

Typical costs of Sure Start Local Programme services

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Introduction

Sure Start is a government initiative designed to provide early intervention services to children aged 0 to 4 years and their parents, living in areas of high deprivation. Since its inception over 500 Sure Start Local Programmes have been initiated across the United Kingdom, each programme serving up to approximately 700 children in the 0 to 4 age bracket (Sure Start Unit, 2005).

Sure Start Local Programmes are held up as a model in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (2003) which stated that:

The Government aims to extend the principles developed in Sure Start local programmes across other services. These principles focus on: working with parents and children; starting very early and being flexible at the point of delivery; providing services for everyone and ensuring services are community driven, professionally co-ordinated across agencies and outcome focused (DfES, 2003, 2.4).

Funding for Sure Start Local Programmes was drawn directly from central government. Providers of Local Sure Start Programmes consist of lead agencies and accountable bodies, frequently but not necessarily the relevant local authority, Primary Care Trust or voluntary sector agency such as NCH.

Recent moves to develop Sure Start Local Programmes into Children's Centres, and to redirect funds for these early interventions through local authorities have heightened the need for an indication of the costs of delivering services to a Sure Start Local Programme model. As a consequence, mainstream agencies have been interested in the costs and outcomes of Sure Start Local Programmes' services and modes of delivery.

Each Sure Start Local Programme has been required to undergo a local evaluation over the course of its first three years of operation and additionally make target returns to the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS). A part of the local evaluation consists of establishing the costs of key Sure Start services. NESS provides guidance on the costing of

Sure Start local programme services, *Guidance for Sure Start Local Evaluators and Programme Managers on the Estimation of Cost-Effectiveness at a Local Level* (Meadows, 2001).

Costing methods

The general approach used to produce unit costs for the Sure Start Local Programmes follows the guidance from the National Evaluation Team. This entailed the following process:

- Calculate the central administration, management and support costs (indirect costs);
- Calculate the project or service-related costs (direct costs);
- Weight the direct costs to take account of the ratio of face-to-face time to non-contact time;
- Weight the service-related costs by indirect costs (weighted costs);
- Measure the amount of project/services provided;
- Divide the outputs by the weighted costs to obtain unit costs.

The seven Sure Start Local Programmes provided end of year accounts from which costs could be separated into indirect costs and direct costs. Premises costs were excluded and travel costs treated as a central cost and thus averaged across each activity.

Practitioner staff (those directly involved with service users) in each programme, were asked to estimate the hours spent on face-to-face work with individual service users, group work with service users and other activities over the course of their working week. From these estimates the proportions of face-to-face: other work were calculated. This calculation enabled the production of distinct ratios for different practitioners such as Health Visitors or Early Years Practitioners whose daily and weekly proportions of contact with service users were likely to differ considerably.

To establish unit costs (the cost of a service or activity per service user), programmes were asked to produce data on service use. The collection of this data is also a requirement of the Sure Start Unit which monitors service use of programmes nationally in relation to Sure Start targets. In their early years, programmes struggled to produce consistent records, but by their third year of operation were largely competent in recording this data electronically to share with local evaluators.

Services and activities differ slightly across the local programmes in their staffing (possibly influenced by the lead agency), the number of service users and their duration. Here we have drawn together some typical Sure Start services common to a number of programmes, and established a mean cost across programmes per service user per hour.

Staff costs

Sure Start Local Programmes may choose whether or not to employ or deploy from their lead agency certain key staff such as midwives and health visitors. Key staff employed in the Sure Start Local Programmes we studied were Early Years Practitioners, sometimes described as Family Workers or Nursery Nurses¹, Health Visitors, Midwives, Development

¹ Some Programme Managers are noting that the EYP/Family Worker/Nursery Nurse role has developed through the skills mix within Sure Start programmes such that these staff are taking up special responsibilities, for example, in weaning.

Workers, sometimes called Parent Workers or Dads Workers, and Speech and Language Therapists. Table 1 shows average salary costs with oncosts for the period 2003 to 2004.

Table 1 Sure Start Local Programme staffing costs: average Sure Start staff costs with oncosts (averaged within and across five programmes) 2003/2004

Key Sure Start staff	£	Number of programmes employing these staff
Midwife	30,318	5
Health Visitor	26,239	4
EYP/Family Worker/Nursery Nurse	14,680	5
Development Worker	26,571	2
Speech and Language Therapist	22,268	3

Indirect costs

We analysed each programme budget, allocating expenditure to 'direct' face-to-face staff and services to 'indirect' administrative and support services. The average ratio of indirect to direct costs over 7 programmes was 2.04 (Schneider and Tidmarsh, paper in preparation).

Practitioner staff in the Sure Start Local Programmes were asked to estimate how much time over the course of their working week they spent in contact with service users, both in groups and individually. From the information they provided we were able to estimate ratios from which to produce the cost of their contact time. Table 2 shows the ratios of contact time for staff in seven Sure Start Local Programmes. The ratios differ widely.

Table 2 Sure Start Local Programme staff contact time ratios: face-to-face ratios

Programme	Midwife	Health Visitor	EYP/Family Worker/Nursery Nurse	Development Worker	Speech and Language Therapist
B	1.75	1.96	2.17		
C	1.18	1.89	1.64		
G			1.47		
A	1.86	1.86	1.6		
D	1.25	1.75	1.92	2.5	
E	3.45		1.93	2.01	2.67
F		1.62	2.04	2.04	
Average	1.90	1.82	1.82	2.18	2.67
Std dev.	0.918	0.133	0.257	0.275	

Sure Start Local Programmes monitor their service use. The information provided on service use is used to construct unit costs. Programmes are in their early stages of development, and so may not be up to capacity, however, Table 3 gives a reasonable guide to the numbers of service users attending a range of typical Sure Start Local Programme activities.

Table 3 Sure Start Local Programmes service user numbers: average number of service users for typical Sure Start activities 2002/2004

Programme	Breast Buddies/ Breast Feeding Support	Well Baby Clinic	Baby Massage	Smoking Cessation	Bumps and Babies	Toddler Group/ Drop In/ Stay and Play	Parenting/ Behaviour M'ment/ Coping with Kids	Dads Group
B			5		7	10		3
C	6	6		1	8	14		7
G	4		10	2	9	10	9	4
A	7			8	8	13	8	3
D	8						12	
E	5	15	10	2	8	13		
F	4					13	12	8
Average	6	11	8	3	8	13	10	5
Std dev.	1.633	6.364	2.887	3.202	0.707	2.074	2.062	2.345

Typical costs

From the core costs, staff face-to-face ratios and average service use the following typical Sure Start Local Programme activities and services costs are constructed. Table 4 provides the unit costs for the services discussed. It should be borne in mind that most of the services discussed may run for a morning or 2 hour session, which increases the cost which is shown in the table per hour.

Table 4 Sure Start Local Programme typical activities and service costs

Programme	Unit cost (per hour per service user) to nearest £	Average number of service users	Typical staffing: Early Years Practitioner (EYP)/ Health Visitor (HV)/ Midwife (MW)
Breast Buddies/Breast Feeding Support – target to increase number of breast feeding women	30	6	1 EYP, 1 HV, 1 MW
Well Baby Clinic – assess babies progress and enables parents to socialize with other parents	16	11	1EYP, 1HV, 1MW
Baby Massage – small group usually run for 6 weeks for parents and babies	11	8	1 EYP, 1HV
Smoking Cessation – small group or individual face-to-face support session	19	3	1HV
Bumps and Babies – supports women in preparation for parenthood	25	8	2 EYP, 1HV, 1MW
Toddler Group/Drop In/Stay and Play – engages parents who may be considered 'harder to reach' – operate on a continuous basis	5	13	2 EYP
Parenting/Behavioural Movement/Coping with Kids – fixed term sessions for small groups of parents	6	10	2 EYP
Dads Group – maybe held at weekend, presently number of participants is low	14	5	1 Development worker

Individual home visits

Sure Start staff also undertake home visits. These are likely to be periodic checks by a health visitor, but may also be undertaken by Early Years Practitioners, Midwives and Speech and Language Therapists. Table 5 shows the typical (again as above constructed from average

costs and ratios across programmes) costs of one hour visits by each of these practitioners. Travel is not calculated separately but included as a central cost and shared across all programme activities.

Table 5 Average cost of a Sure Start practitioner home visit per hour

Practitioner	£
Early Years Practitioner	33
Health Visitor	62
Midwife	75
Speech and Language Therapist	77

Discussion

The costs produced here are the hourly costs per service user for a range of Sure Start Local Programme activities. They are constructed from findings from seven Sure Start Local Programmes in the north east of England. The findings are limited by the number of programmes with costs data available to us, and a dependence upon staff to estimate their face-to-face contact time with families, which may vary periodically and change once programmes are operating from their own premises. Capital costs have not been included as it was judged that they would be misleading at this stage. Nevertheless the costs provide an indication of the spending required to deliver services to a Sure Start Local Programme model of added value through a wide range of supporting activities.

References

- Curtis, L. & Netten, A. (2004) *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2004*, Personal Social Services Research Unit, University of Kent, Canterbury.
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- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2005) *Early Years and Child Care: The Sure Start Agenda Executive Summary*, <http://www.local.odpm.gov.uk/research/rnd5care.pdf>, accessed June 2005.