

Beacon Council Scheme Round Five

Early Years Theme

Evidence on Current Practice, Best Practice and User Satisfaction

Background

This paper presents key findings on current practice, best practice and user satisfaction in the selected theme. This information has been taken from the Round Five theme reports completed by the central government policy leads in each theme in late Spring 2003. The full theme reports can be found at:

www.local.odpm.gov.uk/research/beacon/beacon.htm

The user satisfaction data and analysis was completed by MORI in August 2003 and the full report on all themes is available at

www.local.odpm.gov.uk/research/beacon5.pdf

The evidence base on theme research and user satisfaction is designed to assist the Independent Advisory Panel in creating the selection criteria for the scheme. It is also designed to assist local authorities in applying for the scheme and in improving services generally. The research evidence base on the Beacon Council Scheme is crucial in identifying current and best practice in service provision whilst taking into account the satisfaction of those that receive the services. This evidence base also enables local authorities to identify areas for improvement as well as potential areas for innovation in attempting to achieve continuous improvement in service provision.

The research evidence base can also demonstrate whether the scheme is achieving its long-term objective of improving services. Warwick University Business School has commenced work on a three to five year ODPM / IDeA funded project entitled *An Impact Evaluation of the Beacon Council Scheme* and this will yield further evidence shortly and greatly contribute to the future evidence base on service improvement.

Section A - Current practice in Early Years

Local authorities have a significant role to play in delivering on this agenda and have already been key contributors to the overall increase in childcare and early education provision since 1997. Many of them have also supported a wide range of service provision aimed at supporting young families, especially in disadvantaged areas either through government programmes or on local initiative. Up until now government has placed emphasis on delivery through partnership working (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships) but from 2004 there will be an increased focus on the leadership role of local authorities who will need to coordinate local planning and be carrying accountability for delivery. The Sure Start Unit aims (as outlined above) will effectively be delegated to local authorities along with specific targets. In brief local authorities will need to:

- transform education, health and family support services for pre-school children and their families;
- increase the availability of high quality childcare for all age groups whose parents need it in order to work, especially in the most disadvantaged areas;
- help meet the needs of the most disadvantaged children, reducing inequalities and helping all children to meet their potential;
- provide good, high quality early education for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents want it; and
- help parents into employment, particularly lone parents.

Local authorities have widely differing experience in this area of work. Some have long prioritised investment in this area as a way of contributing to local economic development, improvements in child outcomes and as a commitment to equal opportunities. Others have only started to work in this area relatively recently and have been mainly focussed on the delivery of new government policies, utilising ring fenced funding. In general large county areas tend to be working from a lower service base than urban authorities.

Local authorities are currently working to Early Years Development and Childcare Planning Guidance 2002/4. They have a number of targets covering nursery education, childcare, disadvantaged areas, workforce recruitment and training listed at Annexe B.

Integrated Services for Young Children

This is an area in which excellent local authorities should be leading the way. Services for young children have often developed in a piecemeal fashion to create a complex web that parents often have to negotiate themselves. Thus early education may be offered by schools or playgroups for short sessions, with day-care (childcare) for working parents offered separately. Different professional groups – health visitors, social workers, voluntary bodies, teachers, therapists, may also offer a range of services but not in a coordinated way so that families may not be able to access the range of help that they need. This is a major issue for all children’s services and is being explored in the development of the Green Paper on Children at Risk. For early years the government is now supporting a programme of children’s centres in disadvantaged areas learning from previous experience in Sure Start local programmes and other integrated provision including Early Excellence Centres. Local authorities need to pursue this agenda actively, joining up services so that children and families can access packages of services without needing to negotiate complex arrangements themselves. This will require energy, commitment and vision at a strategic level as well as support for local providers and professionals to achieve integration. At a local level the Start Up Guidance for Children’s Centres sets out these features that should be in place. These would be good indicators for local authorities too:

- Children and families will be able to receive an integrated service from the centre across early education, childcare, support services and health advice. Families should have clear and ready access to these services, not just signposting and information to other

agencies.

- Early education and childcare are integrated so that there is continuity of staffing and support for the children's development and experience.
- Where services are to be provided from more than one location they reflect an integrated approach to planning of activities and a shared management ethos.
- Management arrangements are sufficiently robust to support and lead integration.
- Where full integration has not yet been achieved there is a plan in place that will move services towards this over a 2-year period.
- Every worker, within health, education, social services or the voluntary sector who has contact with a family living within the catchment area of the children's centre should consider themselves to be part of the children's centre hub of local provision.

Evidence

There is strong research evidence that good quality intervention with young children will have long term benefits, such as:

- Improving educational attainment long term.
- Reduction in crime rates, improved health outcomes and attitudes.
- Reduction in need for special educational services.
- Integrated early years services particularly impact on educational attainment at the start of primary school.
- Out of school care has positive effects particularly for disadvantaged children.
- Extended schools can improve positive attitudes to learning, improved behaviour, better school attendance and reduced truancy.
- Holiday schemes can reduce crime.

Much of this evidence is derived from the US however the EPPE study - Effective Provision of Pre-School Education – provides highly relevant supporting evidence. The key findings of this are:

- Good quality pre-school experiences support better social development.
- Good quality can be found across all types of early years settings.
- Disadvantaged children in particular can benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences.
- Learning at home with parents makes a positive difference to children's behavioural development.

Excellence

The Sure Start Unit is currently developing a performance management framework in partnership with local authorities. The grid below sets out the components that are likely to lead to excellent delivery. It includes a commitment (including financial commitment) to Sure Start principles, effective management, strong leadership and a willingness to challenge existing practices and encourage innovation.

Section B - User Satisfaction in Early Years

There is a wealth of research on the availability and high standards of Early Years provision and childcare, the main data sources being the baseline surveys conducted by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf the DfES¹. The latest survey – the fifth in the series beginning in 1997 - on the use of nursery education and childcare by children aged three to four in England, is based on 4,474 interviews with parents (and guardians), and was conducted in spring 2001.

The following table provides a regional breakdown of the participation rates in nursery education and childcare. While participation in nursery education is broadly consistent across all regions, participation rates in childcare differ by region, with participation lowest in London and the West Midlands.

Participation rates in nursery education and childcare last week and last year, by region

Last week base: All except younger and older five year olds (3,297)

Last year base: All parents aged three to four (4,474)

	Nursery education		Childcare	
	Last week	Last year	Last week	Last year
	%	%	%	%
England	96	97	21	26
East Midlands	97	97	19	25
East Anglia	96	98	23	24
London	94	96	14	17
North East	95	96	27	34
North West	97	98	20	25
South East	96	97	23	27
South West	97	99	23	27
West Midlands	93	95	14	20
Yorkshire & Humberside	98	98	24	31

Source: DfES, Fifth Survey of Parents and their Use of Early Years Services (2001).

Parents' opinions are split on the number of nursery education and childcare places available in England. Approximately half of parents interviewed say the number of places for both education and childcare is about right, and the same proportion again say there are not enough. When looking at the data broken down by region, however, we find that parents in London are most likely to say there are too few places. This data is set out in the table below.

¹ "The Fifth Survey of Parents of Three and Four Year Old Children and their use of Early Years Services" (Summer 2000 to Spring 2001).

Parents' opinion of the number of nursery education and childcare places available, by region

Nursery education base: All answering (4,245)

Childcare base: All answering (3,809)

	Nursery education			Childcare		
	Too many	About right	Not enough	Too many	About right	Not enough
	%	%	%	%	%	%
England	1	49	50	1	49	50
East Midlands	1	51	48	3	54	43
East Anglia	1	48	51	1	41	58
London	1	40	59	2	38	61
North East	0	52	48	1	48	51
North West	2	47	52	1	49	51
South East	1	49	50	1	50	49
South West	1	48	47	2	55	43
West Midlands	2	44	54	1	45	54
Yorkshire & Humberside	1	56	44	1	53	46

Source: DfES, Fifth Survey of Parents and their Use of Early Years Services (2001).

The following tables chart parents' views of the quality of nursery education and childcare in England. Overall, nursery education is more positively regarded than childcare, with a greater proportion of parents describing nursery education as either 'excellent' or 'very good'.

Parents' opinion of the quality of nursery education, by region

	Excellent	Very good	Fairly good	Not very good	Not at all good
<i>Base: All answering (4,115)</i>	%	%	%	%	%
England	11	47	34	7	1
East Midlands	13	48	31	7	1
East Anglia	12	43	35	9	1
London	9	40	39	10	3
North East	15	48	32	4	1
North West	12	49	32	6	1
South East	9	47	37	7	1
South West	12	48	32	7	1
West Midlands	12	47	36	6	1
Yorkshire & Humberside	13	48	30	7	1

Source: DfES, Fifth Survey of Parents and their Use of Early Years Services (2001).

Parents' opinion of the quality of childcare places available, by region

	Excellent	Very good	Fairly good	Not very good	Not at all good
<i>Base: All answering (3,464)</i>	%	%	%	%	%
England	5	37	46	11	2
East Midlands	4	40	42	11	3
East Anglia	6	27	47	17	3
London	5	27	51	14	3
North East	6	44	41	9	0
North West	6	39	42	11	1
South East	5	35	49	9	1
South West	5	40	45	9	1
West Midlands	5	35	48	12	1
Yorkshire & Humberside	7	42	39	9	3

Source: DfES, Fifth Survey of Parents and their Use of Early Years Services (2001).

The table below shows the level of satisfaction among parents with each of the different types of education for young children aged three to four.

Parental rating of quality of education, by type or sole provider

Base: All parents who used a main or sole nursery provider in the last week (3,162)

		Excellent	Very good	Fairly good	Not very good	Not at all good
	Base	%	%	%	%	%
Total	(3,162)	41	43	15	2	*
Nursery school	(356)	54	31	13	1	1
Nursery class	(805)	37	45	16	1	0
Reception class	(966)	42	45	12	1	*
Special school/nursery	(18)*	72	22	6	0	0
Day nursery	(314)	33	46	18	3	0
Play-group/pre-school	(664)	37	42	18	3	*
Combined/family	(20)*	30	50	15	5	0
Other provider	(19)*	63	21	16	0	0

* note, small bases sizes

Source: DfES, Fifth Survey of Parents and their Use of Early Years Services (2001).

In another national survey by the National Centre for Social Research – *Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare* – for the DfES in 2001, parents who use childcare were asked how easy or difficult it was to get to the provider. The results are set out below:

Q How easy or difficult was it to get.....

	Base	Very easy	Fairly easy	Fairly difficult	Very difficult	Provider goes to parents' home
		%	%	%	%	%

Base: All providers excluding those that lived with respondent

...to the provider from home?

Total	(8,889)	53	24	6	4	12
Childminder	(424)	67	23	5	2	3
Crèche/nursery	(883)	57	32	8	2	1
Nursery/reception class	(597)	72	22	3	1	1

Base: All providers to which the respondent has gone directly to from work

...to the provider from work?

Total	(3,151)	51	36	10	3	*
Childminder	(299)	52	35	10	3	0
Crèche/nursery	(348)	48	35	14	4	0
Nursery/reception class	(162)	52	30	14	4	1

Source: DfES, Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare (2001).

A baseline survey conducted by MORI on behalf of the Sure Start Unit in 2000 also provides some context for this theme from the point of view of parents. The research comprised 601 interviews with parents with children aged four; 499 of the interviews took place in 10 'trailblazer' Sure Start areas. An additional 102 interviews with parents were conducted in two control areas – similar in nature to the Sure Start areas but where no Sure Start programme was operating.

The tables below detail the key findings looking at satisfaction with services for children aged under four and their parents.

Overall level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with all facilities and services for children under four and their families in area.

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very satisfied	10	7
Fairly satisfied	30	23
Neither/nor	14	22
Fairly dissatisfied	23	21
Very dissatisfied	17	23
Don't know/no opinion	5	6
Satisfied	40	30
Dissatisfied	40	44
Net satisfied	0	-14

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2000).

Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with existing health services

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very satisfied	28	16
Fairly satisfied	45	65
Neither/nor	8	10
Fairly dissatisfied	9	4
Very dissatisfied	6	4
Don't know/no opinion	3	2
Satisfied	73	81
Dissatisfied	15	8
Net satisfied	+58	+73

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2000).

Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with existing childcare services

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very satisfied	8	11
Fairly satisfied	32	27
Neither/nor	15	30
Fairly dissatisfied	13	15
Very dissatisfied	11	8
Don't know/no opinion	21	9
Satisfied	40	38
Dissatisfied	24	23
Net satisfied	+16	+15

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2000).

Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with existing play and learning services

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very satisfied	12	9
Fairly satisfied	28	21
Neither/nor	15	18
Fairly dissatisfied	16	12
Very dissatisfied	16	20
Don't know/no opinion	13	22
Satisfied	40	30
Dissatisfied	32	32
Net satisfied	+8	-2

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2000).

Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with existing services supporting you as a parent

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very satisfied	8	7
Fairly satisfied	33	20
Neither/nor	21	33
Fairly dissatisfied	12	16
Very dissatisfied	12	21
Don't know/no opinion	13	4
Satisfied	41	27
Dissatisfied	24	37
Net satisfied	+17	-10

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2000).

The data in the table below are taken from the Best Value surveys and outlines satisfaction with nursery schools among users:

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way in which nursery schools are provided in your local area?

	1998	2000	2001
	%	%	%
<i>Base: All service users.</i>	<i>(223)</i>	<i>(248)</i>	<i>(240)</i>
Very satisfied	32	33	31
Fairly satisfied	50	43	48
Neither/nor	4	7	5
Fairly dissatisfied	6	6	8
Very dissatisfied	5	6	2
Don't know/not stated	3	5	5

Source: ODPM (Best Value series, 1998-2001).

Parents' views of their neighbourhood as a place to bring up children are set out below:

Neighbourhood as a place to bring up children under 4 years old

	Sure Start Area	Control Area
<i>Base: All parents (601).</i>	<i>(499)</i>	<i>(102)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Very good	16	10
Fairly good	42	43
Neither good nor poor	12	12
Fairly poor	14	11
Very poor	15	20
No opinion/don't know	1	5
Good	58	53
Poor	29	31
Net good	+29	+22

Source: Sure Start Unit/MORI (2002).

A survey commissioned by the Daycare Trust analyses parents' views on childcare provision among parents. Results are shown below:

Views of childcare provision over the last three years

<i>Base: 587 parents/guardians of children aged 0-14 years.</i>	<i>%</i>
Improved	49
Not improved	23
Don't know	28

Source: Daycare Trust/MORI (2001).

Further reading:

'*All Our Futures (Thinking Big: Childcare for All Briefing Paper One)*' published by the Daycare Trust. 'All Our Futures' assesses progress made since the launch of the National Childcare Strategy in May 1998 using MORI survey findings. Please visit <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk>.

Many surveys on children and young people have been conducted at the local level. MORI, for example, have carried out Sure Start quantitative surveys in Southwark, Knowle West, Kings Weston and North Kensington. Individual studies have also been carried out for Years Development and Childcare Provision (EYDCP), providing data for childcare audits and to inform early year service planning among key stakeholder groups.

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January 2004