

An Evaluation of the DELTA Community Parenting Project

Evaluation Report, November 2004
Dr Norman Gillespie and Dr Edel McClean

DEVELOPING EVERYONE'S LEARNING & THINKING ABILITIES





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Foreword

The DELTA (Developing Everyone's Learning & Thinking Abilities) Community Parenting Programme (DELTA Project).

The Southern Boards' DELTA Project started as a pilot project in the academic year 1992-1993. DELTA was set up as a multi-agency partnership initiative. The aim of the project was to develop parenting skills, raise confidence and awareness among parents, to share knowledge and skills, and give parents support by means of individual and group exercises using researched based information and advice.

Following the success of the pilot, there was a decision by Southern Education & Library Board (SELB) and the Southern Health & Social Services Board (SHSSB) to jointly employ a DELTA Development Officer in 1995. Since then the project has expanded and developed through European Union (EU) Peace & Reconciliation Childhood Fund Priority 2 Measure 5, "Investing in Childcare", Department of Education funding through SELB, grants from SHSSB and Sure Start funding in specific areas.

Over 150 Early Years' Programmes, Upper Primary and Post Primary Programmes are delivered in the Southern area annually. These include tailor-made programmes for parents of children with special educational needs, and programmes for parents from ethnic minority groups. Three Project Staff are employed to cover Sure Start Project Areas namely Clogher Valley, Blossom in Portadown and Orana in Newry and these staff members also work with individual parents and families. In addition the Delta Project offers Open College accredited courses and a Baby Sitting Course to Young People.

The Project has continuously self-evaluated since its inception. There have been thousands of parental and promoters' evaluations. Anecdotal evidence and feedback from the participants during DELTA programmes has been very positive. However it was felt that an independent organisational evaluation should be commissioned. DELTA took the opportunity to ask Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) to undertake the evaluation. On behalf of the DELTA Project we would like to thank all the parents, school staff, the evaluators, the evaluation reference group and other participants who took part in this evaluation.

Dr Norman Gillespie and Dr Edel McClean are CENI evaluators who worked on the DELTA evaluation. CENI is an independent not for profit organisation which was established in 1995 to provide evaluation services. It is a unique organisation committed to promoting a better understanding and use of evaluation. CENI aims to facilitate organisations to use evaluation to assess their achievements and to assist them in planning and managing their activities.

Finally we would like to take this opportunity to commend the DELTA Project for "making a significant contribution to promoting social cohesion through developing good practice in partnership working and enabling parents to become more positive in their attitudes to education, social services, health and wellbeing and civic responsibilities. In addition it has contributed to building a sense of community and development of social capital through improving parents' relationships with other parents and linkages between parents, schools and the wider community". (CENI Evaluation '04)

Tony Rodgers
SHSSB

Walter Burke
SELB



Executive Summary

Introduction

The DELTA programme in the Southern area of Northern Ireland was established in 1993 with the aim to promote the holistic development of young children, raise parents' self-esteem, and thus enhance the parent/carer child relationship. Its mission is *'to promote partnership with parents within the Southern Board area on a multi-disciplinary basis through group and individual programmes to parents by imparting parenting information and advice'*. Since its inception the project has undergone considerable development and growth, and this has been aided through funding from the EU Peace & Reconciliation Childhood Fund, DENI funding through the SELB and grants from the SHSSB. Over 100 Early Years' Programmes, approximately 16 Upper Primary and 24 Post Primary Programmes are delivered in the SELB area annually. Since its inception over 11000 parents and carers have taken part in DELTA programmes. Within this context this evaluation is primarily concerned with assessing the project's current operational effectiveness and its effectiveness in meeting its objectives, as well as considering its outcomes and impact on participating parents (and their children). It also assesses DELTA's efficiency in the use of resources and its financial management, including the extent to which it provides value for money.

Summary of Impact and Outcomes

The following is a summary of the main impact and outcomes that the DELTA project has had for participating parents, their children, and the wider community. All percentages are based on the responses of 154 out of 500 parents who returned a postal questionnaire to Ceni, giving a response rate of 31%.

99% of parents felt that the programmes were well planned and organised.

98% of parents felt that the programmes were well presented and delivered.

99% of parents were satisfied with the information they were given.

75% of parents felt that participation on the programmes made them feel more confident as parents.

65% of parents felt that the programme had enhanced their child's learning through play.



88% of parents felt that the programme had increased their knowledge of educational issues.

Just over half the participants felt that the programme had increased their own self confidence.

83% of the parents felt that the programme had increased their awareness of child health issues.

58% of parents felt that the programme had increased their child's awareness of health issues.

At least 38% of parents felt that the programme had improved their quality of life (46% were unsure).

74% of parents felt that participation on the programme had improved their relationships with other parents.

57% of parents felt that DELTA had helped to improve relationships with their child's teacher.

65% of parents felt that the programme had helped their child's communication skills.

53% of parents felt that the programme had helped to improve their child's relationships with other children.

At least 39% of the parents felt that participation on the programme had improved their child's performance at school.

DELTA has made a considerable contribution to promoting the social inclusion of previously marginalised and socially excluded groups and sections of the population.

DELTA has made a significant contribution to promoting social cohesion through developing good practice in partnership working and enabling parents to become more positive in their attitudes to education, social services, health and wellbeing, and civic responsibilities. In addition it has contributed to building a sense of community and the development of social capital through improving parents relationships with other parents and developing linkages between parents and schools and the wider community.

Strategic Policy Context

The evaluation shows that DELTA's aims and objectives are congruent with a number of strategic policy documents in relation to the field of early years, partnership, and voluntary sector work, particularly given its emphasis on promoting a holistic, 'educare' approach to addressing the needs of children at the earliest possible age, with a focus on working in partnership across departments



and sectors. It also provides an additional means (as distinct from formal educational and social and health service interventions) to target those most in need operating, as it does, throughout the whole southern area, using local centres where possible, and providing a specific 'tailored' service for ethnic minority and special needs groups.

Operational Effectiveness

DELTA is a well established project that has undergone considerable development over recent years. It is a registered charity and legally constituted company limited by guarantee with a board of directors (management committee) drawn from well qualified and experienced personnel in professions that are congruent with its aims and objectives. There are also local committees in each H&SS Trust area to ensure that the project is responsive to localised needs.

The project has demonstrated a number of areas of good practice in its partnership working, bringing different agencies and sectors together to work towards a shared vision and developing creative and innovative approaches to its services and activities. The structure of the project also ensures an equitable and optimal spread of its programmes throughout the catchment area, with specific provision being made to reach 'harder to reach' families – either due to their geographical isolation, personal circumstances, attitudes to educational programmes, or their membership of ethnic or linguistic minority groups. The collaborative working with a wide range and number of interest groups and agencies, as well as the development of strong relationships with certain schools, have all contributed to the project's effectiveness in being proactive to particular needs, as well as maintaining, and developing, its more mainstream programmes. Through its operational effectiveness DELTA therefore makes a significant contribution to promoting a holistic, preventative approach to parenting programmes that generates substantial added value over and above the sum of the project's individual parts.

The evaluation has found that there are a number of ongoing staffing issues, mainly concerned with a lack of consistency in contracts, due mainly, to the plethora of funding sources and while the project was found to have satisfactory policies and procedures in relation to a range of important issues, some staff were found to be unfamiliar with some of these.

DELTA has effective systems for planning and reviewing its work and this informs a planning process that has led to the production of a strategy document and business plan in recent years.



However, it was found that it would be useful for the project to measure some of the longitudinal impact of its work, perhaps through tracing the development/experiences of a small sample of (voluntary) participants. DELTA has had considerable success in meeting its key strategic and business targets in recent years. However, the previous business plan has now become somewhat dated and the next two to three years will be a crucial period for DELTA, with a number of key decisions needing to be taken and implemented. Many of these pertain to the issues and recommendations identified in this report. It would therefore be beneficial for the project to produce an up-to-date business plan, which will reflect its current position and inform and guide its future operational development. Furthermore, as this is the first external evaluation completed of the project, DELTA would benefit from ensuring that a comprehensive evaluation is carried out at least every five years.

Effectiveness in Meeting Objectives

DELTA has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in meeting its strategic objectives. It has ensured widespread access to its programmes with a specific focus on children and families in need, taking into account cultural and ethnic factors. The project also delivers programmes in both urban and rural communities, including those where little or no Early Years services exist.

DELTA also networks and collaborates with other parenting programmes and family support services and has had considerable success in raising the awareness amongst all the relevant agencies and the general public of the importance of developing parenting skills through its programmes. It also ensures that its programmes are targeted equitably throughout the Southern area and that they are planned and delivered using a holistic educare approach – an approach to which those engaged in the field of Early Years work attach considerable value. DELTA also keeps well up-to-date and informed by research and evaluation findings in order to regularly review its practice and improve service quality.

DELTA has made considerable progress in addressing key priorities and areas of unmet need. It has addressed the deficits in parenting programme provision in the Upper Primary and Post Primary sectors and has developed some programmes with the youth sector. It has also made significant progress in developing networking opportunities with other agencies and organisations, enabling this to be very much an integrated part of its work and grounding the project much more securely in the community. Lack of short stay crèche provision, funding for hiring out venues for parenting programmes based in local community centres, and lack of transport to facilitate travel to



programmes remain difficult issues but could perhaps be addressed through seeking advice and/or support from the Early Years Forum, the SELB, or local H&SS Trusts.

Impact on Parents

Parents have on the whole found DELTA programmes a very positive experience. As well as the information contained in them they also found that the programmes helped to increase their self esteem as well as parental confidence. There were also a number of quality of life outcomes identified by participants and it was also sometimes felt that the programmes contributed to community building. It was also felt that the programmes were making a significant contribution to improving relationships between parents and the schools involved.

Impact on Children

Parents felt that the programme was helping to enhance their children's communication, improving their relationships with their children, and improving their children's performance at school. They also felt that they spent more quality time with their children as a result of the learning generated through DELTA as well as enhancing their children's ability to learn through play more independently. For participants in the post primary programmes it was felt that they had helped them to relate better to their teenage children, and had made them more comfortable in talking to their children about issues such as drugs, alcohol, peer pressure and sex. Some parents also expressed the view that participating in the course gave them greater influence with their children and helped to make them more aware of what happens in school, contributing to stronger links between teachers and parents and, through this, children and school.

Accessibility and Publicity

Participating parents in general felt that DELTA programmes were very accessible and that course content, venues and times were suitable. However, there was strong support for the creation of a locally based directory which could list all courses happening in a particular region over a four to six month period, including the titles of individual sessions. It was felt that this would give greater flexibility for individuals or couples with tight schedules and little free time, and would thus ensure greater participation in programmes.



Impact on Schools

Almost all schools stated that they had a positive experience of running DELTA courses. Project staff were commended as being both easy to work with, helpful and good communicators. Teachers were impressed both with how DELTA helped schools to organise programmes, and by the quality of the training delivered. The willingness of project staff to work alongside schools, to listen to their needs and concerns and to adapt course content to suit the needs of individual schools and parents had made the course more beneficial. Teachers felt that the parents of young children in particular were seen to be more confident in interacting with their children, and in becoming involved as partners in the education process and that parents who had negative attitudes to school and education, based on their own experiences, were made more comfortable with the school environment. One of the most important benefits for schools of running the DELTA programme has been the building of relationships between the school and parents, particularly for programmes running at the beginning of the academic year, and in a child's first year in the school.

Meeting Programme Objectives

It was found that DELTA had achieved its programme objectives in relation to:

- providing a positive experience for parents with children;
- enhancing the parents role as the prime educators of their children;
- developing parenting skills and building parents and children's self-esteem;
- enhancing the parent/promoter partnership;
- promoting the value of literature in the home;
- providing a framework by which parents will be aware of their children's needs;
- improving children's holistic development taking into account their ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, educational, health and physical needs;
- promoting quality time provision between parents and children as a means of promoting bonding and empowering children;
- helping parents develop self awareness and self confidence in order to improve their capacity to support and nurture their children.

Value for Money

DELTA provides value for money in relation to a wide range of indicators. It was found that resources are broadly used for their stated purpose as outlined in the grant conditions, finances are



well managed, and the skilled time of workers is focused on key activities. The ratio of management and overhead costs to service delivery costs was low and overhead costs were kept to a minimum. It was also found that costs, for such a professional service, were competitive (free). The project was able to make efficient use of buildings, technology and other resources, partly through using existing infrastructure and the goodwill of the SELB.

A number of service vulnerability factors were identified including: unsatisfactory funding arrangements, continuation of goodwill, lack of replacement staff, staff contracts, inability of current capacity to meet any growth there may be in future demand, and working in difficult areas.

The project has been contributing to meeting key targets set out in SELB and SHSSB strategic and business plans, particularly those referring to the development of holistic approaches to service delivery in meeting the needs of families with young children.

All the key targets in relation to strategic and programme objectives have been met, with the only exceptions being some of the priority areas of unmet need as set out in the Business Plan; such as the lack of funding for parenting programmes based in local community centres and the lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes. In addition there were very high levels of satisfaction expressed by users in relation to key aspects of programmes and the project has been able to demonstrate a high proportion of successful outcomes in key areas of work.

Professional standards and supervised practice were maintained throughout the project, which were informed within both the host agency and participating partners by a comprehensive list of appropriate policies and procedures.

There has been substantial interest in and attention paid to DELTA by those in related fields of work who have felt that its approach has much to offer in relation to informing current developments in early years' practice, particularly through its educare approach and its role as an agent for providing family support in a general, holistic way. In addition it was also seen as a useful means of accessing 'harder to reach' parents.

It is difficult to conceive of any alternative means by which outcomes could have been achieved more cost effectively and, indeed, considerable added value has been generated through the project's approach and the synergy produced as a result of good partnership practice. In short, in terms of its efficiency, effectiveness and cost effectiveness, as well as its contribution to promoting equity, social inclusion and the welfare of families with young children, the project provides considerable value for money.



Recommendations

While this evaluation has shown DELTA to be a very successful project, demonstrating effectiveness, efficiency and a wide range of positive impacts and considerable relevance to the strategic policy context and social environment within which it operates, the report contains a number of recommendations that, if implemented, would make significant further improvements to performance. The following is a complete list of all the recommendations made.

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- DELTA should encourage more representation from other community organisations on its management committee
- Contracts of employment should be reviewed in the near future, in conjunction with partner/funding agencies, with a view to establishing a more consistent and coherent funding environment.
- The project should consider the co-option of an appropriate person with a Human Resource background onto the management committee.
- DELTA should approach the Labour Relations Agency for support in relation to addressing human resource/staffing issues.
- The project should explore the possibility of linking all salaries to NJC pay scales.
- Staff should be given further opportunities to familiarise themselves with all relevant policies and procedures.
- DELTA should investigate ways of providing accreditation for DELTA Promotional training.
- DELTA should consider measuring some of the longitudinal impact of its work, perhaps through tracking the development/experiences of a small sample of (voluntary) participants.
- DELTA should commission a business plan to inform its future development, set targets, and suggest a strategy for securing appropriate funding.



- DELTA should ensure a comprehensive external evaluation is carried out at least every five years.

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- DELTA should encourage particular teachers to more actively encourage parents, especially those 'harder to reach' parents to avail of the programmes.
- DELTA should seek advice and/or support from the Early Years Forum, SELB, or local H&SS Trusts in relation to addressing the issues of lack of short stay crèche provision, funding for parenting programmes based in local community centres, and lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes.
- DELTA should also seek ways of securing funding to enable staff to undergo training leading to a recognised parenting skills qualification.
- DELTA should consider raising its profile throughout the area, perhaps through the production of an updated promotional/informative leaflet.

IMPACT

- DELTA should ensure parents know where to go for advice if the course has raised concerns about which they need further information (i.e. complaints or grievances procedures).
- DELTA should provide contact details for local colleges and adult education providers at the end of courses, to encourage people to get involved in other courses.
- DELTA should create an area based directory of courses, listing all courses and individual sessions happening in a 4-6 month period.
- DELTA should provide leaflets and suggestions to parents at the end of courses to encourage the continuation of the relationships formed through the course.
- DELTA should promote its services further among class teachers.



- DELTA should raise its profile through articles in local newspapers, and local radio stations and also raise the profile of the DELTA logo.
- DELTA should seek funding to develop updated comprehensive information leaflets and which can be sent out to parents by schools.
- DELTA should ensure that all schools in its area are aware that they can provide a DELTA staff presence at school open and induction days.

VALUE FOR MONEY

- The project needs to develop a comprehensive funding policy.
- Although DELTA has some sessional staff to provide cover, it needs to pursue a policy whereby sufficient replacement staff will be available whether through posts vacant, or existing staff being on leave of absence.
- Current capacity needs to be increased in order to meet future demand, particularly in regard to providing support staff including someone able to take responsibility for some of the functions of the Director (perhaps a Deputy Director).



Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report is CENI's response to a request from the DELTA Community Parenting Project to carry out an evaluation of the project in the SHSSB and SELB areas in Northern Ireland. DELTA was established in the area in 1993 and celebrated its tenth anniversary a year before this report was commissioned. Since its inception the project has undergone considerable development and growth and consequently it was felt that this was an appropriate time to undertake an external evaluation focusing on the issues currently facing DELTA within the context of its previous development and future direction. Within this context the evaluation is primarily concerned with assessing the project's current operational effectiveness and its effectiveness in meeting its objectives, as well as considering its outcomes and impact on participating parents (and their children). The evaluation also assesses DELTA's efficiency in the use of resources and its financial management, including the extent to which it provides value for money.

1.2 Context for the evaluation

DELTA's mission is to 'promote partnership with parents within the Southern Board Area on a multi-disciplinary basis through group and individual programmes to parents by imparting parenting information and advice'.

It also aims to 'promote the holistic development of young children, raise parents' self-esteem, and thus enhance the parent/carer child relationship'. It has a number of strategic objectives which are:

1. To ensure widespread access to DELTA Programmes with a specific focus on children and families in need, taking into account disability, cultural and ethnic needs.
2. To deliver DELTA in communities, both urban and rural, to ensure social inclusion where little or no Early Years services exist.
3. To network and collaborate with other Parenting Programmes and Family Support Services.
4. To raise awareness amongst all relevant agencies and the general public of the importance of developing parenting skills through programmes such as DELTA.



5. To agree targets and ensure an equitable spread across the Southern Area.
6. To ensure the programme is both planned and delivered using a holistic educare approach.
7. To use research and evaluation findings to inform and improve service quality.

Parents are provided with:

1. Booklets, advice and packs which are suitable to their children's stage of development.
2. Workshops on Play, Healthy Lifestyles and Positive Parenting. With parents primary and post-primary children, workshops are also provided in areas such as study skills, teenage relationships, drugs awareness, literacy and maths, and use/abuse of the internet.

In order to reach as wide a range of parents the groups are held in a number of different settings including:

Schools.

Health and Social Services' Buildings.

Voluntary Sector Buildings.

Church and Community Settings – including playgroups, pre-school nurseries, and parent/toddler groups.

The project also has a commitment to strategic planning and evaluation of its programmes and this evaluation provided an opportunity to extend this commitment through an overarching external evaluation of the project to date that would help to inform its future direction.

1.3 Terms of Reference for the Evaluation

At DELTA's current stage of development it was agreed between the project and CENI that the following evaluation objectives, or terms of reference, would be the most appropriate to be addressed by the evaluation:

Provide an introduction to the DELTA Community Parenting Project – including an outline of the development of the project since its inception.



To provide an overview of the project's relevance to the strategic policy context within which it is located.

To provide an assessment of the operational effectiveness of the project – in relation to issues concerned with aspects of management, staffing, policies and procedures, organisational structure, partnership working, user involvement, monitoring and planning process, appropriateness of venues/times, and course content.

To provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the project in meeting its objectives.

To provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the project's activities in terms of their outcomes and impact on parents (including quality of life outcomes and the added value obtained from its holistic approach).

To provide an assessment of the efficiency of the project in relation to its use of resources and financial management, including the extent to which it provides value for money.

To make recommendations to inform the future direction of the organisation in relation to all of the above.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology for collating the information and data required to inform this evaluation included the following:

1. Review of documentary material

This included a review of the following:

Statements of project aims and objectives;

Funding applications;

Strategic and operational plans and reviews;

Details of organisational structure;

Details of services and activities;

Internal monitoring data, including feedback sheets, minutes of meetings, staff reports;



Annual reports;

Financial information including statements of accounts, monthly/quarterly income and expenditure.

2. Consultation with key informants

The consultation with key informants took place through semi-structured individual interviews with the following:

DELTA staff responsible for managing the services and activities;

DELTA staff directly involved in delivering services;

14 DELTA management committee members (including the chair, former chair, co-chair, and treasurer);

DELTA management sub-committee members (including each of the chairs and seven others from Newry & Mourne, seven others from Armagh & Dungannon, and three others from Craigavon & Banbridge);

Representatives of partnership agencies;

Representatives of funding agencies;

Other key informants including community/voluntary sector personnel and 30 school principals/teachers.

3. Consultation with project users/beneficiaries

This included:

Postal survey of parents. The survey related to the usage of, and satisfaction with, the activities and services provided through DELTA, and 154 questionnaires were returned out of a total of 500, giving a response rate of 31%;

Focus group discussions with three local groups of early years parents (consisting of 8 parents from Craigavon & Banbridge which was held in Tullygally, 8 parents from Armagh & Dungannon which was held in Clogher, and 12 parents from Newry & Mourne which was held in Newry);

One focus group discussion with 12 post-primary parents (held in Newry).

The focus groups were used to collect additional data in relation to activities and services in order to assess outcomes/benefits



1.5 Sequence of the Report

The rest of this report will first provide a description of the DELTA Community Parenting Project. It will then provide an assessment of the strategic policy relevance of the project before considering each of the appropriate terms of reference. Separate chapters will focus on each of the evaluation objectives (terms of reference). The concluding chapter will bring together the evidence and issues identified through the DELTA evaluation process, as informed by the findings, and provide recommendations arising from the evaluation.



Chapter 2 Description of the DELTA Community Parenting Project

2.1 Introduction

The DELTA project in the Southern Boards' area started in 1992 as a pilot project and, following on from the success of this, the SELB/SHSSB employed a development officer in 1995 to facilitate the expansion of the project. Since then, over 11000 parents have taken part in DELTA programmes. This chapter provides a description of the organisation including its conception and development, aims and objectives, organisational structure and services and activities.

2.2 Conception and Development

The DELTA logo, the triangular shape of the Greek letter D symbolises the partnership between parent/child/promoter. The origins of DELTA lie in Renfrew in Scotland in the 1970's where home-visiting programmes were established by health visitors. It was first introduced into Northern Ireland in the Western Board area and was broadened for use by teachers of early years children. The Southern area adapted the programme modifying its use for delivery based on an educate – a synthesis of education and social care – approach. This fostered a collaborative partnership model between the SHSSB, SELB, and the voluntary sector. Under the guidance of the DELTA Steering Group (a sub-committee of the Southern Area Early Years Forum) a strategy for the DELTA project was formulated. This took into account the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, Regional Strategy (1997-2002), and the SHSSB Early Years Strategy. More recently this was updated, taking into account the Children's Service Plan (1999) and the Children First (1999)

The intention of DELTA in the Southern Area was to develop practice using the skills, opportunities and resources available within the area. This entailed the SELB, SHSSB, the three Health and Social Services Trusts and the voluntary sector working together to provide a preventative parent support programme to parents/carers within the catchment area. DELTA sub-committees were established within each of the Trust areas – Newry/Mourne, Armagh/Dungannon, and Craigavon/Banbridge.



The project has expanded and developed through EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation Childhood Fund, DENI funding through the SELB, and grants from the SHSSB. Over 100 Early Years' Programmes, approximately 16 Upper Primary and 24 Post Primary Programmes are delivered in the SELB area annually. The Programmes include tailor made programmes for parents of children with special educational needs, Naiscoil groups and parents from ethnic minority groups. Three project staff are employed to cover Newry & Mourne, Armagh & Dungannon, and Craigavon & Banbridge and three Sure Start project areas in Clogher Valley, Portadown (Blossom), and Newry (Orana). In addition the project offers Open College and Baby Sitting courses to young people.

2.3 Organisational Structure

DELTA is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. Its registered office is in Newry Teachers' Centre and it is formally managed by a management committee composed of representatives from the SELB, SHSSB, the three H&SST's, and the voluntary sector. It has a management team comprising of the chair, co-chair, secretary, treasurer, and Project Manager (official title is Parenting Development Officer), which takes responsibility for the day-to day running of the organisation and decisions regarding issues such as finance and staffing. There are three sub-committees, based in each H&SS Trust area for considering localised strategies and development. The Project Manager is line managed by SELB's Primary Phase Advisor, who is also the company secretary. The Project Manager is currently responsible for seven other members of staff. One is the Post Primary Officer and the Upper Primary Post is currently vacant. The others, all part-time posts, are Project Workers covering each H&SS Trust area. Three are DELTA project workers with each of the three Sure Start projects in the area. The Armagh/Dungannon Project Worker and Clogher Valley Sure Start DELTA Project Worker posts are filled by the same person. There is also a Secretary.

2.4 Programme Objectives

In addition to the strategic objectives outlined in paragraph 1.2 above, the delivery of DELTA services and activities are also guided by the following programme objectives:

To provide a positive experience for parents with children,

To enhance the parents' role as the prime educators of their children;



- To develop parenting skills and to build parents' and children's self esteem;
- To enhance the parent/promoter (including teacher) partnership/relationship;
- To promote the value of literature within the home;
- To provide a framework by which parents will be aware of their children's needs;
- To improve children's holistic development taking into account their ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, health, and physical needs;
- To promote quality time provision between parents and children as a means of promoting bonding and empowering children;
- To help parents develop self-awareness and self-confidence in order to improve their capacity to support and nurture their children.

2.5 Services and Activities

The Southern Area's DELTA project includes the following services:

- Early Years Programme;
- Upper Primary Programme;
- Post Primary Programme;
- Sure Start;
- Baby Programme;
- Toy Library;
- The Importance of Fathers in Parenting Programme;
- Baby Sitting Course;
- Open College Course.

While programmes can be developed to suit the specific needs of the groups involved, including the needs of parents of children with special needs, tend to focus on the following core specific issues:



Learning through play;

Early mathematics;

Language and sharing books;

Healthy lifestyles, dental and footcare;

Relationships between parents and children;

Safety in an interesting environment;

Culturally sensitive materials and special needs packs;

In addition there are a number of specific upper and post primary issues, such as study skills, teenage relationships, drugs awareness, literacy and maths support, and use/abuse of the internet.



Chapter 3 Strategic Policy Context

3.1 As indicated in paragraph 2.2 above the development of DELTA has been grounded in a number of policy and legislative directives. It has particular relevance to The Children (NI) Order, 1995, which placed a duty on Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts to develop a preventive strategy for 'promoting the well-being of families and "children in need"', and the Education Reform (NI) Order, 1995, which gave significant recognition to parents as partners in the education of their children. It recognised that in order to secure the most appropriate provision for each child a partnership approach between schools and parents is 'not only desirable but indeed acting in the best interests of the child'.

3.2 Both of these Orders were preceded by the 1994 Inter-Departmental Policy Statement on Early Years provision in Northern Ireland which highlighted the importance of quality, flexibility, accessibility, partnership and the need to ensure that resources are targeted on those in greatest need. It recognised that parents have the prime responsibility for the care and development of their children during these years and stressed that during this period they should receive help in discharging their parental responsibilities.

3.3 The 1999 policy statement 'Children First – The NI Childcare Strategy' outlined how support for parents and carers is central to raising the overall quality of children's services. In this document the government made clear its commitment to 'integrate early education and care within a wider supportive framework of services for children and families'.

3.4 The SHSSB Early Years Strategy stresses the need for the provision of preventive services for vulnerable children and their families including 'schemes designed to enhance parenting skills and run in co-operation with parents'. The strategy also outlines the necessity to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, as well as those from minority ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, are taken into account in the planning and provision of parenting programmes.

3.5 'Children's Services Plan' (SHSSB) - Sets out how the Board intends to co-operate with other agencies and organisations to ensure that vulnerable children and young people have their health and development needs met. This document also stressed that the needs of children should be addressed holistically and as early as possible.

3.6 Southern Area Childcare Partnership Childcare Plans: 2000-2003 and 2002-2005. The Southern Area Childcare Partnership (SCCP) was established in April 2000 with the task of



implementing 'Children First' in the Southern Area. Its Plans underlined the need for a holistic approach to family support in order to effectively address the needs of children. Sure Start is one of its 'key priorities' for 'taking forward' its work.

3.7 The Sure Start programme is intended to represent a new way of doing things both in the development of the policy and in its delivery. It is an attempt to put into practice 'joined-up' thinking as well as to provide an example of evidence-based policy and open, consultative government. At a policy level it represents a commitment to investing in the long-term future of children as well as a commitment to the belief that statutory and voluntary agencies working together with a common goal can achieve more than the sum of their individual parts. The latter is one of the basic premises upon which the rationale for partnership approaches to policy implementation is based. In Northern Ireland the programme is being implemented as part of the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy, Children First. The programme aims to improve the health and well-being of families and children under four, before and from birth, so that children flourish at home and when they go to school. Sure Start is targeted at parents and children in areas of social disadvantage to promote physical, intellectual and social development at the pre-school stage to ensure the children have the best start in life. It is intended to build on the existing evidence relating to what works well and involves a range of services including early education and play, childcare, health care and family support.

3.8 The European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation's (Peace II) Measure 2.5, Preventing Exclusion, is designed to prevent the future social and labour market exclusion of children and young people by (among other things), advancing the intellectual and social development of pre-school children, equipping parents with the skills and confidence to make a fuller and more positive contribution to their children's development, supporting the active participation of marginalised families in the design and delivery of early years programmes, promoting local community partnerships around early years services, and creating employment and training opportunities in early years services.

3.9 The SELB Strategy has maintained an emphasis on partnership and the view that childhood is a stage of life to be enjoyed in its own right and that good quality experiences in childhood have a direct correlation to future good quality parenting.

3.10 'Investing for Health' (DHSS&PS, 2002) – set out how health and social services planned to work for a healthier people. It noted that one important way of tackling inequalities in health was to improve educational opportunities and that investing in the 'crucial' early years and education 'can



break the cycle of deprivation'. It particularly emphasised 'Working with Communities' and 'Progress through Partnership'.

3.11 'Priorities for Action: 2002/2003' and 2003/2004 (DHSS&PS, Corporate Plans, 2002 and 2003) – these set out planning priorities and actions for the health and personal social services and built on the objectives and targets established by the 'Programme for Government' and 'Investing for Health'. They highlighted important themes such as Equality, Human Rights and New TSN, as well as the importance of partnership working within the HPSS.

3.12 New TSN (1998) – this included Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI), which was a new approach to helping people who were disadvantaged. It included recognition of the need to tackle social exclusion through inter-departmental co-operation and partnership working between departments and voluntary and community organisations.

3.13 'Building Real Partnership: Compact between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, 1998' recognised, among other things, the value of creative relationships between the public, voluntary and community sectors based on partnership that would promote the development of holistic approaches.

3.14 'Partners for Change' (Government Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector, 2001) built on the policies outlined in 'The Compact' and identified a programme of action across every department for adding value to Government in Northern Ireland through a partnership approach with the voluntary and community sectors. DENI's departmental strategy in relation to Partners for Change included 'raising the quality of early learning for socially disadvantaged children, including children from an ethnic minority background, in particular Traveller children' (Action Point 9).

3.15 DELTA's aims and objectives are clearly congruent with all of the above policies and interventions, particularly given its emphasis on promoting a holistic, 'educare' approach to addressing the needs of children at the earliest possible age, with a focus on working in partnership across departments and sectors. It also provides an additional means (as distinct from formal educational and social and health service interventions) to target those most in need, operating, as it does, throughout the whole southern area, using local centres where possible, and providing a specific 'tailored' service for ethnic minority groups.



Chapter 4 Operational Effectiveness

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the operational effectiveness of DELTA in relation to a number of factors. These are organisational structure, partnership working, management structures and systems, staffing issues, policies and procedures, monitoring and planning.

4.2 Organisational Structure

Being a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity gives DELTA a secure basis for effectively carrying out its aims of the holistic development of young children, raising parents self esteem, enhancing the parent/carer – child relationship and the general promotion of charitable activities in the area of benefit. In accordance with the articles of association, all members of the Executive (Management) Committee retire from office and offer themselves for re-election at the Annual General Meeting of the company. The company directors (management committee) are responsible for maintaining 'proper accounting records' that enables them to comply with the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Attendance at the AGM is open to the public and is well publicised throughout the area in advance.

DELTA is a voluntary sector based organisation. It comprises roughly equal partners from the statutory and community/voluntary sectors. Voluntary organisations are more widely represented on the local committees/working groups in each of the HSST areas.

The management team consists of suitably qualified, experienced, and eligible people in the posts of chair, co-chair, treasurer, and company secretary.

4.3 Partnership Working

4.3.1 Introduction

Partnership and integrated working are key elements of the DELTA project. Partnership arrangements are currently accepted as models of good practice, enabling different agencies and sectors to collaborate effectively and efficiently, and through this attain added value for their efforts over and above the sum of the individual efforts of each partner. They enable roles and



responsibilities to be clearly defined, optimise value for money, increase accountability, provide opportunities for the involvement of the appropriate stakeholders, encourage networking and innovation, and ensure that there is co-ordination in working towards a shared vision and objectives. The rest of this section considers the effectiveness of DELTA in relation to a number of indicators of good practice in relation to partnership working.

4.3.2 Management Structure

The management structure of the DELTA project provides for representation of the major partners, encompassing representatives from education, voluntary organisations, and health and social services personnel. The project is usually chaired by someone from health and social services or education. Health and social services agencies have been forerunners in developing and supporting initiatives that encapsulate a number of different interest groups and promote holistic approaches and as such their involvement, and previous engagement with a variety of community and voluntary organisations means that relationships between the partners are constructive, there is an effective flow of information, and communication is clear and open.

4.3.3 Creativity and Innovation

DELTA has constantly sought to make its programmes creative and exciting in order to encourage learning, and ensure that it is an enjoyable and rewarding experience for the participants. Partnerships with a range of agencies and professionals enable the project to draw on a wealth of experience and expertise in the field to help facilitate this process. The project has also initiated a number of interventions that have been greeted enthusiastically by those involved (see chapter six below) as well as health social services and educational personnel. Of particular significance here have been the baby programme (and the launch of the baby soothing CD to accompany it), the Toy Library, enabling harder to reach parents to avail of an educational toy service, the baby sitting course which is delivered to young people in youth clubs and classrooms, and specific programmes and activities to meet the needs of ethnic minority groups. Courses are also organised in such a way that parents are encouraged to discuss particular difficulties or issues in an inclusive, non-threatening environment. Finally, it is also apparent that staff keep themselves well informed of recent research based findings in appropriate fields, ensuring that up-to date approaches, as well as information informs their work on an ongoing basis.

4.3.4 Capacity for Collaboration

The structure of DELTA has led to a wide range of collaboration between participating agencies and this is facilitated at local levels through the local committees. DELTA staff have worked



collaboratively with the Trusts on Early Years' Newsletters and the Article 20 review as well as attending Early Years meetings and participating in Fun Days and Health fairs. DELTA is a partner in four of the five Sure Start projects in the Southern area, and works with the other (in Dungannon). The project is also involved in joint steering group committees with Barnardos and works collaboratively with the SELB led Families and Schools Together project, as well as with Educational Welfare Officers on the School Age Mothers project. Individual staff members are continually involved collaboratively with a range of agencies, organisations, projects and initiatives, including the Armagh/Dungannon Health Action Zone, health visiting staff, librarians, speech therapists, the Southern Area Childcare Partnership Family Forum, the Early Years Forum, Early Years social work teams and community pharmacists.

4.3.5 Shared Vision

DELTA has a clear mission statement as set out in paragraph 1.2 above. All the partners we consulted were agreed that this summed up what the project was about, in particular emphasising the multi-disciplinary basis of the programmes and services. The strategic objectives (also listed in paragraph 1.2 above) were also shared by all of those consulted, and progress against these is considered in detail in chapter five below).

4.3.6 Proactivity

The emphasis of DELTA's work is on preventative interventions. It is designed to prevent difficulties and problems arising in later life due to underperformance as a result of parents not being able to realise the full potential parental input to their children's development. The creativity and innovation, collaboration, and shared long-term vision referred to above, are all examples of the different strands of the project being able to facilitate this process at a number of levels and points of contact. The input to the project from the education and health and social services boards and the trusts, with their emphasis on holistic, preventative approaches ensures that DELTA's work continues in a similar vein and broadly congruent with the guiding principles and strategies of these agencies and initiatives.

4.3.7 Openness and Accountability

Relationships between those involved in DELTA tended to be very positive, with high levels of openness and accountability expressed between staff and representatives of other agencies as well as between the agencies themselves. DELTA is keen to ensure that it is also accountable to the public, and has drawn on the advice of local community organisations when required. It also has a high profile throughout the area with its promotional work in schools, H&SS agencies,



community/youth groups, women's groups, voluntary organisations, parents advice centres, attendance at conferences, and use of the media. There is a parent representative on the Armagh & Dungannon committee.

4.3.8 Flexibility

The DELTA approach is based on flexibility, with programmes being specifically geared towards meeting the needs of different groups and parents with a wide range of needs. The input from the professional involved with their array of expertise and knowledge ensures that these needs can be met in a constructive and effective way. The location of the project in the voluntary sector is another factor that enables it to remain flexible and ready to respond to particular needs and situations without the bureaucratic restraints that are often associated with statutory sector interventions.

4.3.9 Contextuality

Partners have felt that the sharing of information by the array of professionals involved has meant that collaborative learning has been maximised. This has also been enhanced through the ongoing training and familiarity of staff with new developments and approaches in the field of work, ensuring that they are constantly informed by the wider context within which they operate. In addition local contexts are also taken into account through the presence of the local committees and close contacts with schools and local groups. Programmes are also designed to take into consideration the context of particular interest groups, such as ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

4.3.10 Conclusion

DELTA has been operating an innovative and creative partnership in terms of its activities and services, enabling flexibility in relation to meeting the needs of parents in a number of different contexts, and promoting collaborative learning through the multi-agency, holistic approach and ensuring that the expertise available is being used to its maximum benefit. It has partly been facilitated through the shared vision that enables the project to draw on the expertise of the various professionals involved in the partnership. There are some issues, however, that if addressed, could strengthen the partnership. These include providing greater parental/community representation on the main management committee.



4.4 Management Structures and Systems

The management committee of the project is sizeable, and does have a considerable turnover in membership. However, as noted above it is fairly representative except for the omission of some stakeholder groups, notably community/parental representatives. Perhaps, more broad based local representation may be achieved through exploring the possibility of representatives of parenting/community organisations being invited onto the committees. It is felt by some that there is a reluctance of parents to become involved on the main committee and most of the business is taken up by financial and other issues which would not interest them – or at least lead to such representation being merely tokenistic. However, parents consulted through the survey, (chapter 6) have indicated a willingness/keenness to participate more fully on the project. Given this, perhaps the project should consider the most appropriate way to encourage more parental representation.

In relation to roles and responsibilities, the former chairman of the committee had continued to act as an advisor to the committee but after his resignation in March, there was a limitation in relation to who the Project Manager/team could draw on for expertise in this field, as he was particularly well experienced and skilled in handling the operational issues that needed to be addressed from time to time. This is particularly true in relation to personnel issues, of which there have been a few recently, (see 4.5). As it is, most of the crucial decisions are taken by the Project Manager with the Management Team meeting every term. All of the latter are well skilled and qualified individuals with years of relevant management and practice experience in the field of early years work.

Generally, decisions are taken and implemented in a satisfactory manner and information systems are adequate to allow for an effective flow of information throughout the organisation. Information was also updated and disseminated on a regular basis. This is crucial given the changing nature of approaches, policies, and practice in relation to this type of work.

4.5 Staffing Issues

When all the posts are filled, the project does have the appropriate number of staff to meet the current demands for programmes. However, there is a deficit in relation to secretarial support, especially in relation to office management, and a lack of cover when staff are off and/or posts are unfilled. Unfortunately this is quite often in Newry and Mourne, due to a relatively high turnover of



staff¹. At the present, the Project Manager is providing cover for the vacant Upper Primary Post throughout the SELB area. Although able to fulfil existing commitments, this has meant that she has been unable to undertake promotional work. It also leaves her short of support, given that there is only one administration worker and no one employed in a support role, such as a Deputy Manager/Senior Project Worker.

Staff were found to have the appropriate levels of experience and skills to enable them to successfully meet the demands of the project. Although terms and conditions are generally appropriate for the demands of the posts some members of the management committee felt that salaries were rather low given the responsibilities and level of expertise required and the unsocial hours and travel involved. There is also some confusion, and inconsistency arising, due to the current funding situation which means that while three project staff operate in each of the three H&SST areas, three others are Sure Start project workers with three different Sure Start projects. The Post-Primary DELTA Officer has an additional developmental remit. The Project Manager is employed by the SHSSB. This issue could perhaps be resolved through an overhaul/review of all contracts of employment, in conjunction with the funding agencies/partners, with support/advice from the Labour Relations Agency, perhaps with a view to linking all salaries to the NJC pay scales. On a general note, it is apparent that the project does lack appropriate human resource support, which has inhibited the satisfactory resolution of a number of these issues.

Opportunities for formal and informal guidance and support were readily available and staff felt, generally, that they received adequate opportunities for professional development and training.

4.6 Policies and Procedures

The project was found to have adequate statements of policy in relation to the following:

- Confidentiality;
- Health and safety – although two members of staff were not familiar with this;
- Financial management and Controls – see also chapter seven;

¹ From the information we have this was on the whole for further pursuance of career reasons and not a reflection of negative experiences of their employment with DELTA.



- Grievances – although one member of staff was unfamiliar with this;
- Complaints – although two members of staff were unfamiliar with this;
- Vulnerable person legislation – one member of staff was unfamiliar with this although they had been on Child Protection training;
- Equal Opportunities – although two members of staff were unfamiliar with this.

As there appears to be some ambiguity concerning a few members of staff in relation to their awareness/knowledge of some of these, It is recommended that staff be reminded of what policies and procedures are in relation to health and safety, grievances, complaints, vulnerable person legislation, equal opportunities, training and child protection.

4.7 Monitoring and Planning

Internal evaluations are carried out of each programme with participants being encouraged to provide feedback on how they enjoyed the course/programme and whether it would/had change anything about how they would relate to their child at home. Details of participants (postcodes, age, family type, number of children) are also recorded. Mapping is carried out in relation to the location of programmes delivered. All this information is used in reviewing the programmes, which is carried out annually and more frequently, as the need arises (e.g. quarterly reports are prepared for the management committee and submitted to the SELB and SHSSB). While all of this information is useful in enabling the project to keep records of outputs and targeting of programmes, it is apparent that given the development of DELTA in the Southern Area over the past ten years that a comprehensive evaluation is overdue. DELTA should therefore, in future, ensure that an external evaluation of this nature is carried out at least every five years. The Project would also benefit from putting in place systems for measuring some of the longitudinal impact of its work. This could be achieved through inviting some of the participating parents to volunteer for a study to monitor the longer term development of their children.

DELTA updated its 'Strategy Document' in 2000 and a Business Plan for 2000 to 2003 was produced in 2000. Progress in relation to the strategic objectives and key priorities/deficits identified in each of these respectively is discussed in chapter five below.



4.8 Conclusion

DELTA is a well established project that has undergone considerable development over recent years. It is a registered charity and legally constituted company limited by guarantee with a board of directors (management committee) drawn from well qualified and experienced personnel in professions that are congruent with its aims and objectives. There are also local committees in each H&SS Trust area to ensure that the project is responsive to localised needs. However, although having developed effective partnerships with a wide range of statutory agencies and voluntary and community groups, the latter tends to be underrepresented on the main management committee. This could be addressed through actively encouraging representatives of such organisations to become more involved in the project, particularly representatives from parenting organisations (some of whom may also be programme participants) and/or local community networking organisations (perhaps through powers of co-option).

The project has demonstrated a number of areas of good practice in its partnership working, bringing different agencies and sectors together to work towards a shared vision and developing creative and innovative approaches to its services and activities. The structure of the project also ensures an optimum spread of its programmes throughout the catchment area, with specific provision being made to reach 'harder to reach' families – either due to their geographical isolation, personal circumstances, attitudes to educational programmes, or their membership of ethnic or linguistic minority groups. This is a particularly difficult area and some of the shortfalls in relation to this are discussed further in paragraph 6.3.3 below. The collaborative working with a wide range and number of interest groups and agencies, as well as the development of strong relationships with certain schools, have all contributed to the project's effectiveness in being proactive to particular needs, as well as maintaining, and developing, its more mainstream programmes. The partnership arrangements also ensure greater openness and accountability. Through all of this, DELTA makes a significant contribution to promoting a holistic, preventative approach to parenting programmes that generates substantial added value over and above the sum of the project's individual parts.

There has been a recent issue in relation to the lack of ongoing human resources support to the Project Manager, although it is acknowledged that this is to be addressed through the newly appointed Chair.



There are a number of ongoing staffing issues, mainly concerned with the plethora of funding sources. It is therefore important that terms and conditions of employment should be reviewed in the near future, in conjunction with partner/funding agencies, and with advice/support from the Labour Relations Agency; with a view to establishing greater consistency and coherence in terms and conditions, and linking salaries to the NJC scales, and the funding situation.

The project was found to have satisfactory policies and procedures in relation to a range of important issues, although some staff were unfamiliar with some of these. This should easily be addressed through reminding staff of those that are applicable.

DELTA has effective systems for planning and reviewing its work and this informs a planning process that has led to the production of a strategy document and business plan in recent years. However, the Project would benefit from measuring some of the longitudinal impact of its work, perhaps through tracking the development/experiences of a small sample of (voluntary) participants, identified through the programmes.



Chapter 5 Effectiveness in Meeting Objectives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the report considers the effectiveness of DELTA in meeting its strategic objectives as stated in the Strategy Document and addressing key priority areas/deficits as set out in the Business Plan. Performance against programme objectives is examined in the next chapter.

5.2 Effectiveness in Meeting Strategic Objectives

1. To ensure widespread access to DELTA Programmes with a specific focus on children and families in need, taking into account disability, cultural and ethnic needs.

DELTA ensures there is widespread access to its programmes through its monitoring systems, such as the monthly team meetings, constant monitoring and the three local sub-committees. The mapping software package also enables the Project to see at a glance where any gaps might be. The Article 20 review is also up-to-date and the Project adheres to the principles of TSN and the EUSSPPR throughout its work. Quite often, however, this depends on the enthusiasm of personnel in the participating schools, and their ability to get in touch with the appropriate parents. While DELTA is a universal programme, available to all, some parents are usually more accessible than others and those who are least accessible are often those who are more in need of such programmes. This is an issue that DELTA strives to address through continuing to build on relationships with school staff, and other groups, encouraging them to impress upon appropriate parents the importance, and attractiveness, of parenting programmes. This is an area that could perhaps be built on, through further developing the training provided, for instance, for school co-ordinators. DELTA also develops programmes to meet the needs of specific cultural and ethnic needs, such as the work with the Traveller and Portuguese communities and Irish Language schools. The use of local community groups to deliver programmes also enables the Project to access parents who may not be comfortable with, or able to access, schools for one reason or another.



2. To deliver DELTA in communities, both urban and rural, to ensure social inclusion where little or no Early Years services exist.

Again the mapping exercise assists DELTA in identifying areas of unmet need throughout the area. Its liaison with other parenting organisations involved in similar work, such as Barnardo's, and participation on the Early Years Forum in each of the three Health and Social Services Trust areas, also facilitates the identification of gaps in provision as well as helping to avoid duplication and ensuring that services complement each other. The local committees also play an important role in relation to this.

3. To network and collaborate with other parenting programmes and family support services.

This is achieved through participation on each of the Early Years Forums, and liaising with other voluntary organisations (such as Barnardo's, NIPPA, and NICMA) and statutory agencies (such as the SELB, SHSSB, and H&SS Trusts) as well as other initiatives and projects with partnership and networking components (such as Sure Start).

4. To raise awareness amongst all relevant agencies and the general public of the importance of developing parenting skills through programmes such as DELTA.

Although DELTA did draw up a proposed Marketing Plan (as part of the Business Plan), most of its promotional work has been through informal contacts and word of mouth (as it does not have a budget for marketing). Given its connections with most of the schools throughout the area, and statutory agencies and community and voluntary organisations, the project has a high visibility and a significant presence throughout the catchment area. The AGMs are also well publicised and attended. The project is also ready to exploit any opportunities for press coverage.

5. To agree targets and ensure an equitable spread across the Southern area.

This is ensured through the work of the local committees and agreed by the management committee in conjunction with the SELB and SHSSB.



6. To ensure the programme is both planned and delivered using a holistic educare approach.

DELTA's activities are all underpinned by a commitment to this specific approach. It is holistic in nature and consists of a synthesis of approaches developed by those involved in early years' education and social care professions who would point to the mutual dependency of education and social care in the context of early years work with children. There are four primary elements involved in this distinct approach. Firstly, there is a focus on healthy lifestyles and routines. Secondly, there is an emphasis on sharing books and language. Thirdly, everyday activities are used to promote learning and, fourthly, there is an emphasis on positive parenting. In addition the post-primary programmes are tailored to meet the specific needs of parents of teenagers.

7. To use research and evaluation findings to inform and improve service quality.

Internal evaluation findings are considered in relation to the monitoring of progress and the review of work on an ongoing basis. Staff are kept up to date on recent developments and research findings in related fields and this process is accentuated through the diverse wealth of experience and expertise of those involved with the project and its partner agencies. Collaborative learning is also an important element of the project's approach.

5.3 Effectiveness in Addressing Key Priorities and Areas of Unmet Need as Identified in the Business Plan

1. Deficit in parenting programme provision in the Upper Primary sector.

This is now a growing area of DELTA's work although the post is currently vacant. Research has shown that this transitional period between the years of 8 and 12 years is a critical time in children's development. The post is currently vacant and much of the workload being met by the Project Manger.

2. Deficit in parenting programme provision in the Post Primary sector.

This deficit is being addressed, and programmes have been offered (with 37 completed out of 52) in almost every school in the SELB area (except senior high schools who start at year 11), although



only one member of staff (employed by the SELB) is operating in this sector throughout the whole area.

3. Lack of parenting programme provision in the Youth Sector.

There has been some work developed in this sector, working mainly through community and youth centre settings. This has included young people completing a 'Baby Sitting Course' aimed at raising awareness of the responsibility of baby-sitting and to offer participants opportunities to learn about and discuss aspects of child development.

4. Lack of short stay crèche provision for parents attending parenting programmes.

This is still an issue, except with Sure Start projects where crèche facilities are usually provided. Parents have been able to bring their children with them to programmes but this meant having to shorten each session. Although not an ideal situation it is acceptable, particularly for activities such as storytelling and play. DELTA should perhaps explore the possibility of obtaining funding for this in relation to specific courses through the Early Years Forum or individual H&SS Trusts.

5. Lack of funding for parenting programmes based in local community centres.

This is an ongoing difficulty, in relation to the lack of funding to pay for the venues, which is sometimes addressed through using income generated elsewhere or the host group providing this. However, DELTA should perhaps approach the Early Years Forum for advice, or the SELB or individual H&SS's for financial support to resolve this issue.

6. Lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes.

This is still a major problem, and not only in rural areas. In one area (Newry and Mourne) a transport officer has recently been appointed by the Confederation of Community Groups to look at issues of transport (or lack of it) for groups in such circumstances. It might therefore benefit DELTA to approach the Confederation regarding this development.

7. Lack of funding to facilitate ongoing training for staff in promotion of parenting skills.

While all the staff members are well qualified and have broad expertise in aspects of parenting, there is a deficit in parenting qualifications among the staff at DELTA and it would be useful if the project explored possibilities in relation to obtaining such a qualification as a group. Funding could



be obtained from some of the additional income generated, although it is acknowledged that there may be a problem with finding a source for such training locally.

8. Lack of networking opportunities with other agencies.

Although DELTA has always been grounded in a multi-disciplinary approach, this aspect of its work has improved considerably, especially since the onset of the Sure Start projects, with their emphasis on networking, and participation on the Early Years Forums. This is now very much an integrated part of the Project's work and has enabled DELTA to progress from being a mainly service (programme) delivery project, to being one that is grounded in the community.

9. Need to raise the profile of parenting programmes through public relations exercises.

As indicated in paragraph 5.2.4 above, DELTA does not have a marketing budget. Despite this, however, it has been successful in raising its profile through word of mouth and use of the mass media, mainly local newspapers. The tenth anniversary provided opportunities to raise its profile as has the AGM's – particularly as the last one had the Children's Commissioner in attendance. Sure Start has also provided opportunities for this as have a number of 'fun days' and the distribution of the Annual Reports. DELTA should perhaps consider securing some funding for the production of an updated leaflet that explains in basic terms what it is, what it provides, and where it can be contacted. Other suggestions for improving awareness, as identified by schools, are outlined in paragraph 6.3.6 below.

10. Need to hold a local Parenting Conference

This was achieved through the Social Baby Conference in Slieve Gullion Courtyard in September 2002 and the tenth anniversary celebration, including the launch of the Baby Soothing CD, in the City Hotel Armagh in March 2003.

5.4 Conclusion

DELTA has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in meeting its strategic objectives and has also made considerable progress in addressing key priorities and areas of unmet need.



DELTA has ensured widespread access to its programmes with a specific focus on children and families in need, taking into account cultural and ethnic needs, as well as providing for the parents of children with special needs. It may also be useful to further impress upon particular school personnel, their responsibilities and the importance of *actively* encouraging parents, especially those 'harder to reach' parents to avail of the programmes². The project also delivers programmes in both urban and rural communities, including those where little or no Early Years services exist. DELTA networks and collaborates with other parenting programmes and family support services and has had considerable success in raising the awareness amongst all the relevant agencies and the general public of the importance of developing parenting skills through programmes such as DELTA. The project also ensures that its programmes are targeted equitably throughout the Southern area and that they are planned and delivered using a holistic educare approach – an approach to which those engaged in the field of Early Years work attach considerable value. DELTA also keeps well up-to-date and informed by research and evaluation findings in order to regularly review its practice and improve service quality.

DELTA has made considerable progress in addressing the deficits in parenting programme provision in the Upper Primary and Post Primary sectors and has developed some programmes with the youth sector. It has also made significant progress in developing networking opportunities with other agencies and organisations, enabling this to be very much an integrated part of its work and grounding the project much more securely in the community. Lack of short stay crèche provision, funding to pay for venues for parenting programmes based in local community centres, and lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes remain difficult issues but could perhaps be addressed through seeking advice and/or support from the Early Years Forum, SELB or local H&SS Trusts. DELTA should also seek ways of securing funding to enable staff to undergo training leading to a recognised parenting skills qualification. Finally, although DELTA has been successful in raising its profile throughout the area, this could be made more effective through the production of an updated promotional/informative leaflet.

² We understand that DELTA informs schools of their responsibilities and that there is Promoters Training provided. DELTA is also currently working on a contract for schools, and this is to be welcomed.



Chapter 6: Impact and Outcomes

6.1 Introduction

The key recipients of the DELTA programme are the parents who participate in DELTA courses. One of the key measures of the effectiveness of the project's work is therefore the impact which it has upon those parents who participate in the courses, upon their children, and upon the schools and groups which host the courses. This chapter examines the key themes which emerged through consultation with parents, school principals and teachers, and concludes with an assessment of the extent to which DELTA has met its programme objectives, as set out in the Strategy Document.

Consultation with parents took place in two ways:

1) A postal survey (see appendix 1). A questionnaire was distributed to 500 parents, with 154 being returned. This represents a response rate of 31%. Of those who responded, 53% had participated in DELTA Early Years, 14% in Upper Primary, 34% in Post Primary, 17% in DELTA Sure Start, 8% in DELTA Toy Library, 2% in the Importance of Fathers in Parenting, 3% in Baby Sitting and only one respondent in the Baby Programme or the Open College course (some parents had participated in more than one DELTA programme).

2) Focus group interviews. Four focus group interviews were conducted with participants from the Baby Programme, Early Years, Upper Primary and Post Primary courses.

Telephone interviews were conducted with 32 representatives of schools, covering nursery, primary, secondary and grammar schools.

6.2 Impact on Parents

6.2.1 Experience of Classes

The majority of parents were extremely positive about their experience of DELTA courses. 99% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programme was well planned and organised, 98% agreed that it was well presented and delivered and 99% agreed that they were satisfied by the information given. DELTA staff were perceived as approachable, friendly, enthusiastic and competent. The approachability of



the staff and their ability to present material in an informal manner was seen as particularly important in that it helped parents to feel more relaxed about the course:

You felt on a par with them - it wasn't just text book material - the tutor felt like one of us and it was very informal.

We were spoken to in a way we understood and at no time felt like a bad parent.

In attempting to reach parents from a range of educational backgrounds and ensuring the accessibility of courses, this informality is important in allowing parents to relax and enjoy the courses, and in ensuring that parents complete all the sessions. Parents also felt that the reassurance given by tutors and the emphasis that the course was not being assessed helped them to be more open about their real problems and concerns.

While the response to course content was overwhelmingly positive, particularly in relation to the reading and dental health elements of the courses, some parents also expressed concern with the quality of some of the speakers used with a few feeling that some speakers did not take into account the nature of the group they were speaking to (sometimes running over time, or discussing material at an abstract level), or assumed a lack of very basic knowledge among some of those to whom they were speaking.

More specifically, there were some specific comments relating to particular sessions of courses. In relation to the importance of fathers in parenting session one parent commented:

The (session) concentrated on fathers with sons and ignored the fact that some fathers only have daughters.

In the Post Primary course, while several parents commented on how they had valued the session on drugs awareness, there was also a sense, among both parents and teachers, that the 'shock factor' to the reality of drugs for young people had not always been tempered by practical advice on how to approach the problem:

I would have liked some more information on how to DEAL with problems of alcohol and drugs if you find your child already involved with them.



All of these concerns centre on the sense that some parents felt that a minority of those involved in the delivery of the programme were not always aware of the immediate sensitivities and concerns of parents.

6.2.2 Parental confidence

Involvement in the DELTA programme impacted on parental confidence in two key ways. Firstly, the knowledge gained in the course helped participants to feel more confident as parents. 20% of survey respondents strongly agreed and a further 55% agreed that participation in the course had made them feel more confident as parents. In focus groups parents discussed how their increased knowledge of health, education and behavioural issues helped them feel more confident about the decisions that they make for their children. In addition, being together with other parents and sharing concerns helped them to reduce a sense of isolation and to realise that their individual concerns were often shared by other parents:

You're inclined to compare notes - you're not the only one, you're all in there together.

Also, participation in the course helped many parents develop new ways of relating to their children and empowered them to become more involved in the education of their children. Within the Early Years course in particular, the teaching on helping children to learn through play was seen as particularly important:

It gives you ideas of things to do and games to play to stimulate them that you wouldn't have thought of otherwise.

In total 65% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the course had enhanced their child's learning through play, while 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the course had increased their knowledge of educational issues. Among parents of both early years and post-primary children, participation in the course had encouraged them to read with their children and had made them more aware of what their child was capable of and of books suitable for different levels of ability. The lists of books provided by tutors were particularly popular since they helped parents feel more confident in what their child could be reading and in choosing suitable material.

Just over half of survey respondents (55%) also agreed or strongly agreed that participation had also increased their self confidence. In focus groups there was a strong feeling that, particularly for those who were full time parents, participation in the course had provided a rare opportunity to meet with other people in an educational setting and had helped them to gain confidence:



You go to classes and you're nervous and then you realise that you're able to say what you want to say.

It's very unintimidating. Even very shy parents found that by the end of the first night they were talking.

This increase in self confidence may help individuals to become more involved in other courses, with school life or in the wider community. Several parents felt that this could have provided an opportunity for the promotion of other courses since parents would be more likely to get involved immediately after the positive experience of the DELTA course.

6.2.3 Awareness of Health Issues

83% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their participation in DELTA courses had increased their awareness of child health issues, while 58% agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement in the course had increased their child's awareness of health issues. Within focus groups parents commented that the sessions on health had the greatest impact, with many being shocked by the health effects of many popular food products marketed for children. Some parents stated that new sets of rules had been introduced in their homes in direct response to what they had learnt in courses:

Ribena is banned in my house now, and they're only allowed one bag of crisps a week.

For some parents, involvement had also created the necessary motivation to follow a healthier lifestyle for the whole family:

I go home now and I turn off the TV and we all go for a walk.

For many parents the course simply reinforced what they already knew about child health and nutrition but participation in the course had created the impetus to implement changes.

6.2.4 Quality of Life

38% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in the course had improved their quality of life, while 46% were unsure. However in focus groups the view emerged that in making small changes, participation in the course had made significant differences to their quality of life. This was



particularly true for stay at home parents of young children. At one level simply being involved in something new made one parent feel more positive:

It puts a bit of life in you and gives you a bit of enthusiasm

Involvement in the course also helped reduce the isolation felt by some parents, and adult company provided a welcome break from solely child company:

You're not sitting on your own in the house all day talking baby talk

Parents in the focus group also felt that participating in the course helped them to feel more positive about being parents and to enjoy the experience:

It's taught me just to enjoy them and not constantly worry about what I might be doing wrong.

Some parents also felt that changing the parents approach to parenting also had a positive impact on the quality of life of their child:

I've learned to relax more so I'm not so stressed out in the evenings and a happy mother means a happy child!

6.2.5 Community Building

Participation in DELTA programmes provided an important means by which parents formed relationships with each other and provided a means by which they could come to feel a greater sense of belonging to the wider community. Almost three quarters of survey respondents (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that participation had improved their relationships with other parents. The locally based approach of DELTA has been important in this, because it has encouraged people to get involved:

It was great to have something like that in Clogher. If they hadn't had it here I wouldn't have bothered.

The courses also provided a means for some parents to get to know the local community and to reduce isolation:



I've just moved into the area and it was a good opportunity to meet other parents.

However a sizeable minority of parents - 9% - disagreed or strongly disagreed that the course had improved relationships with other parents. Survey responses indicate that for some parents the course was not long enough to allow the establishment of meaningful relationships, and schools or groups had not provided the option of continuing to meet in another format. Also some lone parents found it difficult to integrate with other parents:

As a single parent it was difficult to feel at ease initially as most were couples. Relationships with other parents did not really develop. Also too short a period of time to develop those relationships.

Given that DELTA seeks specifically to reach out to parents in need, it may need to give more consideration to meeting the needs of lone parents, for instance, through the provision of crèche facilities in the evenings.

6.2.6 Relationship with School

Most focus group participants felt that participation in DELTA had helped build linkages with their child's school. 57% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that DELTA had helped improve relationships with their child's teacher. Often the course simply provided an informal environment in which parents could meet teachers as equals and get to know them as individuals, so helping them to feel that the teachers were more approachable:

It makes you feel more comfortable with the teacher who's going to be teaching your child.

However there was also an acknowledgement in both focus groups and in survey responses that the extent to which the course helped build relationships depended on the level of involvement of the school, and on the organisation of the individual course. In some schools only one teacher attended, and particularly for the post primary course, this teacher may not have known the individual children³:

This would have been an opportunity to meet my child's new teacher and also to hear how the school interprets the ideas expressed by DELTA staff. However the school played a minimal part in proceedings and teachers were not even introduced.

³ Cluster groups for post-primary teachers were organised but were poorly attended.



There may be a need to provide guidelines for schools to help them to maximise the opportunities provided by the DELTA programme.

6.2.7 Impact on Children

In survey responses parents were generally positive about the impact which their participation in the programme had on their children. 65% agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had helped to enhance their child's communication, 53% agreed or strongly agreed that it had helped to improve their child's relationships, while 39% agreed or strongly agreed that it had improved their child's performance at school (49% were unsure, which may be a reflection of the long-term nature of many of the changes made). In focus groups parents felt that the course meant that their children now had more quality time with them:

You forget sometimes to just sit down and interact - and the course has helped me to remember that doing that is just so important. You begin to realise how vital and valuable that is.

Parents in focus group discussion also felt that the Early Years programme in particular helped them to give their children greater independence in play:

It's provided her with more opportunities to develop herself because I don't just show her how to do things now, but encourage her to think about things and do things for herself. I spend more time reading and playing and painting with her, asking her lots of questions and taking time to listen.

For participants in the post primary course the sessions on communication had helped them to relate better to their teenage children, and had made them more comfortable in talking to their children about issues such as drugs, alcohol, peer pressure and sex:

I have spoken to each of my three boys about different aspects covered in the course. I feel closer to them because of this.

Several parents in focus groups also expressed the view that having participated in the course gave them greater influence with their children. The course helps to make parents more aware of what happens in school and builds stronger links between teachers and parents, so that children know that teachers and parents are working together:



It gave me more authority with the kids because they knew I'd done the course and because I was following the same structures as the school. They realised that the school had the same agenda as I had.

These linkages should be of benefit to children if parents and teachers are working together to provide a clear structure for education.

6.2.8 Accessibility and Publicity

DELTA aims to be accessible to all parents and seeks to do everything possible to ensure widespread participation regardless of geographical location or income. Overall those consulted were extremely positive regarding the accessibility of DELTA programmes. 99% agreed that the course venue was suitable, 98% agreed that the course content was suitable and 100% agreed that course times were suitable. However, given that only those who had participated in the course were invited to complete the questionnaire, those who found course time, venue and content suitable are more likely to be represented. DELTA, and participating schools, do make attempts to ensure that courses are as accessible as possible, varying times in order to suit particular groups of parents - having some courses during the day so that parents do not need to find childcare, and running others in the evening so that working parents can attend:

I went in the mornings and my husband went to the evening sessions so that we did not need to find baby sitters

In addition several parents commented that, when one parent could not attend, the information and materials provided during the course was shared within the couple:

My husband was able to read the handouts that I was given so that the information was shared

However it is inevitably very difficult to meet the needs of everyone in a diverse group of parents and some will either not be able, or find it extremely difficult, to attend:

7pm was ok, but I felt that this was quite early for working mothers who assist in their child's homework and make a dinner in the evenings - no time for the children!

This was discussed extensively within focus groups with several people commenting that while both partners would have liked to attend, it was not practical for both to be out on the same evening. Others



spoke of friends for whom the designated evening of the course was not suitable although they would have been keen to attend. There was strong support for the creation of a locally based directory which could list all courses happening in a particular region over a four to six month period, including the titles of individual sessions. It was felt that this would give greater flexibility for individuals or couples with tight schedules and little free time, and would thus ensure greater participation in programmes. Survey results indicate that 60% of parents who have participated in one DELTA programme would be interested in attending another. The creation of such a directory would also allow those parents who have participated in one programme the opportunity to attend another if they have several children of different ages. It may also be possible to include a directory function when DELTA and partner organisations' websites are updated.

6.2.9 Expansion

For parents the experience of DELTA had been almost entirely positive. The main criticism which emerged was that parents felt the standard short series of sessions could be expanded to include other areas⁴. Several parents of young children expressed a wish to see first aid for children included in the course. Parents of post-primary children felt a need for more information in how to help children deal with peer pressure/bullying, particularly in relation to material possessions. Several parents stated that they would have liked to explore some individual topics in greater depth, and that they would have liked brief 'refresher' sessions at the beginning of each academic year⁵. As discussed below, many schools would not have the support to run such individual programmes. However, for interested parents, there may be a place for a series of region based courses which allow parents to explore particular topics in greater depth. In addition parents suggested that DELTA could be run by church organisations⁶ (including girl's and boy's brigades) and by local youth and community centres to reach parents who might not be willing to attend courses in the school.

6.2.10 Recommendations

- DELTA should ensure that all speakers are fully briefed on the nature of the group to which they will be speaking. DELTA should reinforce guidelines on the length of session and the importance of not running over time. DELTA should also ensure that parents know where to go for advice if they are not satisfied with particular aspects of the course – i.e. if they have a grievance or complaint.

⁴ Schools are able to decide the length of programmes, for example whether they should run for four or six weeks.

⁵ DELTA does provide 'refresher' evenings in the third term to recap on the first term post-primary programmes.

⁶ DELTA has responded to requests from church groups in the past although it has not been actively promoting programmes with church organisations.



- DELTA should provide contact details for, and information on, local colleges and other adult education providers at the end of courses, to encourage people to get involved in other courses.
- DELTA should encourage teachers to attend and be introduced for at least one session of the course.
- DELTA should create an area based directory of courses, listing all courses and individual sessions happening in a 4-6 month period.
- DELTA should explore opportunities for running more DELTA courses from community based, youth groups and community centres.

6.3 Impact on Schools

6.3.1 Experience of courses

Almost all schools stated that they had a positive experience of running DELTA courses. Project staff were commended as being both easy to work with, helpful and good communicators. Teachers were impressed both with how DELTA helped schools to organise programmes, and by the quality of the training delivered within the course:

They are very dedicated, good communicators and build up good relationships, run informal sessions and cover topics of importance.

In addition several principals, particularly those in secondary and grammar schools noted that the willingness of project staff to work alongside schools, to listen to their needs and concerns and to adapt course content to suit the needs of individual schools and parents had made the course more beneficial. It also helped schools to maximise the benefits of the course and to ensure that DELTA was more likely to benefit those parents that schools most wanted to involve:

I like it because you can make DELTA suit your school - it's flexible and I can make it suit the needs of my parents in that particular year - it allows me to be individual while drawing on their expertise and support.

6.3.2 Changing attitude of Parents

Most teachers contacted were able to recognise the impact which participation in the course had had on the parents involved. Parents of young children in particular were seen to be more confident in interacting with their children, and in becoming involved as partners in the education process:



It makes parents more aware of what they can do. They come and see what we do here and it makes them more aware of what they can do themselves and more confident in playing with their children.

In addition many teachers felt that many parents had negative attitudes to school and education, based on their own experiences. Having parents come into their child's school, meet teachers and learn about methods and approaches used helps parents who had been disaffected with school themselves to become more comfortable with the school environment:

It helped parents realise that schools are a different place now and that we've moved a very long way.

Schools use the opportunity provided by DELTA, and the increased familiarity with the school to emphasise the need for parents to support the school. Having an external speaker reinforce the school's ethos has helped support teachers as they seek to encourage parental support:

It gives the principal the support to emphasise the impact and role that the parents can have.

Also, the familiarity with the school, teachers and other parents encourages parents to take a more active involvement in the life of the school and gives them greater confidence in the role they can have:

P1 parents often haven't met. Meeting weekly builds a relationship and is good for socialising - it's someone to speak to in the playground. They tend to get more involved in the life of the school too - because it improves the relationships.

As a result, DELTA becomes an important tool in forming relationships, fostering involvement and building community, particularly in rural areas, encouraging greater local participation in the life of the school.

6.3.3 Parental involvement

DELTA seeks to provide a service which is open to all parents and which reaches people regardless of income or social status. In particular the programme seeks to include those parents who are economically disadvantaged. While acknowledging that DELTA makes real efforts to encourage inclusivity in its courses, almost all schools felt that the programmes were still struggling to reach certain groups of parents. Many schools felt that the courses were 'preaching to the converted', attracting those who were already confident



and competent as parents, while not reaching those who might be most in need of support (including some of the previously disaffected parents referred to in 6.3.2 above):

You can't force people to come - often it's the parents you most want to come who don't

In particular, it was felt that the courses *sometimes* did not reach a few of the most economically disadvantaged and that many parents, although invited, simply were not willing to attend, often frustrating teachers who had invested considerable time and energy in organising courses. Principals had a sense that, despite promotion, the course did not appeal to the parents invited:

Our school is in an area of social deprivation, we invited 14 parents and only 1 turned up - the course just didn't reach them.

Several schools who did manage to attract parents from a broad social spectrum identified that often within that, young lone parents did not attend. Some teachers felt that the stigma of being a lone parent, particularly in rural areas, discomfort with being the only lone parent in a course of couples, and difficulty in accessing childcare all contributed to the lack of involvement. This might be addressed by providing training on an individual basis or with small groups within homes in order to make the courses seem less intimidating. Several principals also felt that parents with lower educational qualifications were also less likely to attend. In part this was seen as a reflection of negative personal experiences of education and of a lack of confidence in an educational setting:

Some parents are afraid of it or intimidated by it and so chose not to come along. They worry that they'll have to speak.

This reluctance seems to be a reflection, more of perceptions of the DELTA course, than of the reality. It might therefore be addressed by better information being made available prior to the course with detailed timetables and assurances that participants will not be assessed or 'forced' to speak if they do not want to.

It was also recognised by some teachers that, in their area, the course can fail to reach some working parents who are better off:

the high-fliers don't tend to come.



It was felt that for this group, the business of daily life and existing tight schedules made attendance at DELTA extremely difficult. The course was seen as another of a list of demands, from the schools, on limited time and 'eating into' already precious time with children in the evenings:

Most of our parents are working and they're very busy. We try to accommodate that, but it's just the way that life's going.

A course schedule, as suggested in section 6.2.8, might help to address this problem since parents would be better able to identify courses which best fit their existing schedule, or to attend sessions which they had been unable to attend in their own school.

6.3.4 Building relationships and partnerships

One of the most important benefits for schools (nursery, primary and post-primary) of running the DELTA programme has been the building of relationships between the school and parents. For many teachers interviewed, having the programme running at the beginning of the academic year, and in a child's first year in the school, was a good way to ensure that parents and teachers got to know each other and were therefore better able to work together through the child's time at the school:

It's a good way of building relationships with parents and having them working alongside you throughout the year.

The relationships formed also help to alleviate the pressure on teachers since they allow an opportunity to get to know the parents in an informal way, rather than meeting for the first time at more formal parent teacher meetings or when problems have arisen. Initial contact through DELTA has proven extremely valuable in creating more relaxed relationships between parents and teachers:

Running it before the beginning of the school year helps to build relationships. I've had open day today and I'm more relaxed because the ground is broken and I've met the parents before and they've met me.

Many principals also felt that the building of these relationships also help teachers to work better in partnership with parents. By building friendships parents are more willing to speak to the teacher about issues and concerns and to ask questions about their child's education.



There's real interaction and support between the parents because they've already mixed and met. It helps me to be more relaxed as a teacher because they feel more willing to ask me questions and talk about their concerns.

The development of relationships between parents and teachers has also had an impact on the long term involvement of parents with the schools. Schools which have been running DELTA for several years stated that they frequently use the programme as a way of forming initial links with parents, which are then used to promote other programmes and encourage parental involvement in other aspects of school life:

As parents get more involved we use that to promote the PTA and events, and to ask for assistance when we need it.

Principals also felt that the DELTA programme gave parents an insight into the needs of school, the work of teachers and the role of parents as educators. As a result parents were likely to be more committed to the schools and so to offer to become involved in volunteering within the school:

We've had a lot of parents offering to volunteer and support the school after DELTA - they appreciate the work the teachers are doing.

In one school the recognition of this need through the DELTA course had brought parents together and engaged them with the work and needs of the school that they organised an independent parents group seeking to support the school and encourage greater involvement of the local community with school events. Several teachers and parents felt that the DELTA programme created the impetus by which such groups could be formed, although parents were not always sure how to go about this, and individual schools offered varying degrees of support. Many parents were keen to continue and develop the friendships with other parents and teachers formed through DELTA. It would be useful for DELTA to provide leaflets and suggestions for parents on where to go next after DELTA programmes, so that the long term impact of the programme can be maximised. This support, which might be better provided by a partner agency or local community organisations, would have considerable potential to help promote local community development and empowerment.

Teachers also value the ability of DELTA to link with other programmes already running within schools. In particular teachers mentioned that material covered in the programme linked well with Reading Partnerships, the 'Love for Life' programme and citizenship courses. Schools have used the DELTA



programme to inform parents of particular programmes they are running with pupils, which provides opportunities for parents to discuss issues with their children:

We use DELTA as a springboard to launch other programmes like 'Love for Life', and we link it in with what the pupils are doing in school.

In secondary and grammar schools, some teachers felt that these linkages could have been further developed by having pupils attend some of the DELTA sessions, so that parents and their children would be more likely to discuss the issues raised:

Because we're linking in with programmes we do with the pupils, it might be good to have the pupils come along some nights. The course fits in very well with the citizenship programme we run with year 8 pupils.

Although pupil attendance does occur in some schools, this might be further encouraged for all or part of the programmes. School principals also recognised that DELTA helped them to develop linkages with other agencies and organisations so that both the school and the parents were better informed about who to contact regarding certain issues:

It brings outside agencies and people into schools and that's very worthwhile. Parents appreciate that there's one place they can go to where there can hear and access a breadth of information

In this context, DELTA provided the initial linkages and information with external agencies which could then be pursued by parents. As such, DELTA provides an important information point for parents about other services and resources available to them.

6.3.5 Impact on children

For the Early Years programme, teachers felt that DELTA had a clear impact on children whose parents had taken the course. At one level this was simply due to parents getting involved in the school and getting to know the teachers. Seeing their parents interest in the school had influenced the child's own perception of the school:

The fact that the parents come makes the child feel special and that their parents value them and the school.



Early years teachers also felt that the skills learnt by parents during the DELTA course, particularly the session on child behaviour, had a notable impact on children's behaviour in the classroom:

It helps create positive behaviour because parents know what they can be doing to help behaviour at home.

Teachers also felt that the signals sent to young children by their parents' attendance at a DELTA programme positively reinforced the idea that learning is important and enjoyable, helping to create an attitude of valuing school and education:

Any contact helps and is a bonus. Parents are enjoying meeting other parents and enjoying learning so it's bound to be good for the children.

For teachers in post primary schools the impact of the course on children whose parents had attended was not easily identifiable. Many teachers felt that any real impact would be long term, seen over the 5 or 7 years of the child's attendance at school. Particularly in terms of study skills, the DELTA programme was seen to be encouraging the establishment of good practice that would 'bear fruit' several years later. One principal did suggest the value of tracking children of DELTA participants to help identify the long-term benefits of participation in the programme. More immediately teachers did feel that the DELTA programme encouraged better and more meaningful communication between parents and their children:

We talk to the children about pastoral care, and DELTA encourages parents to talk to their kids about what they're learning in school. It means the parents are hearing the same message that the children are hearing.

6.3.6 Promotion

While teachers were extremely positive about their experiences of DELTA, there was a strong belief among those interviewed that the programme needed to be marketed much more strongly. Many teachers felt that there was a lack of awareness of the existence of the programme, and what it involved, even among teachers within the Education Boards. While principals are kept informed about the availability of courses, this information often does not always filter down to ordinary teachers:



They need to promote the course more every year. Sometimes schools and teachers don't really hear. There's a need to let ordinary teachers know more about the programme.

Since ordinary teachers are often those who help support and run new courses, it is important to ensure that they are aware of what DELTA does. While recognising that the promotion of individual DELTA programmes is essentially the responsibility of the host school, teachers also felt that if DELTA had a higher profile, parents would be more likely to attend:

The course is new to a lot of parents - it would have helped if they had already heard about it, or of there had been a pre-prepared booklet explaining what would happen on the course.

Suggestions included adopting a higher profile locally, through articles in local newspapers (photographs of groups are already included in newspapers, but teachers felt that these did not give a clear indication of what DELTA actually involved) and local radio stations, developing comprehensive information leaflets which could be given to parents on open days, and raising the profile of the DELTA logo. Teachers also felt that it was important for DELTA to be promoted to parents at every opportunity. While many schools already do this, several suggested that it would be good to have a DELTA presence at school open days and induction days, which the vast majority of parents attend, in order to emphasise the value of the course, explain the content and address any questions or concerns⁷:

The school has induction days at the beginning of every year to bring parents in. It would be good to have DELTA staff at those induction days to introduce the parents to what the course actually does.

Providing such initial contact, and reassuring those parents who might otherwise be intimidated by the course, would help to ensure greater take-up of DELTA services and might help to reach those individuals who are currently less likely to become involved. It might also be useful to develop a manual for those involved in the promotion of Delta to provide guidelines in how to encourage participation in courses.

6.3.7 Expansion

As with parents, the majority of teachers were extremely positive about their experiences of the DELTA programme. Teachers also believed, however, that due to the success of existing programmes, there was

⁷ While we are aware that DELTA already provides this when requested, perhaps they should ensure that all appropriate schools in the catchment area are aware of this.



considerable potential for the expansion of DELTA's existing services. The majority of these suggestions have already been outlined in section 6.2.9, however two other key ideas for development emerged from teachers. Firstly teachers felt that it was important to recognise that parents, particularly in lone parent households, are not the sole carers for children. Other friends and family and in particular grandparents often play a central part in a child's development. With changes in the nature of the nuclear family, several teachers felt that it was important to open up the courses more to people other than parents who also have a significant role in the child's life:

We had granddas come to the father's night. It might be an idea to open up to grandparents, since often they play a major role in childcare if the parents are working.

While other carers (including grandparents and minders) are invited to courses, there may be a need to target this group more specifically. As well as helping these carers feel more confident in their role, this might also encourage wider community involvement in the life of schools and playgroups.

Some teachers in rural areas also commented that while they were extremely supportive of DELTA and felt that it was an extremely valuable resource for their parents, the size of their school and the level of uptake by local parents could not justify running a new course each academic year. There was a suggestion that a cluster of schools in a local area could rotate the DELTA course, while making it open to all parents. This would reduce the pressure on small schools with limited resources and ensure that the DELTA course is offered every year. It might also, in some areas, provide opportunities for schools to work together on a cross-community basis. This cluster approach has been tried in some areas, but could be expanded into other areas where schools express an interest.

6.3.8 Recommendations

- DELTA should explore the possibility of expanding opportunities for one-to-one or small group training in people's homes, particularly for single parents.
- DELTA should provide leaflets and suggestions to parents at the end of courses to encourage the continuation of the relationships formed through the course.
- DELTA should promote its services further among class teachers.
- DELTA should raise its profile through articles in local newspapers, and local radio stations and also raise the profile of the DELTA logo.
- DELTA should develop comprehensive information leaflets which can be sent out to parents by schools.



- DELTA should attempt to ensure a DELTA staff presence at DELTA school open and induction days.
- DELTA should develop a manual for promoters.
- DELTA should widen the invitation to DELTA courses to grandparents and other individuals with a significant role in caring for children.
- DELTA should explore the possibility of rotating DELTA course between clusters of smaller schools on an annual basis.

6.4 Meeting Programme Objectives

- **To provide a positive experience for parents with children**

Virtually all parents consulted had had a positive experience of the DELTA programme. The courses provided are informal and relaxed and provide a supportive environment for learning and for forming relationships with other parents. Many saw the sessions as social events as much as learning events. Participation in the course also helped parents feel more confident and relaxed as parents.

- **To enhance the parents role as the prime educators of their children**

Participation in the course helps individuals to feel more empowered as parents. DELTA makes parents more aware of the role that they can have in their child's education, builds links with local educational providers, provides information on the nature of child development and provides practical suggestions for helping children to learn. This knowledge helps parents to feel more confident in participating in the education of their children.

- **To develop parenting skills and to build parents and children's self-esteem**

The knowledge provided through DELTA and the reassurance and advice given by DELTA staff helps parents to feel more relaxed about their relationship with children. The course encourages the creation of active, accepting and encouraging homes in which children feel valued and are encouraged to grow and learn.

- **To enhance the parent/promoter partnership**

DELTA helps to create stronger linkages between schools and parents. The course helps to build relationships and to open lines of communication between teachers and parents. As a result parents are more likely to speak to teachers about issues of concern. Parents also become more aware of the needs of schools, and of the ethos and approach to education within their child's school. In addition schools find the DELTA programme a valuable way of encouraging parents to become more involved in the life of the



school. In secondary and grammar schools in particular, DELTA helps to make parents more aware of material being covered in school which encourages better communication between parents and their children.

- **To promote the value of literature in the home**

DELTA encourages parents to read with their children, and to provide suitable reading material within the home. Parents are provided with lists of suitable books and advised on how best to increase their child's literacy.

- **To provide a framework by which parents will be aware of their children's needs**

DELTA programmes draw together information from a broad range of groups and agencies to provide key information on the needs of children. By providing this information in local schools and groups, parents are able to access a broad range of material in an accessible way. In addition the atmosphere created by DELTA staff helps parents to relax and participate so that they are more likely to benefit from the information provided.

- **To improve children's holistic development taking into account their ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, educational, health and physical needs**

DELTA's approach to child development seeks to encourage parents to take into account the broad range of needs of their children. Courses cover a range of topics including social, health and educational issues and parents are encouraged to help the children to develop in a holistic way.

- **To promote quality time provision between parents and children as a means of promoting bonding and empowering children**

Parents consulted said that they spent more time with their children as a result of the DELTA programme, that they were more relaxed in interacting with them and that they sought to encourage their child to grow through play. Many parents felt that participating in the DELTA programme had encouraged them to enjoy their children more. For parents of secondary or grammar school children, participation in the course had helped them feel more confident and open in communicating with their children, particularly in relation to sensitive topics, and that this in turn had helped them to build a better relationship with their teenager.

- **To help parents develop self awareness and self confidence in order to improve their capacity to support and nurture their children**



For some parents, participating in the DELTA programme had helped to reduce their sense of isolation (particularly for parents of babies and young children), and that meeting with other parents had made them feel more confident. In addition, participating in the course helps parents to feel more confident in their own parenting skills and were more relaxed at home with their children. For those parents, participating in the course has helped create a happier and more supportive home environment.



Chapter 7 Value for Money

7.1 Introduction

This chapter assesses the ways in which the DELTA Project provides value for money in relation to a number of effectiveness and efficiency indicators. It should be noted that value for money and, more specifically, added value, are issues that are not independent of partnership working, other good practice, and the quality of life outcomes and benefits derived from the programmes. It should therefore be recognised that there is a strong correlation between the operational effectiveness and benefits/outcomes described in chapters 5 and 6 respectively and the processes and outcomes described here.

7.2 Use of Resources and Funding Conditions

DELTA's income has been used strictly for their stated purpose as outlined in the grant conditions with 93.3 percent of all expenditure for the year 2003 being used for wages and salaries (77.5%), travel (9.9%), conference expenses (4.1%), and insurance (1.8%). Indeed there are substantial hidden costs which are subsumed by the SELB such as the provision of premises and reprographic service in Newry Teachers Centre and the use of schools for delivering programmes. There is also the provision of Board personnel who deliver many of the sessions at no cost to DELTA.

7.3 Finance Management

DELTA has effective systems of budgetary control, auditing, monitoring and accountability. These enable them to operate efficiently and ensure that they are able to meet their medium to long term commitments. Adequate systems are in place for the preparation and recording of salaries (which are administered by the accountants), cheque book security, payment of accounts and purchases. Financial expenditure is carefully monitored by the management team, itemised in the annual report, and are professionally audited to ensure that they accurately reflect the financial affairs of the project. As a company limited by guarantee, DELTA's management committee is responsible for maintaining proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and to enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with the



Companies Order. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

7.4 Use of Time

The time of all the staff is firmly focussed on key activities and set out in their job descriptions, and adequate supervision ensures that this is regularly reviewed and continues. Needs assessments have been utilised to provide a focus for this and although there has been an element of flexibility in relation to what some staff have been doing (for instance the Project Manager is currently covering for the vacant Upper Primary post while the Post Primary Project Worker is covering some of the Project Managers duties), on the whole staff time has been used for the purposes outlined in their funding conditions. Indeed there is substantial supervision (Sure Start Project Workers for instance have two line managers⁸) to ensure that individual workers time is well managed and focussed accordingly.

7.5 Ratio of Costs to Overheads

The ratio of management and overhead costs to service delivery costs is extremely low. In most cases there is little or no management costs to the Project (given that all the management committee members provide their time free of charge and/or as part of their professional responsibilities). As stated in 7.2 above there are substantial 'hidden' costs (to the SELB) with office space, reprographics and school space being provided free of charge. Indeed, there is very little available in the budget anyway for overheads which keeps these to an absolute minimum. As reported in paragraph 4.5 above, there is a deficit in terms of administrative and secretarial support and this should be brought to the attention of funders.

7.6 Competitiveness

Programmes are delivered free to participating parents and this is appropriate to ensure that they are able to target areas, groups, and individuals who are most in need. Although it is difficult here to compare salaries with other sectors/employers, it was felt by some of those on the committee that they are quite low (see paragraph 4.5 above). In addition input to programmes from specialist

⁸ DELTA line manages professional issues while Sure Start co-ordinates programmes and targets



personnel from other agencies/organisations tends to be free (provided as part of their job). The time of the management and local committee members is also provided free (making a considerable saving given the level of some of those involved). Under these circumstances, in addition to the factors mentioned in paragraph 7.5 above, it is safe to assume that programmes are delivered as competitively as possible in a professional manner.

7.7 Efficient Use of Other Resources

As mentioned above, premises are usually provided free. The Newry Teachers' Centre has proved to be adequate for the purposes of providing office space, although there is a shortage of storage space. School rooms are also provided free, although the standard of support service tends to vary between schools – for instance some provide tea and coffee while others do not – and this can make quite a difference in relation to the extent to which the programmes provide a positive experience for the parents. There is also an issue in relation to staff being on their own, at night, in premises without any form of supervision, sometimes in difficult areas. These issues could be resolved if better relationships were developed with participating schools, as discussed in paragraphs 5.2.1 and 6.2.6 above. The difficulties involved, in relation to using other premises such as local community centres, have already been discussed (in paragraph 5.3.5 above).

DELTA is able to use equipment, such as the reprographic service, that is already available in the Teachers' Centre and this brings considerable added value to the Project.

Project Staff have all been provided with lap-top computers and have access to SELB multi-media facilities and computer courses. This is important given the geographical spread of the project, and the need for staff to ensure that they stay in contact with each other and other agencies and organisations, for networking and assimilation and dissemination of relevant developments, information, and knowledge.

7.8 Skill Development Measures

Needs assessments are carried out with staff as part of their ongoing supervision and support. All members of staff have had their skill development needs assessed in the past six months. In addition Sure Start workers are able to avail of specific Sure Start training initiatives. However, it may be beneficial for the project to investigate ways of obtaining accreditation for the DELTA Promoters training.



7.9 Service Vulnerability

There are a number of contributory factors that may contribute to service vulnerability in the area and these are listed below:

1. Lack of Consistent/Core Funding – this is the most pressing issue in relation to a number of the difficulties identified with the project – and it is one that would need to be addressed in the foreseeable future. Mainstream funding would provide one means of resolving the issue – although it may raise others in relation to the project's independence.
2. Staff – there is a shortage of administrative/secretarial support, developmental support, and a lack of cover for vacant posts or staff on sick leave. There also appears to be a considerable turnover in staff in Newry and Mourne and a number of issues in relation to the insecurity of contracts and terms and conditions (particularly unsocial hours).
3. Meeting demand – the demand for DELTA programmes is substantial and likely to increase (see paragraphs 6.2.9 and 6.3.7 above). In order to meet this, particularly in the upper, post primary, and youth sectors, DELTA would need to increase its current capacity in order to meet future anticipated demand.
4. Working in difficult areas – there are quite a number of these throughout the Southern area. Some may be troublesome interface areas, such as in Portadown, others may be severely marginalised, such as Brownlow, others very divided communities, such as in Ballyward. Some may be very remote areas, such as in Clogher Valley, and others areas of acute disadvantage, as in Newry and Cookstown. Social exclusion is an added factor in many communities, such as in South Armagh, as well as in relation to communities of interest, such as ethnic minority communities and those with special needs or disabilities. These are all factors that require specialist attention and the ability of staff to work in a very sensitive and empathetic way. They may also, at times, prove to be difficult areas to work in, or even inaccessible, due to circumstances beyond the control of the DELTA project.
5. Geographical spread – Southern DELTA covers an equitable, and wide, geographical area, which is sometimes difficult to cover, particularly when posts are vacant or staff off on sick leave.
6. Goodwill – a considerable amount of what DELTA does is dependent on goodwill – particularly from the Boards and Trusts, as well as the schools and general public, and this would need to continue.



7.10 Meeting Funders Key Strategic/Business Targets

DELTA has been identified by senior SELB and SHSSB personnel as an important vehicle for enabling them to meet their key strategic and business targets. The strategic policy relevance of the project has already been outlined in some detail in chapter three. The SELB's strategy has an onus on working in partnership with parents while the programmes fit well with the SHSSB's Childcare Partnership's Childcare Plan, particularly with DELTA'S emphasis on a holistic approach to service delivery. DELTA's participation on the Early Years Forum also ensures that its activities complement others being provided through, or by funding agencies. It also plays a significant role in relation to meeting the requirements of New TSN in a number of ways, particularly through providing programmes with an emphasis on specific targeted as well as more general or universal issues. The partnership approach in itself also makes a considerable contribution to enabling funding agencies to meet their strategic, as well as more specific business, targets.

7.11 Performance Against Targets

As outlined in chapters five and six, DELTA has had considerable success in meeting its own key strategic and programme targets.

7.12 Satisfaction of Participants

As indicated in paragraph 6.2.1, and in internal feedback mechanisms employed by DELTA itself, the proportion of users who have indicated satisfaction with key aspects of the programmes, has been very high (almost 100%).

7.13 Successful Outcomes

The project can demonstrate a high level of successful outcomes in key areas of its work. Many of these are presented in chapter six. In addition internal records kept by partner agencies support this view. For instance, key personnel, in statutory agencies were able to offer anecdotal evidence of increases in parents encouraging children to use libraries and a more positive attitude to oral health as a result of the DELTA programmes.



In addition feedback from those who completed programmes indicated that they had enabled them to become much more confident and develop mutual support networks as outlined in paragraph 6.4 above.

7.14 Practice Development

DELTA has received considerable interest from other practitioners, and inspectors, involved in related fields of work who felt that its approach had much to offer in relation to informing current developments in early years practice. Of particular significance was the educare approach and its role as an agent for providing family support in a general, holistic way. In addition it was also seen as a useful means of accessing 'harder to reach' parents, as illustrated through its work with Travellers.

7.15 Alternatives

Paragraph 7.6 indicated that costs, for a comparable professional service, could not have been lower while paragraphs 7.2 and 7.5 indicated that overhead and management costs were minimal and that the bulk of resources were focused primarily on key activities and programme delivery. Given these indicators alone it is difficult to envisage how the outcomes that were achieved by the project could have been achieved more cost effectively elsewhere. In addition this is supported by the efficiency indicators referred to in paragraphs 7.3, 7.4 and 7.7. Added to this is the existing 'tried and tested' expertise and experience of the participating agencies as well as the significant added value that was brought to the initiative through its specific approach.

7.16 Added Value

Substantial added value can be demonstrated through the ways in which the project has operated. All of the indicators in relation to good partnership practice discussed in chapter four above, and the practice described in chapter six, would suggest that the outcomes achieved through the ways that the participating agencies and organisations were working together in the operation and delivery of DELTA, were significantly greater than what would have been achieved by them operating independently of each other. DELTA also provides an opportunity for those delivering



the programmes to signpost parents to other significant sources of support and information (as described in paragraph 6.3.4).

While the linkages created between different agencies and organisations and the networks generated have been crucial in realising this, DELTA has also enabled other agencies to provide support to parents who previously would not have been able, or reluctant, to avail of it. This has been achieved through a number of factors, such as; being able to provide the programmes free, providing transport (through Sure Start), facilitating interventions with 'hard to reach' families (through work with Travellers, using local; community centres/groups, providing programmes for smaller groups that would not previously have been viable (but perhaps more in need), accentuated focus on identified localised needs, and the provision of specialist services such as those mentioned in paragraph 4.3.3 and, of course, its educare, holistic approach.

Added value is also brought through the programmes social dimensions (as described in paragraph 6.4) and its contribution to 'community building' (as discussed in paragraphs 6.2.5 and 6.3.2). This is an area that could perhaps be enhanced through further developing linkages with, and connectedness within, local communities through, for instance, encouraging greater participation from community groups and/or parents in the project's development.

7.17 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the value for money aspects of the DELTA project in relation to a number of efficiency and effectiveness indicators. It has found that resources are used for their stated purpose as outlined in the grant conditions, finances are well managed, and the skilled time of workers is focused on key activities. The ratio of management and overhead costs to service delivery costs was low and overhead costs were kept to a minimum. It was also found that costs, for such a professional service, were competitive (free). The project was able to make efficient use of buildings (with a few provisos), technology and other resources, partly through using existing infrastructure and the goodwill of the SELB. Staff were also able to significantly increase their capacity to communicate and access information through the use of lap-top computers. While skill development measures had been taken to increase capacity, there were still some gaps, particularly in relation to having the DELTA Promoters training accredited.

A number of service vulnerability factors were identified including: unsatisfactory funding, continuation of goodwill, lack of replacement staff, staff contracts, inability of current capacity to meet future demand, and working in difficult areas and with groups with special needs.



The project has been contributing to meeting key targets set out in SELB and SHSSB strategic and business plans, particularly those referring to the development of holistic approaches of service delivery in meeting the needs of families with young children.

All the key targets in relation to strategic and programme objectives have been met, with the only exceptions being some of the priority areas of unmet need as set out in the Business Plan – lack of funding to pay for venues for programmes based in local community centres and lack of transport (discussed in paragraph 5.3). In addition there were very high levels of satisfaction expressed by users in relation to key aspects of programmes and the project has been able to demonstrate a high proportion of successful outcomes in key areas of work.

Professional standards and supervised practice were maintained throughout the project, which were informed within both the host agency and participating partners by a comprehensive list of appropriate policies and procedures, as outlined in paragraph 4.6. above.

There has been substantial interest in and attention paid to DELTA by those in related fields of work who have felt that its approach has much to offer in relation to informing current developments in early years practice, particularly through its educare approach and its role as an agent for providing family support in a general, holistic way. In addition it was also seen as a useful means of accessing 'harder to reach' parents.

It is difficult to conceive of any alternative means by which outcomes could have been achieved more cost effectively and, indeed, considerable added value has been generated through the project's approach and the synergy produced as a result of good partnership practice. In short, in terms of its efficiency, effectiveness and cost effectiveness, as well as its contribution to promoting equity, social inclusion and the welfare of families with young children, the project provides considerable value for money.



Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the conclusions of this report in conjunction with the recommendations for further action emanating from them.

8.2 Strategic Policy Context

DELTA's aims and objectives have been shown to be congruent with a number of strategic policy documents in relation to the field of early years, partnership, and voluntary sector work, particularly given its emphasis on promoting a holistic, 'educare' approach to addressing the needs of children at the earliest possible age, with a focus on working in partnership across departments and sectors. It also provides an additional means (as distinct from formal educational and social and health service interventions) to target those most in need, operating, as it does, throughout the whole southern area, using local centres where possible, and providing a specific 'tailored' service for ethnic minority groups.

8.3 Operational Effectiveness

DELTA is a well established project that has undergone considerable development over recent years. It is a registered charity and legally constituted company limited by guarantee with a board of directors (management committee) drawn from well qualified and experienced personnel in professions that are congruent with its aims and objectives. There are also local committees in each H&SS Trust area to ensure that the project is responsive to localised needs. However, although having developed effective partnerships with a wide range of statutory agencies and voluntary and community groups, the latter tends to be underrepresented on the main management committee. This could be addressed through continuing to actively encourage representatives of such organisations to become more involved in the project, particularly representatives from



parenting (some of whom may also be programme participants) and/or local community networking organisations ⁹(perhaps through powers of co-option).

Recommendation

DELTA should encourage more representation from other community organisations on its management committee

The project has demonstrated a number of areas of good practice in its partnership working, bringing different agencies and sectors together to work towards a shared vision and developing creative and innovative approaches to its services and activities. The structure of the project also ensures an optimum spread of its programmes throughout the catchment area, with specific provision being made to reach 'harder to reach' families – either due to their geographical isolation, personal circumstances, attitudes to educational programmes, or their membership of ethnic or linguistic minority groups. The collaborative working with a wide range and number of interest groups and agencies, as well as the development of strong relationships with certain schools, have all contributed to the project's effectiveness in being proactive to particular needs, as well as maintaining, and developing, its more mainstream programmes. The partnership arrangements also ensure greater openness and accountability. Through all of this, DELTA makes a significant contribution to promoting a holistic, preventative approach to parenting programmes that generates substantial added value over and above the sum of the project's individual parts.

There are a number of ongoing staffing issues, mainly concerned with a lack of consistency in contracts, due mainly, to the plethora of funding sources. It is therefore important that contracts of employment should be reviewed in the near future, in conjunction with partner/funding agencies, with a view to establishing a more consistent and coherent funding environment. It is also apparent that the project has a lack of Human Resource support for helping it to address staffing issues, and it is recommended that DELTA should approach the Labour Relations Agency for advice/support in regard to these issues.

The project was found to have satisfactory policies and procedures in relation to a range of important issues, although some staff were unfamiliar with some of these. This should easily be addressed through reminding staff of those that are applicable.

⁹ Although we understand that the Confederation of Community Groups, Newry was unable to commit itself to formal representation in the past and does continue to provide advice and support if requested.



Recommendations

Contracts of employment should be reviewed in the near future, in conjunction with partner/funding agencies, with a view to establishing a more consistent and coherent funding environment.

The project should consider the co-option of an appropriate person with a Human Resource background unto the management committee.

DELTA should approach the Labour Relations Agency for support in relation to addressing human resource/staffing issues.

The project should explore the possibility of linking all salaries to NJC pay scales.

Staff should be given further opportunities to familiarise themselves with all relevant policies and procedures.

DELTA has effective systems for planning and reviewing its work and this informs a planning process that has led to the production of a strategy document and business plan in recent years. However, the Project would benefit from measuring some of the longitudinal impact of its work, perhaps through tracking the development/experiences of a small sample of (voluntary) participants.

Recommendation

DELTA should consider measuring some of the longitudinal impact of its work, perhaps through tracking the development/experiences of a small sample of (voluntary) participants.

It is apparent that a number of significant developments have occurred in the project in recent years, and it has had considerable success in meeting its key strategic and business targets. However, the previous business plan has now become somewhat dated and the next two to three years will be a crucial period for DELTA, with a number of key decisions needing to be taken and implemented. Many of these pertain to the issues and recommendations identified in this report. We feel it would therefore be beneficial for the project to produce an up-to-date business plan, which will reflect its current position and inform and guide its future operational development. In addition, it would benefit the project if it ensured that an external evaluation, of this nature, was carried out at least every five years.



Recommendations

DELTA should up-date its business plan to inform its future development, set targets, and suggest a strategy for securing appropriate funding.

DELTA should ensure that another external evaluation is carried out no later than in five years time.

8.4 Effectiveness in Meeting Objectives

DELTA has demonstrated considerable effectiveness in meeting its strategic objectives. It has ensured widespread access to its programmes with a specific focus on children and families in need, taking into account cultural and ethnic needs. However, it may be useful to focus on particular school personnel in order to promote the value of DELTA and encourage them to more actively encourage parents, especially those 'harder to reach' parents to avail of the programmes. The project also delivers programmes in both urban and rural communities, including those where little or no Early Years services exist.

DELTA networks and collaborates with other parenting programmes and family support services and has had considerable success in raising the awareness amongst all the relevant agencies and the general public of the importance of developing parenting skills through programmes such as DELTA. The project also ensures that its programmes are targeted equitably throughout the Southern area and that they are planned and delivered using a holistic educare approach – an approach to which those engaged in the field of Early Years work attach considerable value. DELTA also keeps well up-to-date and informed by research and evaluation findings in order to regularly review its practice and improve service quality.

Recommendations

DELTA should encourage particular teachers to more actively encourage parents, especially those 'harder to reach' parents to avail of the programmes.

DELTA has also made considerable progress in addressing key priorities and areas of unmet need. It has addressed the deficits in parenting programme provision in the Upper Primary and Post Primary sectors and has developed some programmes with the youth sector. It has also made



significant progress in developing networking opportunities with other agencies and organisations, enabling this to be very much an integrated part of its work and grounding the project much more securely in the community. Lack of short stay crèche provision, funding for parenting programmes based in local community centres, and lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes remain difficult issues but could perhaps be addressed through seeking advice and/or support from the Early Years Forum, the SELB, or local H&SS Trusts. DELTA should also seek ways of having the DELTA Promoters training accredited. Finally, although DELTA has been successful in raising its profile throughout the area, this could be made more effective through securing funding for the production of an updated promotional/informative leaflet.

Recommendations

DELTA should seek advice and/or support from the Early Years Forum, SELB, or local H&SS Trusts in relation to addressing the issues of lack of short stay crèche provision, funding for parenting programmes based in local community centres, and lack of transport to facilitate travel to programmes.

DELTA should also seek ways of having the DELTA Promoters training accredited.

DELTA should consider raising its profile throughout the area, perhaps through the production of an updated promotional/informative leaflet.

8.5 Impact on Parents

Parents have on the whole found DELTA programmes a very positive experience. As well as the information contained in them they also found that the programmes helped to increase their self as well as parental confidence. There were also a number of quality of life outcomes identified by participants and it was also sometimes felt that the programmes contributed to community building. It was also felt that the programmes were making a significant contribution to improving relationships between parents and the schools involved.



8.6 Impact on Children

Parents were generally positive about the impact which their participation in the programme had on their children such as helping to enhance their children's communication, improving their children's relationships, and improving their children's performance at school (although they were less sure about the latter, perhaps indicating the long-term nature of the outcomes of the programmes). Parents also felt they were spending more quality time with their children as a result of the learning generated through DELTA as well as enhancing their children's ability to learn through play more independently. For participants in the post primary programmes it was felt that the programme had helped them to relate better to their teenage children, and had made them more comfortable in talking to their children about issues such as drugs, alcohol, peer pressure and sex. Some parents also expressed the view that participating in the course gave them greater influence with their children and helped to make them more aware of what happens in school, contributing to stronger links between teachers and parents and, through this, children and school.

8.7 Accessibility and Publicity

Participating parents in general felt that DELTA programmes were very accessible and that course content, venues and times were suitable. However, it is inevitably very difficult to meet the needs of everyone in a diverse group of parents and some did find it difficult, or were unable to, attend. There was strong support for the creation of a locally based directory which could list all courses happening in a particular region over a four to six month period, including the titles of individual sessions. It was felt that this would give greater flexibility for individuals or couples with tight schedules and little free time, and would thus ensure greater participation in programmes. The creation of such a directory would also allow those parents who have participated in one programme the opportunity to attend another if they have several children of different ages. The main criticism that emerged in relation to the courses was that parents felt the standard short series of sessions could be expanded to include other areas. Some parents would have liked to explore some individual topics in greater depth, and would have liked brief 'refresher' sessions at the beginning of each academic year. Although many schools would not have the support to run such individual programmes, there may be a place for a series of regionalised courses for this, perhaps through DELTA using church organisations and by local youth and community centres to reach parents who might not be willing to attend courses in the school.



Recommendations

DELTA should allow time to deal with immediate parental concerns, and ensure parents know where to go for support if the course has raised issues about which they need further information.

DELTA should provide contact details for local colleges and adult education providers at the end of courses, to encourage people to get involved in other courses.

DELTA should create an area based directory of courses, listing all courses and individual sessions happening in a 4-6 month period.

DELTA should explore the possibility of region based courses which explore topics raised in short courses in greater depth.

8.8 Impact on Schools

Almost all schools stated that they had a positive experience of running DELTA courses. Project staff were commended as being both easy to work with, helpful and good communicators. Teachers were impressed both with how DELTA helped schools to organise programmes, and by the quality of the training delivered. The willingness of project staff to work alongside schools, to listen to their needs and concerns and to adapt course content to suit the needs of individual schools and parents had made the course more beneficial. It also helped schools to maximise the benefits of the course and to ensure that DELTA was more likely to benefit those parents that schools hoped to reach.

Teachers felt that the parents of young children in particular were seen to be more confident in interacting with their children, and in becoming involved as partners in the education process and that parents who had negative attitudes to school and education, based on their own experiences, were made more comfortable with the school environment. Some teachers felt that young lone parents were less likely to attend due to the stigma involved and the difficulty in accessing childcare.

One of the most important benefits for schools of running the DELTA programme has been the building of relationships between the school and parents, particularly for programmes running at the beginning of the academic year, and in a child's first year in the school.



Recommendations

DELTA should provide leaflets and suggestions to parents at the end of courses to encourage the continuation of the relationships formed through the course.

DELTA should promote its services further among class teachers.

DELTA should raise its profile through articles in local newspapers, and local radio stations and also raise the profile of the DELTA logo.

DELTA should seek funding to develop updated comprehensive information leaflets and which can be sent out to parents by schools.

DELTA should attempt to ensure a DELTA staff presence at DELTA school open and induction days.

DELTA should widen the invitation to DELTA courses to grandparents and other individuals with a significant role in caring for children.

DELTA should explore the possibility of rotating DELTA courses between clusters of smaller schools on an annual basis.

8.9 Meeting Programme Objectives

It was found that DELTA had achieved its programme objectives in relation to:

- providing a positive experience for parents with children;
- enhancing the parents role as the prime educators of their children;
- developing parenting skills and to building parents and children's self-esteem;
- enhancing the parent/promoter partnership;
- promoting the value of literature in the home;
- providing a framework by which parents will be aware of their children's needs;



- improving children's holistic development taking into account their ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, educational, health and physical needs;
- promoting quality time provision between parents and children as a means of promoting bonding and empowering children;
- helping parents develop self awareness and self confidence in order to improve their capacity to support and nurture their children.

8.10 Value for Money

DELTA provides value for money in relation to a wide range of indicators. It was found that resources are broadly used for their stated purpose as outlined in the grant conditions, finances are well managed, and the skilled time of workers is focused on key activities. The ratio of management and overhead costs to service delivery costs was low and overhead costs were kept to a minimum. It was also found that costs, for such a professional service, were competitive (free). The project was able to make efficient use of buildings (with a few provisos), technology and other resources, partly through using existing infrastructure and the goodwill of the SELB. Staff were also able to significantly increase their capacity to communicate and access information through the use of lap-top computers. While skill development measures had been taken to increase capacity, there were still some gaps, particularly in relation to recognised parenting qualifications.

A number of service vulnerability factors were identified including: unsatisfactory funding, continuation of goodwill, lack of replacement staff, staff contracts, inability of current capacity to meet future anticipated demand, and working in difficult areas.

The project has been contributing to meeting key targets set out in SELB and SHSSB strategic and business plans, particularly those referring to the development of holistic approaches to service delivery in meeting the needs of families with young children.

All the key targets in relation to strategic and programme objectives have been met, with the only exceptions being some of the priority areas of unmet need as set out in the Business Plan. In addition there were very high levels of satisfaction expressed by users in relation to key aspects of programmes and the project has been able to demonstrate a high proportion of successful outcomes in key areas of work.



Professional standards and supervised practice were maintained throughout the project, which were informed within both the host agency and participating partners by a comprehensive list of appropriate policies and procedures.

There has been substantial interest in and attention paid to DELTA by those in related fields of work who have felt that its approach has much to offer in relation to informing current developments in early years' practice, particularly through its educare approach and its role as an agent for providing family support in a general, holistic way. In addition it was also seen as a useful means of accessing 'harder to reach' parents.

It is difficult to conceive of any alternative means by which outcomes could have been achieved more cost effectively and, indeed, considerable added value has been generated through the project's approach and the synergy produced as a result of good partnership practice. In short, in terms of its efficiency, effectiveness and cost effectiveness, as well as its contribution to promoting equity, social inclusion and the welfare of families with young children, the project provides considerable value for money.

Recommendations

The project needs to develop a comprehensive funding policy.

DELTA needs to pursue a policy whereby sufficient replacement staff will be available whether through posts vacant, or existing staff being on leave of absence.

Current capacity needs to be increased in order to meet future anticipated demand, particularly in regard to providing support staff including someone able to take responsibility for some of the functions of the Director (perhaps a Deputy Director).



APPENDIX



Appendix 1: Parents Questionnaire

DELTA Community Parenting Project

Evaluation Questionnaire for Parents

1(a). Please indicate, by ticking the appropriate box, which of the following DELTA services you have used.

DELTA Services	Please tick if used
1. DELTA Early Years Programme	
2. DELTA Upper Primary Programme	
3. DELTA Post Primary Programme	
4. DELTA Sure Start	
5. DELTA Baby Programme	
6. DELTA Toy Library	
7. The Importance of Fathers in Parenting	
8. DELTA Baby Sitting Course	
9. DELTA Open College Course	

1(b) How did you find out **at first** about DELTA programmes (please tick box)

From DELTA worker	
From DELTA office	
From social services	
From parent and toddler group/ play group	
From community centre/worker	
From family/friends/neighbours	
From school	
From health worker	
From local press/newspaper	
Other source (please say what it was)	



2. Please write the number or numbers (from the list in 1(a)), of the DELTA services that you did not use but would have liked to use if you had known about them, or which you would be interested in using in the future.

3. Below are a number of statements relating to the programme(s) you undertook. Could you please indicate, by circling the appropriate number, how strongly you agree or disagree with each of them?

(a) *The programme was well planned and organised.* Do you:

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. don't know/have no opinion
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

Please give comments/reasons for your answer.

(b) *The programme was well presented/delivered.* Do you:

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. don't know/have no opinion
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly

Please give comments/reasons for your answer.

(c) *I was satisfied with the advice/information given to me by the DELTA course tutors.* Do you:

1. agree strongly
2. agree
3. don't know/have no opinion
4. disagree
5. disagree strongly



Please give comments/reasons for your answer.

4. Looking back on your experiences of the DELTA programme(s), please indicate by ticking the appropriate box how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It made me more confident as a parent					
It improved my communication with my child/children					
It increased my awareness of child health issues					
It increased my knowledge of educational issues					
It improved my relationship with the teacher(s)					
It increased my knowledge of child development					
It helped improve relationships within my family					
It improved my self confidence					
It developed my relationships with other parents					
It has improved my quality of life (please give details below)					

Please comment



5. Looking back on how your participation in the course has impacted upon your children, please indicate by ticking the appropriate box how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It helped me manage my child's behaviour					
It helped me to enhance my child's communication skills					
It helped me to enhance my child's numeracy skills					
It helped me to increase my child's ability to learn through play					
It helped me to improve my child's relationships with others					
It has improved my child's awareness of health					
It has improved my child's performance at school					
It has improved my child's quality of life (please give details below)					

Please comment

6. How satisfied were you with the ways in which you were personally treated by DELTA staff? (please tick one box)



Very satisfied	
Satisfied	
Don't know/not sure	
Dissatisfied	
Very dissatisfied	

Please comment

7 (a) How suitable did you find the course venue?

Very suitable	
Suitable	
Don't know/not sure	
Not suitable	
Very unsuitable	

Please comment

7 (b) How suitable did you find the course content?

Very suitable	
Suitable	
Don't know/not sure	
Not suitable	
Very unsuitable	

Please comment

7 (c) How suitable did you find the course times?

Very suitable	
Suitable	



NOTES:



DELTA Community Parenting Programme
Southern Education and Library Board
Newry Teacher's Centre, Downshire Rd, Newry, BT34 1EE
Tel: 028 3026 2357 Fax: 028 3036 4211

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