

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Leeds
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Case Study 3: Impact on policy and practice in early childhood services in England of the Impact Module of the National Evaluation of Sure Start
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Sure Start, the flagship New Labour anti-poverty initiative launched in 1999, was an area-based early intervention targeting pockets of social and economic deprivation in England. The multi-disciplinary National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), to which Professor Angela Anning was the central educational contributor, was the largest social science evaluation contract ever awarded in the UK. Findings were continually fed back to ministers and civil servants to inform policy and practice. Impacts (discussed below, section 4) include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) systemic changes in integrated services for vulnerable families; (2) rethinking the resourcing and funding of Children's Centres; (3) revision of training and qualifications of early childhood staff; (4) enhancing the role of family support and parenting projects.
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Anning (Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Leeds, 1997-2004; Research Professor, University of Leeds, 2004-2006) has researched and written extensively on early years education and services for children. From 1999 to 2002, she led DfEE-funded evaluations of three early years Centres of Excellence, which pioneered integrated services, and, from 2002-2004, she completed an ESRC-funded project with colleagues from medicine, health care and social policy into multi-agency teamwork. Both projects informed the multidisciplinary NESS evaluation research. The impact reported here refers both to Anning's role as a core member of the Impact team, its central educational contributor and to those aspects of the evaluation she led personally.</p> <p>Context:</p> <p>From 1997-2010, Labour invested massively in Early Years provision. Radical policy changes included integrating and expanding the early childhood education and care sectors, initiating multi-agency teamwork and targeting the whole family. The policies had a particular focus on improving child health, education and welfare outcomes for those families deemed to be at risk or vulnerable. Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) were seminal in modelling new ways of working. Guidance was offered to SSLPs but the approach was not prescriptive. Programmes were negotiated with communities and responded to local needs to deliver services. There were, therefore, wide variations in treatment.</p> <p>NESS Evaluation:</p> <p>The Impact Module of the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), of which Anning was a team member and the sole educationalist from 2000-2008, conducted large-scale surveys of child and families in SSLP areas and rated programme variability (PV) to investigate characteristics of the SSLPs found to be more effective in achieving outcomes (5). It was central to the evaluation of the programme and has played a key role in shaping subsequent government policies in this area. The Impact team used an 'intention to treat' model on 7,000 children and their families for a cross-sectional study (at 9 months and 3-years-old) in 150 representative SSLP areas. Early findings found variation in effects on subgroups within local communities, with some adverse effects on the most disadvantaged groups and greater impact on parental measures than child outcomes (6). The final contract for the NESS evaluation in January 2001 specified that an education expert should be part of the evaluation team. On the basis of her expertise in multi-agency work and evaluation of integrated services for young children, Anning was contracted for this key role and worked as the educationalist responsible for the Impact Module (cf Source C)</p> <p>The disappointing early results of the cross-sectional study resulted in SSLPs being rebranded as Children's Centres and taken under Local Authority control (3). The Impact Team were subsequently asked to identify characteristics of SSLPs that showed better than expected outcomes. Anning led this programme variability (PV) research (2004- 2006) (2). Its purpose was to analyse what made some programmes more effective than others and what were the qualities of services connected to better outcomes for children and families. The team worked 'blind' on measuring the processes of more and less effective delivery of treatments. Statistical analysis demonstrated that variations in PV measures of SSLPs' effectiveness were linked to more or less</p>

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impact (4). Key dimensions of proficiency identified in this research were: effective governance and management, informal but professional ethos, and empowerment of service providers and users. Key strategies to attain proficiency for universal services were: tuning into local communities and specialist services, early identification and treatments, recruiting and training quality staff and managing multi-agency teamwork.

The PV findings formed the basis of guidelines for Children's Centres and more accountability for outcomes. The Impact of Sure Start services on both parents and children was found to be more positive over time. 2008 findings in the longitudinal study (using a matched Millennium Cohort Study sample receiving mainstream services as controls) were positive effects for 7 of 14 outcomes, particularly parental measures, no significant differences in subgroups; but overall more 'advantaged' families gained most. Evidence from a themed study on the Quality of Early Learning and Play in Sure Start Local Programmes, published in 2005 and with **Anning** as the lead researcher(1), also emphasised the importance of improving the child focused activities, and had an impact on wider discussions on the need to improve the training requirements for childcare workers.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] **Anning, A.**, Chesworth, E. and Spurling, L. (2005) *The Quality of Early Learning, Play and Childcare Services in Sure Start Local Programmes*, Sure Start Report 09, Nottingham, DfES
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/NESS-2005-FR-009.pdf>
- [2] **Anning, A.** and the National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team (2007) *Understanding Variations in Effectiveness amongst Sure Start Local Programmes*, Sure Start Report 024, Nottingham:DfES
<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/impact/documents/40.pdf>
- [3] Belsky J, Melhuish, E. and Barnes, J. and the NESS Research Team(2008) Research and Policy in Developing an Early Years Initiative: The Case of Sure Start. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*. 2, 1-13.
- [4] Melhuish, E., Belsky, J., **Anning, A.**, Ball, M., Barnes, J., Romaniuk, H., Leyland, A. and the NESS Research Team, (2007) *Variation in community intervention programmes and consequences for children and families: the example of Sure Start Local Programmes*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48:6, pp 543-551. DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01705.x
- [5] **Anning, A.**, Ball, M., Belsky, J., and Melhuish, E. (2007). Predicting impact in an early years intervention: the design of a tool using qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Children's Services*, 3, 27-42.
- [6] NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team) (2005) *Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families*, Sure Start Report 13, Nottingham: DfES, <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/NESS-2005-FR-013.pdf>
- [7] Rutter, M. (2007) Sure Start Local Programmes; an Outsider's Perspective, in Belsky, J., Barnes, J. and Melhuish, E. (Eds.) (2007) *The National Evaluation of Sure Start. Does Area-Based Early Intervention Work?* Bristol: The Policy Press..

Quality of the research: Sir Michael Rutter in an independent, project external contribution to [7] wrote of the work produced by NESS 'as rigorous and careful an evaluation as could be undertaken...high quality research... every reason to trust the research findings' 7, p.204). [3] and [4] above are included to represent publications based on the NESS Impact team findings in high quality international journal, providing an additional quality indicator for the research.

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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The NESS evaluation, and **Anning's** work as the educationalist and core member of the impact module of the National Evaluation of Sure Start, had an immediate impact on the development of Sure Start services. The Director of the Sure Start Programme (1999-2006) states: "Sure Start had a profound and direct impact on the way early years services are delivered in England. In particular, early disappointing Sure Start impact results published in 2006 led to an in depth study on programme variability for which **Anning** was the project leader ... The findings from this study had a direct impact on the requirements for the great expansion of Children's Centres that followed. Of particular relevance was the importance of good local data systems to understand local needs, and what groups were not using Sure Start services, and the importance of matching local empowerment strategies with a clear focus on activities that would enhance child development." (H) The Sure Start Director (1999-2006) continues: "Evidence from the themed study on the Quality of Early Learning and Play in Sure Start Local Programmes (**Anning** et al 2005) was also used by civil servants to ensure local programmes were improving the child focused activities, and had an impact on wider discussions on the need to improve the training requirements for childcare workers." (H).

Ultimately, the significance of this case lies in **Anning's** role in promoting enhanced life chances for children in poverty or at risk (D) and over 3,000 children's centres across England continue to deliver provision shaped by the Impact Module of the NESS evaluation. Reports, accessible on the DfE website, are widely used by professionals and students. NESS publications from the Impact Team provided the evidence base for policy changes to combat poverty, educational failure, worklessness, family and relationships breakdown. The Chief Research Officer at the Department for Education in 2012 states in a letter to support this case study: "On behalf of the Department for Education, I am pleased to confirm that the Impact Module of NESS findings informed systemic changes in services for families with young children defined as at risk/vulnerable. In particular, though the concept of multi-agency teams delivering universal services remained central to successive Labour and Coalition government policies, NESS Impact Module findings evidenced the need to target specialist expertise at point of needs (examples being the enhanced role of family nurse/health visitors and day-care staff for identifying and responding to needs for two-year-olds deemed to be at risk of health, welfare or educational related targets.)" (G). The Minister of State for Children from 2005 to 2009 also stressed the continuing impact of the NESS evaluation: "During the period 2008-2013, cumulative findings from the National Evaluation of Sure Start impacted on policy and practice in early years services for young children defined as vulnerable/at risk and their families." (J).

During the period 2008-2013 cumulative NESS findings of the Impact Module informed:

(1) Systemic changes in integrated services for vulnerable families

The concept of multi-agency teamwork remained central to Labour and Coalition policies. NESS evidence clarified the need to target specialist expertise at point of need (e.g. the enhanced role of family nurses/health visitors) whilst multi-agency teams delivered universal, non-stigmatised services. Evidence of the importance of targeting 2-year-olds at risk resulted in extending free childcare to them (A).

(2) Rethinking resources and funding of Children's Centres

The average funding allocated to SSLPs/CCs was £500,000 revenue per year. Early disappointing NESS findings on Impact in 2005 mediated by PV evidence of 'what worked' formed the basis of guidance and increased accountability for all Children's Centres. Continuing this impact from 2012, the Coalition government instigated payment by results (e.g., for take up of free nursery places by 2 and 3-year-olds) (B).

(3) Revision of training and qualifications of early childhood staff

Evidence of the difficulty of operationalising integrated services resulted in upgrading the workforce. As a result of this evidence Early Years Professional Status (EYP), and masters level Leadership and Management qualifications (NPQICL) for managers were introduced. References [1] and [2] are referenced in Families in the Foundation Years Evidence Pack: [2] on Page 14,

Anning, [1] on Page 29. This Evidence Pack is a key guidance document for EY services (E).

(4) Enhancing the role of family support and parenting projects

By 2008 NESS Impact findings (C) indicated positive effects of the intervention. Of 14 outcomes 7 showed significant differences between SSLP and non-Sure Start (MCS sample) areas. These included: improved child social behaviours, improved child independence and self-regulation, less harsh discipline and home chaos, improved home learning environments, parents making more use of services, higher rates of immunisations and fewer child accidents. In 2012, NESS reported significant effects on 4 of 15 parental outcomes in survey of 7-year-olds (D). Children's Centres are perceived to work and maintain a central role in supporting vulnerable families with young children. The Director of the Sure Start Programme from 1999 to 2006 stated in a letter to support this case study, written in 2012: "Sure Start has had a profound influence on key principles in the delivery of children's services across England: the importance of working with adults as well as children, the importance of education, social care and health working together for family welfare, and the difficulty of offering universal services that are successful in reaching and improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged families have all been part of the original Sure Start thinking. The National Evaluation of Sure Start provided crucial evidence on how such services should be delivered, what we got wrong in the original design, and the changes to the original design that resulted in the delivery of over three thousand children's centres across England. The evaluation results will continue to play a key role in the arguments going forward on childcare and early education policy." [H] Evidence of continued impact, particularly of the PV research which Anning led, continued after 2010. The Coalition Government shifted policy imperatives for Children's Centres (funded directly by the government) to focus on the neediest families and to involve charities and private companies with a track record of helping parents [B].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] DFE (September 2013) Early Education and Childcare- Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, DFE – 00/24-2013. <http://education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00209650/code-of-practice-for-las>

[B] National Audit Office (2012) Delivering the free entitlement to education. NAO Communications. DPREf:009800-001. <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/hc1012/hc17/1789/1789.pdf>

[C] Melhuish, E and the National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team (2008) *The Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on Three Year Olds and their Families*, Sure Start Research Report 027, Nottingham:DfES <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/impact/documents/42.pdf>

[D] NESS Research Team (2012). *The impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on seven year olds and their families*. Research Report DFE-RR220, ISBN 978-1-78105-116-0. London: DfE. <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR220.pdf>

[E] Families in the Foundation Years Evidence Pack: References and research links for Families in the Foundation Years, July 2011, Dfe and DH joint publication. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/177034/DFE-00214-2011.pdf

[F] Executive Director, National Evaluation of Sure Start

[G] Chief Research Officer, Department for Education

[H] Senior Research Fellow, Department of Education, University of Oxford

[I] Former Head of Department, Department of Applied Social Studies and Social Research, University of Oxford

[J] Minister of State, Department for Education and Skills/Children, Schools and Families 2005-09