

ACCESS: Cottonera Community Resource Centre

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1. UK interest in Social Exclusion

The UK government is committed to reducing social exclusion wherever possible. To this end the government has created a range of initiatives that tackle social exclusion from different perspectives. Some of these initiatives are area-based and some targeted in other ways. The most well-known and biggest of such initiatives is Sure Start, which approaches social exclusion by trying to improve parent and child well-being for a family with a young child in disadvantaged areas. The theory behind such an approach is that children who are better prepared for school and social life will be more successful throughout life and thus avoid social exclusion. Hence the UK is open to influences from other countries and hopes to learn from other countries with regard to tackling social exclusion. Thus Malta's experience with this issue is of interest.

From an inspection of the documentation supplied regarding Malta's experience, several features stand out as being of particular interest to the UK. These include:

1. The move away from an "interventionist" approach to one supporting community development and empowerment.
2. The provision for mixed SES population in childcare centres.
3. The use of the keyworker system and developing keyworker-parent communication.
4. The importance placed in a stimulating environment in childcare centres and in the home for young children.
5. Work with non-attending schoolchildren.
6. The apparent success of parenting skills seminars
7. Pre-adolescent outreach.
8. Monitoring of service uptake.
9. Approaches to outreach.
10. Facilitating father involvement with children's development.

A key aspect of the UK approach is the recognition that the most effective route out of poverty is employment, and that employment changes not only the financial status of families but also has other individual and social benefits.

2. Similarities/differences between approaches in Malta and the UK

There are several similarities in approach between the UK and Malta. These include:

1. The recognition of the link between employment, parenting and social exclusion.
2. The aim to provide high quality services for parents and young children.
3. The targeting of services by area.

Differences include the involvement of health agencies, the size of the populations involved, and the heterogeneity of the populations served.

3. Current Issues in the UK

Sure Start has become embedded in the welfare state. Current issues involve

1. How to solve the problems of lack of staff capacity both in numbers and in training.
2. How to obtain good inter-agency collaboration.
3. The balance between universal and targeted services.

4. Measuring Success: Evaluation Issues

Within the UK there has been a distinct move to try to introduce evidence-based policy; a consequence of this is that any new policy should be evaluated. With most initiatives there has been some kind of evaluation although the quality and extent of these evaluations has been variable. The most thorough and extensive evaluation is the National Evaluation of Sure Start, which will be covered in the meeting. The UK approach distinguishes between different aspects of success.

1. Success in implementation would refer to the setting up and running of a programme.
2. User-satisfaction would refer to the opinions of users about the programme.
3. Both of these may indicate a high level of success but there may still not be any impact upon social exclusion. Therefore impact evaluation measures the degree to which the programme produces change that indicates a reduction in social exclusion indices.
4. Also there is a cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit evaluation. Most evaluations try to include a cost-benefit evaluation. In the UK, experience has been that mostly these fail because of an inadequately specific cost data being available.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start

Sure Start represents a unique approach to early intervention for families with young children. Rather than providing a specific service, the Sure Start initiative represents an effort to *change existing services*. This is to be achieved by reshaping, enhancing, adding value, and by increasing co-ordination. The Sure Start model presumes that improving services will enhance family

well-being and functioning that will, in turn, improve children's well-being and development. In light of this model, three core questions guide the overall evaluation of Sure Start:

1. *Do existing services change?* (How and, if so, for which populations and under what conditions?)
2. *Are delivered services improved?* (How, and for which populations and under what conditions?)
3. *Do children, families, and communities benefit?* (How, and if so, for which populations and under what conditions?)

The evaluation addresses these questions through: (1) implementation evaluation, (2) impact evaluation, (3) local community context analysis, and (4) cost-benefit analysis.

The Implementation Evaluation

The overall purpose of the implementation evaluation is to:

- To provide data on key aspects of design, policy, practice, style and development in *each* local Sure Start programmes;
- To produce qualitative information on services as a framework for the impact study;
- To provide data on programme objectives and facilitate the *quantification* of inputs for the analysis of cost effectiveness.

The Impact Evaluation

The impact evaluation is designed to examine effects of Sure Start on children, families, and communities and to identify the conditions under which Sure Start proves most effective in enhancing child, family, and community functioning. The impact study is designed around an integrated cross-sectional, longitudinal framework, which compares children and families receiving Sure Start with similar children and families not receiving Sure Start.

The Local Context Analysis

By collecting and examining neighbourhood-level data on Sure Start communities longitudinally, this part of the evaluation will:

1. Provide essential contextualisation for evaluation.
2. Describe change in programme communities over time.
3. Compare change with that in comparison communities.

The Cost-effectiveness Evaluation

The cost-effectiveness evaluation aims to answer three core questions:

1. What is the true cost of a particular initiative?
2. Did the outcomes justify the investment of resources?
3. Was this the most efficient way to achieve the identified outcomes?

Cost effectiveness should only consider the effect of the intervention on the programme's own objectives. Cost-benefit analysis, however, should include all effects, both positive and negative, direct, indirect and spillover, anticipated and unanticipated. Sure Start is likely to include both unanticipated effects and spillover effects. The cost-benefit analysis will consider short-term (up to 3 years), medium-term (3-15 years), and long-term benefits (15+ years). Examples of benefits are improved family functioning (short term), reduction in special needs (medium term), and lower crime (long term).

5. Changes in Sure Start

As a result of emerging research results from the evaluation changes to the nature of Sure Start programmes have occurred. It became evident that there was large variation in the proficiency and effectiveness of Sure Start programmes and that a particular type of programme called Children's Centres were particularly effective. Hence changes to programmes were introduced such that by 2006 all Sure Start programmes had become Children's Centres. Children's Centres in their most complete form would deliver the following range of services within disadvantaged communities.

1. Child health advice and services.
2. Childcare for those families that need it.
3. Preschool education for all children for 3 years upwards.
4. Family support and parenting education for families that need it.
5. Employment advice and support where needed.
6. Training advice to improve employment prospects where needed.

In addition the guidance provided for Children's Centres has become much more specific about the services to be provided and how to provide them. Also ongoing work is upgrading the skills of Sure Start workers.