
A TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS (PARTNERSHIP WORKING) OF SURE START MANAGERS

Summary

Research on the training needs of Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) and Children's Centre managers, with a particular emphasis on needs related to partnership working was undertaken by NIACE in 2005. This research was commissioned and funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The aim of the project was to identify the essential elements that should be included in a training programme for managers of SSLPs and Children's Centres to support and promote effective multi-agency and partnership working to deliver high quality integrated services.

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Background

Research on the training needs of Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) and Children's Centre managers, with a particular emphasis on needs related to partnership working, was undertaken in 2005. This research was commissioned and funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The aim of the project was to identify the essential elements that should be included in a training programme for managers of SSLPs and Children's Centres to support and promote effective multi-agency and partnership working to deliver high quality integrated services.

The Developing A Curriculum Methodology (DACUM), a job/occupational analysis approach which determines the tasks performed in a job, was used to help design a model job description and structure workshops for experienced practitioners.

Methods

A wide range of research and guidance literature was reviewed to explore the context and design a model job description. Sources included publications from the Sure Start Unit and the National Evaluation of Sure Start. Literature on working with volunteers, parents, reaching the 'hard to reach', families, family learning, building sustainable communities and workforce development was also examined.

A model job description which outlined the role or duty, knowledge, skills, aptitudes or traits required by a manager in relation to the delivery of a partnership mission, aims, and values and the implicit operational demands was designed. Under the guidance of a facilitator, two focus groups made up of experienced managers involved in Sure Start, either SSLPs or Children's Centres, from four different regional settings deliberated over the descriptions.

Findings

Managers agreed that a large number of roles, knowledge, skills and aptitudes were critical to the successful delivery of a partnership. These are explored in greater detail in the final report.

Role or duty: there was a high degree of concurrence that the purpose or 'mission' of a Sure Start manager is to provide leadership and to promote and provide evidence of high quality integrated services. Areas of competence that successful workers in the occupation must demonstrate or perform on an on going basis deemed critical include **developing staff and members of the partnership; involving parents; involving the voluntary and community sector; promoting integration across service locations; working towards an integrated service across early education, childcare, support services and health advice; and creating a quality framework.**

In relation to **knowledge**, the majority of participants felt that it was *very critical* to know the **roles of other professional colleagues; the inspection framework for Children's Services; local, regional and international initiatives; laws, policies, protocols and procedures e.g. child protection, first aid, health and safety, crime prevention, managing risk, employment law; and ethical standards.**

A wide range of **skills** were considered *very critical* for managers and participants, for example, **multi disciplinary working; project management; relationship building - with a range of agencies, services and individuals; objective setting; visioning; and giving and receiving feedback from children, parents and carers.**

There was a high level of agreement on the **aptitudes** or **traits** required of a Sure Start manager. Aptitudes such as **flexibility; approachability; tolerance; a positive attitude to change; the ability to motivate, build self-confidence and self-esteem; and being inclusive** were all considered critical. Participants suggested managers have **the ability to drive change; a sense of humour; resilience; be organised and a good communicator.**

Conclusions

The study concluded that managers need to be able to:

- **Effectively communicate and engage** - work with, listen to and engage children, parents and families
- **Work with other professionals** and across professional boundaries
- **Share information** and develop awareness of the law and guidance relating to sharing information.

All managers will have an ongoing need to acquire and refine the range of skills and competences needed for effective multi-agency leadership and partnership development. The priorities as identified by the focus groups include:

- Relationship building
- Communication
- Multi disciplinary working
- Brokerage
- Influencing
- Consensus building
- Finance and budgeting.

It was felt that trainers should consider the following factors in the development of training courses:

- Relevance to the audience
- Recognition or accreditation of prior learning amongst attendees
- Use of e-learning approaches
- Appreciating the needs of the workforce in this sector such as childcare issues
- Coaching and mentoring
- Drawing on the latest information
- Interagency training.

The study also recommended a number of further training needs impacting upon the knowledge, understanding and skills required by managers, which include:

- Managing change in the context of multi-agency working
- Information and support on lifelong learning and related educational agendas
- Development of research and evaluation skills
- Strategies to engage and retain families
- Greater awareness of community development and regeneration agendas in order to engage with potential partners.