childhood care already made, the UK Government plans to increase its support for families between now and 2010 either by starting new services or by increasing the entitlement such as increasing the provision of free minimum part-time early education for all 3 and 4 years olds from 33 to 38 weeks, the possibility for parents to claim back 80% of their childcare costs through the Working Tax Credit (both April 2006), the extension of paid maternity leave to 9 months (April 2007) and to open one-third of all secondary schools 8am-6pm. Last but not least, initiatives have been announced to improve the quality of the children's workforce and the inspection regime (see "Choice for parents").

4. Relevance for and transferability to other national contexts

The general aims and approach of Sure Start are seen as a positive contribution to the combat against child poverty and to the social inclusion programme in general. Different countries, however, have varying priorities and the different national contexts have obvious consequences for the capacity to transfer the good practices.

Transferability is thought to be more easy or feasible if policies and programmes have single goals, simple problems, few side-effects, actors with high levels of information and/or outcomes which are easily to predict. As these conditions hardly apply to UK Sure Start it is consequently considered more difficult to discuss policy transfer.

4.1 Peer Countries²³

France

Historically speaking, it is felt that France answered in a substantial different way to the issues at stake in Sure Start. France has a longstanding policy to support every family also in order to maintain a high birth rate. As the (full-time) employment of French mothers has been and remains comparatively high, the combination of work and family life is a ongoing challenge for parents and public authorities alike.

The '*Caisse National d'Allocation Familiale*' (CNAF) constitutes a major policy tool, especially to organise a universal system of cash transfers to families with two or more children (annually 35,3 billion Euro), a special transfer for the unemployed lone parent as well as a system of contracts ('*Contrats Enfance*' for children below 6 and '*Contrats Temps Libre*' for children between 6 and 18) with local authorities to support the provision of variety of good quality child care services (annually 3.1 billion Euro). Moreover, access to pre-primary schools is offered free of charge (approximately 29% of all children between two and three years old; almost all children aged three or more).

Comparatively speaking, it is felt that the main problem for France is not for the (very) young children but rather older children and adolescents (i.e. 10% child poverty among children aged 13 and older). Some key issues of Sure Start nevertheless draw the attention. For example, the way a new service is implemented at population level, and the way it is communicated. For developing these new services, the mix of public funding together with private investments is considered of great interest. Finally, to learn from the overall assessment and the evaluation of a vast public programme.

Hungary

In Hungary, as in other Central European countries, the history of childcare dates back about a hundred years. Health care visitors had also been in place for a long time. With the political changes, Hungary established two types of social service support – the family support centres and the child welfare services. Financial support for families includes three types of family benefit.

Poverty is governed by a number of factors in Hungary, among others ethnicity (i.e. 50 % of families living in deep poverty are Roma, 70 % of Roma live in deep poverty) and geography (dead-end vil-lages, segregated communities). To structure what remained of the previous social provisions a three-step approach to introducing new working systems was adopted in order to ensure acceptance by the country as a whole and the various groups of professionals involved. All concerned had a joint responsibility to resolve the problems.

²³ See "Statements and Comments" by the Peer Countries representatives at the Peer Review Meeting (May 2006).

The Sure Start approach required professional knowledge of early development, and such expertise was not widely available. Over the past few months, after an evaluation of the pilot scheme, Hungary had opened up its limited experience for the benefit of others. At the planning stage, it was important to use a target-oriented approach. This helped to prevent burn-out among social workers – a common phenomenon, due to the difficult nature of work with families. When the professionals were invited into the new project, they appreciated that it provided them with innovative jobs that were different to their previous activities. The involvement of the stakeholders was essential to success. Various committees of professionals were set up to achieve this. Communication between the different professional groups involved was often difficult, as they had different vocabularies and mentalities.

The implementation of Sure Start was not uniform in Hungary. However, all of the new programmes were based on a few important values, one of the main ones being the involvement of the people concerned in seeking solutions to their own problems. This was as important in education as in social services. In Hungary, the 'sure' in Sure Start should mean early needs analysis, competence-based supporting services and safety within the community.

Although professionals were pleased by the innovative aspects of the new approach, they also felt that they were already overburdened and could not do more. The solution was to provide training and to show them that, by sharing their tasks with other professionals in a new way, they could reduce their burden. As professionals were often left alone with their problems the Sure Start approach gave them a new framework for tackling them.

The local councils had financial control, the local and national professionals had professional control and there is customer involvement in the design of the services. There is general agreement that breaking down the barriers between agencies is critical.

The Hungarian Sure Start also found it difficult to reach the least motivated parents; but by building a club or other place that was clearly good for their children, that helped to convince them. But it took time. Minorities were also involved in planning the activities (i.e. Roma people often promote such programmes in their contacts with each other).

Lithuania

In Lithuania, there are a range of different, separate family benefits systems. A kindergarten system is in place, usually catering for children from the age of 1 or 2, which has a long tradition dating back to the Soviet era and which has continued in the cities, but had largely disappeared in the rural areas after independence.

But everything is very separate. Access to kindergartens depends on the area and on parents' ability to take their children to the kindergarten. A national action plan for child welfare was launched in 2005 including a programme for children under school age, containing a range of measures aimed at improving the system.

In Lithuania, it would also help to create family support services in areas where these do not exist, and it would provide for cooperation between those structures and the social services. Lithuania also has some experience with day centres for children. They were set up five years ago, specifically for

children from poor families. These 127 centres, at present attended by about 3,000 children after school, were seen as effective support for families, as the centres were also a point of contact with the social services.

Although there are numerous community-based activities targeting the welfare of children and families, they are poorly co-ordinated. They are at risk of discontinuity and of low effectiveness.

The principles and practices of Sure Start could be of help to remedy these shortcomings. The same holds to overcome a narrow-minded approach among the various professionals involved and the need to change attitudes in order to become involved in issues beyond their domain. Finally, the overall system of monitoring and evaluation is very relevant for different types of services in Lithuania (i.e. quality and standards of the social services).

Latvia

It was emphasised that many different Latvian ministries had responsibilities concerning children with problems of cooperation. On the other hand, the municipalities were in charge of all the social services. Any attempt to transfer Sure Start to Latvia, the local authorities would say they had neither the money nor the staff.

The main problems were now in the rural areas, where many people were living in poverty. There was an urgent need to train more social workers. Latvia, with its population of 2.3 million, currently has 1,254 social workers. Social workers had to be usually some kind of superwomen. A debate was currently under way about the desirability of attaching social workers to kindergartens.

The kindergartens were under the education ministry, with the main task to educate, not to do social work. The same was true of the health aspects. Interdisciplinary cooperation is of great importance, but still seems to be too undeveloped in Latvia. However, there can be seen the tendency of interdisciplinary cooperation to develop lately. The amount of work, the level of professionalism and the possession of information of specialists always influence successful cooperation. If the interdisciplinary cooperation is weak, the specialist, mostly social worker, lack the information about the concrete social problem (for example - family doctors and nurses did not inform the social services when necessary).

Latvia saw a possibility of transferring the Sure Start approach for families in need, also as a form of outreach to unemployed parents. Some key issues of Sure Start are, however, of special interest. First of all, the elimination of child poverty as a major problem for many countries. Since poverty is looked at as a multidimensional problem bringing together the many stakeholders and services is considered worthwhile, as well as establishing strong links between various policies need to be co-ordinated.

Malta

In Malta, children have always been treasured by family members. It is felt that a number of services are available in Malta with a medium-sized population of about 400,000 citizens to cover the health and well-being of young children living in the community.

The Maltese government has been providing free kindergarten / pre-school education to 3-5 years old in State schools for over 30 years. Since 1986 even the Catholic Church provided Child Day Care services for children from socially excluded families as well as an outreach service for families in need.

Home Start-Malta is a project set up in March 2006 to have volunteers offering support, friendship, emotional and practical help to parents of children below five.

ACCESS is a complex building which encompasses various services namely, Employment and Training Corporation, Housing, Social Welfare, Ability centres and social work services as well. Another preventive project at ACCESS is Smartkids which is a day centre for children under the age of 3. Smartkids provides child care facilities and also parental skills training for parents. Though not considered as a "Children's Centre" because it provides other services to other sectors of the inhabitants of the region, part of the pilot project ACCESS in Birgu (an inner harbour area), could possibly fall under this title as many of the services offered are child and family oriented.

It is therefore felt that a good part of Sure Start is perhaps already put in practice in Malta under various other names.

Early 2005, the Ministry of Family and Social Solidarity established an Office for Social Inclusion. It currently conducts and co-ordinates a consultation exercise on the NAP for Social Inclusion / 2006-2008. The Ministry of Education runs various programmes (i.e. the project Ghozza) which is a support service and an educational programme to single, pregnant adolescents.

Some key issues of Sure Start are, however being implemented. Such services are a means to avoid stigma within a local community. They also help build trust between various professionals and service users.

Poland

Over the past ten years, the number of kindergartens has dropped in Poland by 30%. In 1990-91 alone, more than 1,300 pre-school centres were closed. The proportion of kindergartens operating in rural areas declined from 43% to 37% between 1991 and 2000.

In Poland, the *powiat* or county is the basic administrative unit bearing statutory responsibility for combating poverty and social exclusion. As in the Sure Start programme the Polish National Plan for Children assumes it is the local community which can most effectively prevent poverty and social exclusion. The authors of that Plan consider the following as the most important and urgent problems:

an insufficient care system for mothers and children (incl. insufficient availability of health care services for pregnant women or adjusted to children's needs), limited availability of extracurricular activities for children and youth, and an overall financial situation of families with children below 14.

Financed by the EC Structural Funds, an important initiative aims to support the development of very young children through alternative pre-school educational centres in rural communities.

Some key issues of Sure Start are, however, specifically looked. For example, the integration of the educational and health care services or the adaptation of the Psychological and Educational Counselling Centres into Children's Centres to create a setting where parents could seek comprehensive support for themselves and their children. The macro-economic disparity between Poland and the UK may be the major difficulty to finance and transfer a project similar to Sure Start.

4.2. European stakeholder organisations²⁴

The contribution of **ATD Fourth World** concentrated on a pilot project they run in London. It had set up a Doorstep Library as a means of getting into contact with the most disadvantaged families, in partnership with the SSLP. The idea is to offer people the possibility of borrowing books as well as the possibility of volunteers' reading with the young children, together with the parents. The project had produced results mainly because of the trust built up in a long-term relationship with the families.

One of the aims of the Doorstep Library was to talk to the parents about the different services offered by the local Sure Start project and to offer to accompany them to a meeting with Sure Start workers. This process was led by the families themselves, who decided how far they wanted to go. This proved a fruitful approach to the most disadvantaged, who were suspicious at first. Building up trust might therefore entail several repeat visits.

The contribution of **EUROCHILD** as a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe with EC funding is to improve the quality of life of children and young people within the EU action programme to combat poverty and social exclusion. At the heart of Eurochild's activities is the Child Poverty Work Programme. A key part of this is the assessment of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPS/Inclusion).

Attention is drawn to the experience of the Dutch member organisation of Eurochild with Sure Start. It is felt to focus on a more coherent structure for the pre-school age compared to other existing initiatives in the Netherlands. Moreover, a lot of attention is given to the educational disadvantages of children under 4.

It was considered risky for NGOs to become too dependent on local authority or government support, as political swings could pose a threat to such funding. EUROCHILD believes that children themselves should be involved in discussions on provisions.

²⁴ See "Statements and Comments" by the Stakeholder representative at the Peer Review Meeting (May 2006).

4.3. Peer country discussion of the transferability of Sure Start

The peer review brought out a number of lessons about the transferability of the Sure Start local programmes to other countries. Participants felt that there were ideas and practices that they definitely wanted to take back home with them.

It was felt that the **integration of services** was not currently happening in the peer countries, but they would like to move towards it step by step. The joined-up, holistic approach taken by the children's centres had been of interest to participants from countries where services were more fragmented. Increased co-operation between professionals was felt important. Joint training could be provided for the various professionals involved in childcare, in order to promote networking. This was an idea that they definitely wanted to take back home with them. In many Member States, **different ministries and departments** have different responsibilities for childcare, and often do not co-operate as effectively as might be wished. Sure Start's integrated approach was seen as a successful, and by and large transferable, means of promoting greater co-operation.

The involvement of parents was found to be of the utmost importance. They must be kept informed of the child's development. The Thomas Coram centre's system of portfolios for each child and discussions with parents was seen as very helpful. The level of **parental involvement** in Sure Start local programmes, notably through the partnership boards, was praised. Time would tell if that would continue under local authority financing.

The role of the "femmes-liaison" in France was described who act as a link between different communities and the school system.

Interest was shown in Sure Start's role in **helping parents into employment** as a means of tackling poverty. Some doubts were expressed as to whether a combination of childcare and employment promotion would work in every national context. Decent wages, sufficient to bring up a family, are needed in order to motivate people. Training opportunities and childcare also have to be upgraded.

The peer countries all shared a commitment to act in **the best interests of children** and their families but none of the countries had yet succeeded in that struggle. Targets were being moved again and again, making the process even more challenging and complex. EU Member States with the most admired childcare programmes had decades of trial and error behind them. One discussion point could be the role of programmes against child poverty within Member States' National Action Plans for social inclusion, and the funding implications. It could be argued that investment in children was investment in the future.

Another point, closely linked to that, was the question of **public support**. A case had to be built up. The Sure Start brand name had been maintained because it had gained credibility. But although Sure Start was a flagship of government policy, surveys had shown that only a very small proportion of the British public knew anything about it. It was also said that one problem in the UK's present full-employment society was that many people assumed that poverty did not exist, except where it was due to the indolence of the poor. That was one reason for the concentration on alleviating child poverty. Some people might object to money being spent on parents, but few would argue that efforts should not be made to alleviate the consequences for the children. The true facts about child poverty were not well known in the UK. Getting the information across also entailed engaging with the media, who were not always sympathetic.

It is also felt that public support required public debate. Real public discussion was needed about the aims and quality of childcare if funding was to be secured at the level needed. An exchange of views

on how to build public support would be useful because this depended very much on the national context, for example, the extent to which NGOs were involved in childcare.

Standards for the **quality of service** should also be discussed. A balance had to be struck between the quality and quantity of services.

Would the Sure Start approach lead to patches of high-quality coverage, rather than a universal system?

The balance to be struck between cleanliness and hygiene on the one hand and the happiness of young children (and their parents) on the other. The consensus was that play value and a happy environment were paramount. It was noted that Sure Start focussed on child development and the global well-being of the children.

A lot was known about the process of programmes such as Sure Start, but more information was needed on the practice. One may wonder if too much emphasis on quality control might not lead to competition between different professional groups, whereas Sure Start programmes needed them to work together..

More than 50% of the UK's childcare was still provided by the private sector. Although a public-private childcare mix exists in all Member States, the mix varies considerably and social attitudes might be different too. Some felt there were limits to the childcare services that could be offered by private companies. This should be borne in mind when looking at transferability.

Financial constraints are a sore point for all peer countries. If Sure Start centres were set up, would there be any guarantee of continued funding after the first 2-3 years? And in countries with limited financial means, is there not a danger that a Sure Start approach would create a few centres of excellence amidst a general lack of coverage? Sure Start's emphasis on evaluation and monitoring is an element that participants were keen to recommend. Personnel also need to be helped to self-monitor and self-evaluate. **Accountability** to the various stakeholders (parents, employees, policy-makers, donors) is important in ensuring value for money. Given the scale of such programmes, and the level of investment involved, it is important to have the means of disseminating experiences and best practice. In some instances, the financial horizons were very short. A number of participants mentioned that political and ministerial changes could pose problems for continuity within childcare programmes.

This posed a problem for forward planning. The emphasis on evaluation and monitoring was an element that participants wanted to take back with them. Personnel also needed to be helped to self-monitor and self-evaluate.

Regarding the **economies of scale**, the SSLP were all located in naturally occurring, coherent communities. The smaller programmes were often set a target (i.e. to include up to 800 children under 4). Consequently, these smaller programmes were often unsure about how large an area they should choose to cover. Some opted for areas that were too small. Obviously, there would also be an upper limit to economies of scale. This issue would probably be taken care of by the transfer of responsibilities to local authorities, which cover quite large areas.

For **rural areas**, England did not have a clear-cut model to share with other countries as only 10% of the population lives in rural areas (i.e. 60% in Hungary). More information was needed on the functioning of Sure Start programmes in rural areas, as that was where deprivation was at its greatest in many countries. The rural aspect might be a good point for international co-operation.

5. Conclusions and lessons learnt

Child poverty and the social exclusion of children are of great concern to all EU Member States. It is important to break the cycle of inherited poverty at an early stage in a child's life. This should therefore occupy one of the top places on Member States' agendas for social inclusion. Peer reviews are a process of learning from each other, so as to improve the effectiveness of strategies. They facilitate the transfer of key policy components that had proved effective.

All Member States struggling with similar levels of (child) poverty, strong regional disparities in deprivation of parents or inadequate childcare provision can find inspiration in UK Sure Start. Moreover, Member States wishing to improve one dimension of their local services (e.g. reaching disadvantaged families, joining up services) can turn the evaluation of Sure Start for inspiration. This also holds when they can only earmark a lesser proportion of their GDP for such programmes.

Children's centres had not yet fully mastered the issue of inter-agency collaboration. Often for reasons of political expediency, there had been a tendency to move control of the Children's centres over to the local authorities, because they had the infrastructure to take on that remit immediately. By placing that duty on the local authorities, these services were being incorporated into the welfare state, as a statutory right. A future government would therefore find it very difficult to remove those rights, but one of the consequences of shifting responsibility to the local authorities was that there was no automatic "buy-in" by the health services.

Acknowledging that the vast amount of care is provided by mothers, it is suggested that the policies, programmes and analyses also be looked at from a gender perspective apart from class and ethnicity. It can for example be argued that the situation of (poor) single mothers can for example work as an indicator of the overall situation for women within a certain national context.

Unlike parenting programmes that have historically targeted their services for mothers, such programmes for fathers are still in an infancy stage and much of the work is being conducted on a local level. The NESS already investigated how far fathers were being encouraged to take part in the SSLP. The UK Sure Start provides a tremendous opportunity to examine which type of programmes are effective in altering the way fathers approach their parenting roles.

For EU Member States operating under the logics of a different type of welfare state (including different models of care and education) it provides an interesting 'test case' to monitor how an approach which is familiar to them (e.g. to deliver universal and good quality early childhood services) works out in a macro social setting which differs (strongly) from their own. It may reveal that such service provision does not need all conditions (e.g. infrastructure, staff capacity, qualifications) they consider essential to succeed.

Placing the discussion in its European context it was recalled that at least two of the three main common objectives for social inclusion of the European Union are clearly related to the Sure Start programme:

1. the access for all to the resources, rights and services necessary for full participation in society
2. the mobilisation and co-ordination of all social actors.

The *access to services* was crucial for families and for early child development. Here, some key lessons can be drawn from the experiences with the Sure Start Local Programmes.

Childcare entails a number of comprehensive needs:

- A comprehensive approach to and delivery of integrated services from pregnancy to entering school, focused on child development
- Community control based on local requirements and users driven services.
- Bringing together childcare, early education, health care, education and prevention as well as family or parental support in teamwork
- Organising co-operation with social services, employment services and training services
- Universal access for all the families living in the same community.

Co-ordination and Partnerships. With regard the EU common objective of co-ordination, the discussions had shown that it was more necessary to break down the barriers between different agencies. Different ministries had responsibilities concerning children. There were problems of co-operation between the various ministries. On the other hand, the municipalities were in charge of all the social services. This was not just a matter of writing new rules. It implied a change of culture.

Human Resources and Sustainability. This challenge expresses itself most explicitly in the following issues:

- The need for capacity-building within local authorities and others concerned
- Training (i.e., on teamwork within a multi professional approach and on building partnerships with deprived people), including a strong amount of information-sharing
- Professional qualifications (or status) and salary levels
- A good balance between health protection and child development
- Co-operation with volunteers and NGOs.
- Parental involvement was also clearly important, as a way of building trust.

Sustainability challenges included funding, longitudinal assessment of results in order to demonstrate their cost-effectiveness, a stronger partnership between child protection services and child centres, a stronger partnership between child centres, enterprises and job centres, and giving children themselves a voice within the process and the evaluations.

The importance of a comprehensive and authoritative process of monitoring and assessment, providing a rich variety of information and (longitudinal) data, needs to be stressed. It is a prerequisite for evidence-based policies and the continuous will to improve services, schemes and qualifications.

Sustained efforts are needed to reach families and target groups, notably through outreach services, developing work with all parents in the area (snowball effect) as well as parent-to-parent support. A greater flexibility in opening hours and activities, the inclusion of professionals belonging to the ethnic minorities and organising meetings with specific groups (e.g. teenage mothers) can all contribute to a better use of services and to reaching those most in need.

At the EU level, the concern for child poverty should be integrated into the 2006-2008 National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPS/Inclusion) within the new National Strategic Reports on social protection and social inclusion. Moreover, its inclusion into the European Union's Lisbon reforms should be seriously considered. Tackling the intergenerational inheritance of poverty was clearly relevant to growth and to future employment. Finally, the EU structural funds, notably the European Social Fund (ESF), could also support the implementation of reforms. Here too there is an obvious need for comprehensive, consistent and continued policies

Political momentum. An institutional commitment is needed both at national and local level. Setting national objectives, targets and indicators (i.e. to improve standards in childcare facilities) can go along with freedom for local authorities in designing services most appropriate to the local context and antecedents. In previous years, an inspiring record of achievement can be looked at in terms of budgets, programmes and research data. At the same time, much work remains in progress and needs proper time frames enabling all actors to further deliver the goods. Till now, the focus was mostly on short-term effects as it was too early to consider longer-term effects and outcomes. Moreover, as new challenges and aspirations have been added to the (political) agenda it is necessary that medium-term financial sustainability be provided.

Can the UK political and administrative authorities keep up the commitment and investments which have carried the valuable Sure Start initiative till now? It could be asked how an EU Member State can afford to spend so much of its GDP on Early Childhood and Education Services. The question may be as well. "How can a Member State afford not to do so?" considering the importance of developing social capital in the 21st century.

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7. Appendix

Table 1. Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) Expenditure, by budget year (England, 1999-2006)

Year	SSLPs outturn (in £ million)	% increase compared to year of reference (100%)
1999-2000	5,2	
2000-2001	52,0	
2001-2002	126,2	100
2002-2003	205,6	162,9
2003-2004	359,4	284,8
2004-2005	562,6	445,8
2005-2006*	521,8	413,5

Source: UK Department for Education and Skills (A. Wilsdon, personal communication)

* *estimated* outturn figure

Table 2. Number of Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) and of Children's Centres (CC) that have opened, by calendar year (England, 1999- 2006)

Year	No of SSLPs approved	No of CCs designated
1999	22	0
2000	102	0
2001	116	0
2002	161	0
2003	123	59
2004	0	131
2005	0	255
2006**	0	391
Totals	524	836

Source: UK Department for Education and Skills (A. Wilsdon, personal communication)

** as at end March 2006

There is not a direct one to one read across from SSLPs to children's centres. Some SSLPs are developing into 2 or 3 children's centres (as part of this their existing catchment area is being extended).

Table 3. Number of Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) and of Children's Centres, by region (England, 2006)

ENGLAND By region	No. of SSLPs	No. of Children's Centres*
East	24	55
East Midlands	44	55
London	96	139
North East	62	92
North West	108	145
South East	32	70
South West	31	78
West Midlands	59	94
Yorkshire & Humber- side	68	108
Totals	524	836

Source: UK Department for Education and Skills (A. Wilsdon, personal communication)

designated by 31st March 2006 (figures include some SSLPs that have now become children's centres).