HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

**A BRIEF GUIDE TO CONDUCTING USER SATISFACTION
SURVEYS FOR LOCAL SURE START PROGRAMMES**

by

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NESS

NATIONAL EVALUATION OF SURE START

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1. Introduction:

User Satisfaction and why it needs to be explored

Public services are no good if they are not used. Sometimes people have no choice but to use a service which is geared to their essential needs, but which doesn't meet them very well: then they tend to moan about it. Sure Start services have been designed in response to moans from the past: moans about services that were hard to get to, were insensitive to the complex demands that parents have to cope with, and seemed to be more about fitting in with a large number of separate, professionally-run departments than in making life better for young families.

The Sure Start Unit's Requirements
One of the basic aims of Sure Start is the provision of services that parents and children will want to use. And finding out if they are using them will be one way of knowing if local Sure Start Programmes are getting it right. The Sure Start Guidance asks Programmes to report on the proportion of parents (with children under 5) who are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with services for young children.

To start with, this is a matter of counting. How many parents and children live in the Sure Start area? How many distinct services are available to them? How many people use each service? How often do they use it? How sustained is that use? Do people keep coming back for more, or do they come once and never again? Or come for a while and stop? If they stop, is there an external reason (the child started school, for example) or an internal reason (the child became bored with the activities, the parent fell out with someone, shopping was more fun)? . Information about the area will be required too, and much of this is already available. You can get help on how to find and use information about families from existing sources on the National Evaluation of Sure Start website: *www.NESS.bbk.ac.uk*

These are the kinds of questions that Sure Start Programmes will be investigating in local evaluations, using information collected through the regular monitoring of service use. Satisfaction with services is of prime interest to local Programmes and most are asking questions about it in local evaluations. With careful planning the User Satisfaction Surveys can be integrated into the local evaluation, and provide useful extra learning about the Programme and the way it is experienced by families.

We can learn something about satisfaction with Sure Start services from the standard monitoring techniques which all local Programmes are using to collect statistics for the Sure Start Unit. If the number of existing families or parents seen in the monthly statistics goes up, this will be a good first indication that services are getting it right. If numbers go down regularly, this indicates that people are not coming back for more services, and should be a cause for concern. But local Programmes will need more sensitive indications of satisfaction with services, so that they can address any moans that users may have, and adapt and improve services in response to them.

Besides this good reason for investigating user satisfaction, there is an overall commitment by government to finding out whether people are satisfied with the

services that are provided for them. In Sure Start, this commitment is embodied in a Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) target, which is part of the contract between each local Sure Start Programme and the Sure Start Unit. *(See Annex 2 in the document Planning and Delivering Sure Start).*

"Seventy five percent of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support".

In this target the services referred to are all services to families with young children in the Sure Start programme, not just those often defined as 'family support' in other contexts.

Reports containing evidence on the extent to which targets have been achieved will be made in annual progress reports (Form M5) which have to be submitted to the Sure Start Unit by 1st September each year. But to start with, each local programme must submit start point information for each target in their Delivery Plan, against which subsequent annual evidence can be compared. The aim is steady improvement.

For the User Satisfaction target outlined above, the Sure Start Unit will expect start point information in the Delivery Plan, which will be updated once every three years.
- Start-Point Requirement: a clear picture of current issues and strengths in the area, based on an assessment of the needs of young children and their families and the take-up of existing services.
A User Satisfaction Survey will show what parents think of existing services and help to identify what needs to be change.

- Three-Year Update: re-visiting the question of what parents think of services once Sure Start is established is a way to measure change.
A repeated User Satisfaction Survey will indicate where improvements have occurred and where more needs to be done, or adjustments are required. The findings will help to fine tune your Sure Start Programme.

Conducting a User Satisfaction Survey requires considerable time, effort and cost. It is important to consider whether you can use the opportunity to collect information beyond that required by the Sure Start Unit, in order to inform your local practice and the evaluation of your Programme. This Guide is written for Sure Start Managers and local Programme Management boards to help them choose how they will tackle the task.

Who are 'users' in a Sure Start Programme?
The long-term aims of Sure Start are all about improving prospects for children. Some investigation of what children think of the local services can be carried out, and it is really worth considering whether your Programme can tackle this, even on a small scale. Section 13 of this Guidance gives some ideas about ways you can do it.

The main target for the User Satisfaction research suggested in this publication, however, is parents and carers of 0-5 year olds living in the local Programme area. Parents of 4-year olds are included, because they will have had recent experience of using services for the 0-3s. Although this is likely to mean birth parents, and

especially mothers in many cases, don't forget that other carers, including grand-parents and especially fathers, may all have made a choice about using a service. They will need to be included in the population you research.

You will not be collecting information from practitioners for this piece of work though any follow-up research based on a study of user satisfaction may need to do so.

What does 'satisfaction' mean?
The process of designing and setting up a Sure Start Programme means that parents in the local area will have had their expectations raised about what the programme will do for them and their children. An essential part of designing a Delivery Plan and implementing it, is consulting with and involving parents. They will have been telling you what they want, often in the light of services they have experienced already. The Sure Start Partnership will have incorporated parents' views on existing services, and on services they need, but do not have but would like, into the design of the local Programme.

- Programmes still in the planning stage can use this Guide to develop a survey that can be used as part of the consultation process, as well as collecting start point data for the Delivery Plan.
- Programmes which are already up and running will need to refer to the results of the consultation exercises carried out for the Delivery Plan and continued as an intrinsic part of the local Sure Start Programme.

Take the issues about services which arose from the consultation – things like 'The clinic is in a cold hall', 'There is nobody to give advice on children's behaviour' – and formulate these into questions about venues and services. An example of how to do it is given below.

Example:
In Southampton Central, the Sure Start planning team heard from parents that they were particularly concerned about the dirty condition of existing play areas. Questions about satisfaction with individual Sure Start services, or with the overall Sure Start programme, in this area, will need to include questions about levels of cleanliness, including perceptions of improvement. These could take the form of a series of statements with which users of facilities are asked to agree:

"Sunny Fields playground is:

- often dirty and unsafe for small children
- sometimes dirty and unsafe
- usable but still needs improvements
- usually clean and pleasant
- always a pleasure to use"

It is easy to score such choices, both for Sunny Field and for other Sure Start facilities, and to combine them in a rating for the Sure Start Programme as a whole.

It is important to remember that perfection is hard to achieve when you are trying to deliver services in new ways, so perfect scores for satisfaction will not be likely. Remember too that users, given the opportunity to voice their opinions, alight on shortcomings before they note improvements. Shifts towards higher levels of satisfaction will be what you are aiming for. And ratings will give you clues as to where the Programme needs to direct its energy to make improvements: Sunny Fields playground may be clean and pleasant these days, but the community hall may rate much lower in comparison, and need some attention.

- Sure Start is a learning programme, so look upon these investigations as something you are doing <u>with</u> parents, not as a test or confrontational exercise.

Two Stages
- Sure Start Programmes will need to develop *baseline information* about User Satisfaction stage in the Programme area.
- They will then need to plan for a *follow-up study* which will be carried out three years later. Both types of enquiry will share the essential features of User Satisfaction surveys described in this Guide.

However, there can be a problem: exactly which services are you investigating at the baseline? To produce comparative material, which tests whether or not Sure Start has had an effect, you need to ask similar questions at the baseline stage and in later surveys. Most Programmes may be able to undertake the baseline study only after some months of operation. Some may decide to do it before approval, as part of the community consultation.

If your Programme is well established and you have not carried out a base-line survey, use the information collected in the consultation stage and analyse it by grouping the findings under the key service headings for Sure Start. These are:
-outreach and home-visiting
-support for families and parents
-access to good quality play, learning and childcare
-primary care and health
-support for families with special needs.
If, under the last heading, they were saying that it took a long time to get a child assessed; that they had to tell the same story to many different practitioners; that they never saw the same member of staff twice; that the journey to the assessment centre was long and expensive – that will give you the clues to the kind of questions that need to be asked in the follow-up survey.

2. Planning a User Satisfaction Survey

Project Plan
Survey work requires considerable forethought. It is a good idea to start from the date when you need to use the findings from your survey, and work backwards to include all the stages listed below. The project should be 'owned' by the Sure Start Partnership, though you may decide to set up a special group to plan and manage it, or base it in an existing working group. Parents will therefore be able to contribute to the

process, and comment on the methods. The aim will be to make sure that parents can participate in the survey and understand why it is being carried out.

In particular it will need to fit in with other research that is being conducted in the local Programme, - like other evaluation work and non-Sure Start research which may be taking place in the area.   The aim will be to not duplicate information collection and not add to a sense of 'research overload'. Find out about research projects being carried out in your area, by other organisations and initiatives.

The best way to avoid overload could be by amalgamating the User Satisfaction Survey with other investigations, like the local Evaluation. (Ways to do this are examined later in this publication. See Section 13) or by joining up with research being carried out by other organisations or initiatives

Plan Contents
Areas the partnership and / or the planning group will need to consider are:

- *When* the User Satisfaction Survey will take place. Once you have chosen a time for your Baseline User Satisfaction Survey, plan the next one for three years on. Avoid difficult times like summer holidays and half-term. Some Programmes will plan a survey before the Sure Start Programme is approved, to set the scene for the Programme (their baseline).

- *Which* aspects of the local Programme will be examined. Sure Start is a multi-functional programme with a wide range of services. Although it is tempting to look at everything, it will be more effective to select aspects of the Programme which are illustrative of the whole approach. In considering the focus of your survey, don't forget the five core areas of Sure Start activity: -   outreach and home visiting
  - support for families and parents
  - support for good quality play, learning and childcare
  - primary and community health care
  - support for children and parents with special needs.

  You can ask questions about the general approach and style of each of the core services and you could select some specific services within the core areas to supplement the overall findings.

- *How long* the process will take – and whether it can be merged with other planned studies. You will need a *timetable* which should take account of the planning of the survey, the commissioning process (if applicable), the design of the methods and the questionnaire, the collection of material from parents and carers, the analysis of the information you collect, making judgements based on findings, the scope and kind of circulation you will give to the results, and the policy decisions you will base upon them.

  It is a good idea to work backwards in constructing this timetable, from when the Partnership will consider the results of the User Satisfaction Survey, and make decisions based on it. The Sure Start Unit requires information by September 1st of the relevant year of reporting – after three years of

operation.You may also want to plan for findings to feed into your local evaluation cycle of reporting and planning for future years of operation.That will mean that you always have your eye on the fact that this research will be used to improve your Sure Start Programme, not to be simply filed away.

You will need to think about the specific elements of the Survey. These will include:

- ***How many people will need to be surveyed:*** this should be
a figure that gives authority to your findings. You will need to know how many parents of children under five there are in your area*. **(See Section 3 for advice on choosing a sample size and sampling methods.)***

- ***How 'hard to reach' groups will be included***: you will need ways of making sure that parents who might find participation difficult are enabled to do so. This may include the following groups:
    - very young, lone or isolated parents
    - parents who are disabled
    - parents who have mental health problems
    - parents whose mother tongue is not English
    - parents who are not functionally literate
    - parents from some minority ethnic groups.

    You will need to plan how you will reach these groups and how many people will constitute a proper representation of them. There are some ideas to help you do this in ***Section 4.*** Since it is particularly important to Sure Start that such parents are reached, you may decide to weight your survey sample in order to make sure you hear their voices. There is advice on how to so this in ***Section 3.***

- ***The research methods.*** A survey of this type is based on a questionnaire. How will you design this and agree the questions? What method will be used to apply the questionnaire: sending it by post, telephoning users, getting together groups to answer it together? These and other choices are outlined in ***Section 6.***

- ***Who will carry out the research?*** Staff of the local Programme or agents, commissioned by the Partnership? In User Satisfaction research it often makes sense to use non-Programme staff Users are likely to know and have relationships with Programme personnel, and this can affect their responses. If the research is to be carried out by Sure Start employees, those employees should be clearly identified, the tasks involved in the User Satisfaction research should be included in their job descriptions, and sufficient time allowed for them to carry out the tasks. More information can be found in ***Section 8.***

    Where agents are used they commonly include:
    - research units in institutions of higher education
    - consultancies which specialise in survey work
    - consultancies which specialise in social research
    - voluntary sector organisations, local and national

    An agent may undertake the User Satisfaction survey as part of a broader brief – perhaps as part of the evaluation of the local Programme.

(See Section 8 and Guidance document "Getting Started" on the NESS website for guidelines on choosing external agents.)

- *Budget* All research has cost implications. Besides worker time, these could include expenses to enable parents to participate, like resources for translations and other facilities; materials for information collection; computer time for analysis; costs of reporting on the survey, and feeding results back to parents, the Partnership, other practitioners in the area and the wider community.

Agreeing the Project Plan

After discussion, the Plan will need to be ratified by the whole Partnership. User Satisfaction surveys should be repeated at regular intervals in the life of the Sure Start Programme, and it is most effective if the methodology is also repeated, to allow for comparison over time. The existence of a clear, written plan will make it simpler to repeat the exercise in the future.

3. Sampling

The idea of surveying all the users of a local Sure Start Programme is an attractive one, but not very practical: it is liable to take a lot of time, money and effort. It makes sense to take a sample of users for a User Satisfaction Survey because:

it provides results quickly

it can be quite cheap

the results will stand up – providing the sample is taken carefully and the numbers are sufficient.

For your User Satisfaction Survey you will be taking a *probability sample* of **all** the parents of 0-5s in the area, **whether they use Sure Start services or not.**

Probability Sampling

This means using an *objective* method to select the parents you will survey – such as drawing names at random from a hat - not simply choosing those who are able and willing to take part. *Random sampling* of this kind does give everyone who is eligible to take part a fair chance of selection, but you may get a bias towards a particular type of respondent. For example, you may find that nearly all the names you draw from the hat are of single-parent families, but you know that these families are a smaller proportion of all the families in the area.

There is always a potential for error in sampling, because you will be selecting from a larger population and the sample will usually be different from the population. This difference is a random result of sampling. In general, the larger the sample, the more likely it will be to represent the true population. You will want a large enough sample to keep the error low – but there are other sources of error in sampling, including unclear eligibility criteria, badly designed and administered surveys and poor response rates.

An example of Probability Sampling is given below

> **Example**
>
> The Sure Start Programme gave a number to every household in the area with children under 5 (818 households), put all these numbers in a hat and picked out every fifth name. (The Partnership had decided that 20% of total eligible households would be a give a fair insight into the opinion of parents.) This meant that the User Satisfaction Survey would be conducted with 164 households**.**

Ways to Take a Sample
There are many ways to take a sample. In the following list, the first suggestions are for the more objective ways, the later suggestions are for progressively less rigorous methods. This guidance gives only a brief description of each method. You can get more detailed help from publications listed at the end of this publication, or from experts in your partner agencies. Remember that you will need to ensure that ethnic and other minority groups are represented in your sample, so you will need to weight your sample to ensure their inclusion, by using stratified or quota methods described below.

1. Simple Random Sampling
A Simple Random Sample is one in which each person has an equal chance of being selected from the population.

There are 500 families with children aged 0-5 in the Programme area. You want to survey 100 (20%). You place their names in any order. Each name is given a number from 1 – 500. Using a table of random numbers *(See Appendix 1)* you select the first 100 people whose numbers show up on the table. Once the sample has been selected, these families are the only ones from which you will want information. You will not be able to send questionnaires to more households or interview more people.

2. Stratified Random Sampling
To take a Stratified Random Sample you first subdivide the population into subgroups or strata and select a given number or proportion of respondents from each to get the sample.
You want to survey 100 families, but you want to ensure that the whole Sure Start geographic area is covered. You divide the area into smaller geographic districts, and divide the 500 families between these. Then you randomly choose a given number of parents from each sub-group.

3. Systematic Sampling
In this method of Sampling, every nth person is chosen.

Take the list of 500 families, from which you want to select 100, choose a number between 1 and 10, (say five) and select every fifth name on the list. (You can randomly select a number to start (say seven), beginning with the seventh name on the list and counting and choosing every fifth name thereafter.) The success of this method depends on the list you start with. Often these are already arranged in some pattern, which may interfere with the scope of the selection.

4. Quota Sampling

This is similar to Stratified Sampling: the population of parents of 0-5s in the Sure Start area is divided into smaller groups proportionally. This is a good way to make sure you reach appropriate numbers of people from minority ethnic groups.

Divide your total list into subgroups, and select from these in specific proportion. For example, you might decide that a useful sub-division of parents would be by age of youngest child in Sure Start age group. Then you could construct a table like that below to give you the number of parents from each group you will need:

Total number of families with children aged 0-5: 500
Goal of User Satisfaction Survey: to reach 20% (100) parents

Age of Y'gest child	Total numbers	Proportion	No. in survey
0 – 12 months	130	26%	26
13months – 2 years	260	52%	52
25 months – 3 years	110	22%	22

Similarly, you can construct quotas for ethnic groups in the community:
Total number of families with children aged 0 –5: 740
Goal of User Satisfaction Survey: to reach 30% of parents

Ethnic group	Total numbers (families)	Proportion	No. in survey
African –Caribbean	37	5%	11
Indian	136	18%	40
Chinese	12	2%	4
Bengali	80	11%	24
Pakistani	211	29%	65
White British	264	35%	78

Sample Size

How big is big enough? There is a whole science of sample size involving subjects like standard error, confidence intervals, null hypotheses and power. If you are interested in these, you can find out more from some of the books about survey design listed at the end of this Guidance.

In investigating User Satisfaction with services offered by a local Sure Start Programme, however, a rule of thumb size would be a figure between 15% and 30% of eligible parents in the area. This means that surveys will be larger if your programme has higher numbers of families with small children living in the area. If you have 1000 families, you may be surveying up to 300 parents. When looking at satisfaction with specific services that are components of the whole Sure Start Programme, the percentage of parents you will need to survey will be higher,if quite small numbers are involved. For example, where a parenting education programme is used by 12 families at a time for a 10 week course , and there are three courses a year, then you will have 36 families who can express a view of this service, and it would be wise to survey as many as possible: at least 75% or 27 people.

4.Response Rate

Not every parent will be happy to be surveyed. They may be, but if you send them a questionnaire they may forget to complete it, or lose it, or decide not to fill it in. Or they may be fed up with people asking them questions and refuse to participate. So though you may have a clear idea of the size of sample you need to provide clear results, the response rate will be the number who actually respond, divided by the target number. If the target for our Sure Start Programme above is 100 and 80 parents respond – that is an 80% response rate.

Although there is no standard satisfactory response rate, Sure Start Programmes should aim to get response rates of over 70%. If the response rate is below 50%, the User Satisfaction Survey will not produce reliable results.

Ideally all surveys would get a very high response rate.. In the case of a local Sure Start Programme, where one of the goals of the approach is community and parental involvement, the aim should be a high response. Less than 50% should be seen as inadequate; 60-70% as usable, and over 70% as reliable.

There are things you can do to improve your chances of a good response.
• Produce some lively publicity about the Survey, emphasising that this is the opportunity users have been waiting for, to express themselves and to improve services;
• Design a questionnaire that looks attractive and easy to complete: use colour, lay the questions out clearly and include friendly instructions on how to fill it in;
• Make sure the questions are understandable and can be answered; they should be relevant to parents' own experience. Don't use jargon.
• Don't make the questionnaire too long – it is off-putting to be faced with pages and pages to complete;
• Build into your project plan time and resources to follow-up those who have not completed or returned their questionnaire;
• Get the timing right: don't expect a good response rate if your survey coincides with Christmas or summer holidays; avoid periods when other research may be going on in the area.

How to Get a High Response Rate to a Survey

• Conduct User Satisfaction Surveys sparingly, so that parents don't get tired of the idea. Decide a realistic timetable for repeat surveys (like once every three years, so that there has been a turnover of parents using the programme).

• Make allowance for the number of parents who may be unable to respond because addresses are incorrect, they are ill, or there are other circumstances which make if impossible.

• Warn parents of the study in advance

- Make absolutely sure that the Survey responses are confidential and emphasise confidentiality and your methods for preserving it in any publicity about the research. Emphasise it, too, in all contact with individual parents.

- Design survey instruments which are easy to understand, look interesting and are sensitive to language and the social and cultural background of respondents. Always test your instruments first.

- Provide translation services if there are parents whose mother tongue is not English

- If you are using postal questionnaires, address them to a named recipient: people are more likely to open the envelope and read the covering letter if they are addressed personally. Use white envelopes: brown ones are associated with bills and junk mail; enclose pre-paid envelopes or collect the questionnaires by hand.

- Provide a helpline number for queries, with a named contact to receive the calls.

- Send reminders once people have received mail surveys, with another copy of the questionnaire enclosed; keep 'phoning if you are conducting the survey by telephone.

- Everyone who has contact with parents over the survey should be trained in the techniques and approaches to be used. Everyone working in the Programme should be briefed about the survey: why it is being conducted, what it is about and who to contact for more information

- Provide some sort of reward for parents who take part – a shopping voucher, for example.

If the response rate is disappointing, try several waves of follow-up. You may have to stretch your planned timetable, but a surprising number of late questionnaires can be gathered in if you keep telling people that you still want them. Monitor these follow-up stages and keep lists of most likely returns, less likely returns and ones you're sure you won't get. Put your persuasive efforts into those who seem most likely to respond. Be ready to replace questionnaires that have been mislaid or destroyed.

5.Timetable

The timetable for your survey will need to describe the number of times the survey will be carried out, and the time that will be required for each stage of the operation. It is important that these details are recorded in a written Survey Plan as they give credibility to the research.

The standard design for User Satisfaction research is likely to be a ***Cross-Sectional Survey.*** In such surveys, information is collected at one point in time and the results stand alone to give an insight into the issue being investigated. They produce a snapshot. The same survey instrument can be re-applied at a later date, and repeated surveys can produce comparative information. In this way, you can discover if parents are becoming more or less satisfied with Sure Start services as time goes by.

We know that the User Satisfaction survey will have to be re-applied every three years. You may decide that you want to do more, and at different intervals. When making this decision, be aware not only of the cost and resource implications but also that people can get fed-up with being surveyed.

Bear in mind any other research that is being conducted in the local programme and in the area. Most Sure Start areas are also affected by other Area-Based Initiatives such as Health Action Zones, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Deal for Communities, , Single Regeneration Budget, On Track and other programmes may be carrying out local surveys, and some of these will target families. Check with members of your Partnership: they are likely to know what is going on in other initiatives locally.

The User Satisfaction Survey can be incorporated into an evaluation research project. *(See Section 13)* It is important to make sure that information collection does not coincide with other research, like the local evaluation, which may be going on in your programme: plan to have a decent interval between various research projects.

All surveys take considerable time. Your timetable will need to cover:

• Possibly setting up a steering group from the Partnership to manage the research. Many Sure Start Programmes have a research/evaluation working group as a sub-committee of the Management group.

• Developing an outline Plan of the resesearch

• Developing a specification of requirements.

• Commissioning a contractor, (if you decide to employ an outside agency)
  (See Section 8)

   The tasks which follow may be carried out by your agent, but they will
   need a timetable, which should be included in the contract. The commissioning
   process will require time for advertising, interviewing and agreeing terms with the
   agent. *(See the Box below for information on how to do this)*

• Choosing the sample

• Designing the 'instrument' (usually a questionnaire, *See Section 6)*

• Piloting (testing) the instrument with a small group of users *(See Section 10)*

• Training any personnel who will be involved in applying the instrument

• Informing parents in the sample that they will be surveyed

• Applying the instrument, and reminding respondents about it

• Analysing the information collected

- Writing a report on the results

- Feeding back the results to the Programme and to users

All these stages will need to be incorporated into a detailed timetable.

Commissioning a Contractor

(see also "Getting Started with your Local Evaluation" guidance on the NESS website)

- Advertise for an agent or organisation to carry out the User Satisfaction research, making clear the aims and objectives of the project, who is commissioning it, and the timetable. You may wish to publish the amount available to fund the work, or to send this to interested applicants in a document which gives more details about the project. Or you may prefer applicants to produce costings for the work, and use this as one of the criteria for selection.

- Specify the details which you want applicants to supply. It is usual to ask them to describe the methodology they would use for the User Satisfaction Survey, the personnel who would work on it, their experience and any reports they have produced on similar projects.

- Interview candidates and select a contractor.

- Draw up an agreement with the preferred contractor which includes a clear and brief statement of the Survey aims, the framework for the research, including the time allowed and resources allocated for the work. Your expectations should be clearly stated, as should lines of responsibility for the overall study and its various parts.

- The study design and specific methods should be discussed, understood and approved by all parties to the research. Negotiation may be needed in terms of what is desirable and what is possible in resource or practical terms. The researcher will want to uphold the quality of the research and to conduct it ethically, without compromising the reliability or validity of the results. The advice of the researcher about what is possible will be helpful.

- Research design should include a mechanism for passing on any requests for help or information on any situation which raises concerns, to the appropriate agency.

- Ownership of any material arising from the research needs to be agreed and the decision clearly recorded

- In accordance with the Data Protection Act, access to computerised personal data should not be given to the contractor without the express permission of parents. Data should not be used for any purpose than for that which it is gathered and for which parents have given their consent.

• Once agreed, any changes in the conduct of the research should only be considered if there is an unavoidable change in circumstances. Any changes should be carefully considered, agreed,, recorded and communicated to all involved in the research.

• The agreement with the contractor should include the required research outputs (reports, presentations, conferences and so on) and a plan for dissemination and publication.

6. Questions and How to Ask Them

Whatever service or aspect of the local Programme you choose to investigate, you will be asking questions. Your questions will need to cover the following aspects of the service:

• *How Accessible is It?* Are parents satisfied with the location of services and the distance they have to travel to get to them?

• *How Available is It?* Are parents satisfied with opening times, response times to enquiries, waiting times if a service can take limited numbers?

• *What Are Staff Like?* In particular, do parents feel that staff are working together on their behalf; using language that is understandable; helping them to solve problems or difficulties?

• *Is the Service good enough?* Is there enough of it, is it reliable, is it sensitive to family needs, language, social and cultural considerations; is it making sufficient difference to the children's lives?

Constructing Questions
You will be constructing questions to learn about parents' attitudes to services which they have experienced*. It is very important that the questions make clear to which service you are referring. Always use the recognised, consistent name of the service in each question you ask about it.* Avoid words like 'service'. Research has shown that this vocabulary, though second nature to practitioners, doesn't make sense to parents.

So, for example, if you are asking questions about a Sure Start play and learning scheme which is known as Playlink use that title and use it consistently. (Don't say, Playlink sometimes, and 'early learning scheme' at other times.)

1. Factual Questions

It is best to start any questionnaire with some factual questions which respondents find easy to answer. It is reassuring for them.

Factual questions about Playlink might be:

- "Have you heard of Playlink "

YES   NO

- "Have you used Playlink? "

YES   NO

If *Yes* "When did you make your most recently use Playlin?
"When did you use Playlink for the first time?"
"Approximately how many times have you used Playlink?"

Factual questions of this sort will require either **logical** answers: Yes, No, Don't Know, or **numerical** answers: dates and numbers, as in the responses to the example supplementary questions outlined above.

If you are asking 'when', make it easy for the respondent to give you the answer in the form you want by making the format clear in the answer box. For example:

"When did you use Playlink for the first time?"

Day/Month/Year

"When do you ***usually*** use Playlink?

Mon/Tues/Wed/
Thurs/Fri/Sat
(Please circle usual day or days)

Always try to make it as easy as possible for parents to give you the kind of information that you want. Piloting the questionnaire will usually show you where misunderstandings can occur. There are always some!

A third way of asking a factual question of this kind is to give the parent a list of choices from which to select their answer. For example, you might want to find out *how* parents heard of Playlink, and offer them the following alternatives:

*I **first** heard about the Playlink from:*   *tick one*

a friend	
a Sure Start leaflet	
a Sure Start visitor	
the local paper	
the Children's Information Service	
Another Sure Start activity (eg. a clinic, a library session)	
Passing and seeing the sign	
Other *(please specify)*	

You can see from this example how difficult it would be for anyone to produce a questionnaire for you. Understanding local circumstances and local provision is essential in designing a questionnaire that will work for local parents. If you are commissioning an outside contractor, Programme staff or members of project planning groups will need to be involved at this stage.

These kinds of simple, factual questions, which expect logical, numerical or limited choice responses are called **closed questions**. Their advantage is that it is quite easy to work out results from them. The disadvantage is that they sometimes do not give parents enough choice in their responses, especially if they are not well designed. For example, if the choices you give do not cover the most common experiences, and if, in a table like that above, many parents are choosing the 'other' category, they will not trust the process.

You can also ask factual questions which are **open questions**. You could ask:

- "What form of transport do you normally use to get to Playlink?"

If you do not give choices, parents may come up with all sorts of descriptions, involving cars - their own or friends - buses, journeys on foot and combinations of these. You may want to explore this variety, in which case you will need to employ some classification so that you can understand the range of answers afterwards. **(See Section 10 on Analysing Data.)** Such questions will give you extra insight into parents' lives, but they do take more time to record and to understand the responses.

2. Questions about Attitude
In investigating User Satisfaction you will be looking at more than fact. You will be trying to find out how parents feel about services. Once again, you can ask both closed and open questions, but the latter will be more difficult to record and understand, because your respondents will be talking freely and spontaneously and you will have no control over the amount or scope of what they say. Parents are likely to enjoy the opportunity to do this, but it can generate a huge amount of information which is difficult to analyse.

In exploring parents' attitudes to services, it is a good idea to ask some questions in both an open and closed form.

For example, (open question):

- "Why do you use Playlink every week/day/regularly?"(Tailor the question to the previous answer from individual parent)."

Supplementary question, (closed question):

- "Can you say which of the following attract you to Playlink?"

Please rank in order of importance to you, from 1 – 10

Comfortable surroundings	
Activities for children	
Staff always available	
Know other parents who use it	
Cheap refreshments are available	
Play equipment is of good quality	
Open at convenient times	
Staff can advise on child development	
Chance to find out what else is going on for children and families	
Easy to get to	
Nothing else to do round here	

You can follow-up these questions with more specific investigation of each aspect of the Playlink surroundings, activities, staff, facilities for children, facilities for adults, food, opening times, accessibility, and so on.

For example:
- "How would you rate the Reception areas at Playlink premises?"

Please tick one response

Always welcoming and friendly	
Usually welcoming and friendly	
No opinion about it	
Sometimes unwelcoming	
Unwelcoming	

An open follow-up to this question could be:
- "Can you suggest ways in which the Reception areas at Playlink premises could be improved?"

Very satisfied parents will have fewer suggestions. But suggestions should be scrutinised carefully, because not all will be critical of the service. Some may be of the 'if it were possible the service would be even better' variety.

In this way the User Satisfaction Survey can become part of the local Sure Start Programme's ongoing consultation process with parents.

Attitude Statements

The traditional method of measuring attitude is through statements: a single sentence that expresses a point of view, a belief, a judgement – a position for or against something. In order to develop workable statements it is essential to conduct pilot interviews with parents, to write and re-write statements carefully, you will then need to develop a suitable **a scaling procedure**: *very satisfied; satisfied; dissatisfied; very dissatisfied*.

You can, however, develop some quite simple statements as part of a more varied questionnaire approach. For example:

- "Using Playlink has made my daily life more enjoyable".

Is this very true, true, partly true, not true? If you decide to ask more indirect questions of this sort, you will need to establish beforehand how the answers relate to satisfaction. You may decide to interpret 'very true', in the example above, to mean 'very satisfied'.

Or you may decide to follow up the statement with a direct satisfaction question:

- *" Would you describe your feelings about the Playlink service as:*

  (*Please tick one only*)

  Very satisfied
  Satisfied
  Dissatisfied
  Very dissatisfied?"

As part of your monitoring of PSA and SDA targets the Sure Start Unit wants to know how parents feel about all the services they receive. Are they satisfied in general with the services they have experienced? So don't forget to include a question along the following lines:

Thinking of all the services that you and your child/children have needed or used, would you describe your feelings about them as:

(Please tick one only)

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Further examples of questionnaires being used by some programmes are available at the NESS website: www.NESS.bbk.ac.uk under 'Local Programme Methods'

7. Applying a Questionnaire

Once you have decided on your questions there are a variety of choices to be made about how you ask or *apply* them. The first choice will be between giving the questionairess to parents and asking them to complete it themselves, or having an interviewer take it to each parent, ask them the questions, and fill in their responses. When parents complete the questionnaire, it is called *self-administered* as opposed to an *interview.*

Self-administered Questionnaires
These can be sent by post or otherwise delivered to parents' homes. There are strengths and weaknesses in the method.
Advantages:
- this method is cheap.
- it avoids interviewer bias.

Disadvantages: it tends to mean:
- low response rates;
- difficulties in surveying people with poor basic skills, a visual handicap, or non-English mother tongue;
- no chance to correct misunderstandings, offer explanations or help;
- no control over the order in which questions are answered, no check on incomplete responses, incomplete questionnaires, or passing questionnaires to others for answers;
- no opportunity for other interaction with parents, including building relationships, consultation about services and collecting other research material to inform, say, evaluation research.

Self-administered questionnaires can be given to parents by an interviewer, or member of the Sure Start team, the purpose of the survey explained, and then the parent left to complete the questionnaire, which will be picked up later. This can deal with some of the disadvantages of postal administration listed above.

Advantages:
- high response rate;
- minimum of interviewer bias;
- explanations and some help can be given;
- there is some personal contact with an interviewer.

Disadvantages:
- method requires high levels of staffing
- more expensive.

It is important that if a members of the Sure Start team, or staff in linked services, apply a self-administered questionnaire in this way, then they receive training in the manner in which they should do it and the amount of explanation and help they can give. Otherwise bias may be introduced into your sample.

Group-Administered Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be given to a group of parents gathered together. Generally two persons at least will be needed to administer the questionnaires, give help where required, check finished questionnaires for completion, and so on. This works best if there is a situation in the Sure Start Programme where up to forty parents are meeting in a group at any one time. Parents can be provided with the boxes and rating scales for each question and the numbered questions can be read aloud to them.

Advantages: - cheap
- respondents feel confident because others are completing questionnaire
- good response rate
- staff contact means that any problems in completing questions can be addressed
- questions can be read out to parents, so overcomes literacy difficulties, ensures questions are answered in the same order.

Disadvantages:
- parents may talk to one another and even copy one another's responses;
- some parents may feel the system is less confidential (though it should be completely confidential and they should be reassured about this).

Interviews

These may be carried out :
   a. on the telephone.
   Advantages: - cheap
- interviewer can help with any difficulties
- questions will be answered in order in which they are asked
- parent does not have to write answers.

Disadvantages:
- all parents in sample may not have a telephone
- it will be necessary to find 'phone numbers
- it is harder to manage responses on the telephone, and interviewers need experience
- lack of eye contact can lead to misunderstandings
- interruptions are harder to deal with than in a face-to-face situation.

The widespread ownership of cell-phones means that respondents could be contacted by this means. This method has same strengths and weaknesses as in telephone interviewing, and some extra ones.

Advantages:
- parents can be contacted when they are not at home
- particularly useful in rural areas.

Disadvantages:
- difficult to obtain contact numbers unless respondents give them
- more likely to contact parents at an inconvenient time

b. by an interviewer visiting each parent in their own home or at a previously arranged site.

Advantages:
- good response rate
- questionnaires well completed
- parents may enjoy chance to talk to interviewer in own home

Disadvantages:
- expensive
- parents could view visit as intrusive or onerous
- risk of interviewer bias
-

Although the completed questionnaire response rate will be good, it may be harder to make these arrangements with parents in your sample, because parents with young children may find it hard to get the time to talk quietly.

It is likely that if your User Satisfaction Survey is applied by interview, and if it is to contain attitude scales based on statements, then you will have to think about appointing outside researchers to devise and conduct it.

Focus Groups
A group of parents are brought together, each usually representing some significant trait of the whole group. For example, the age of the child, as in the table above, might be a distinguishing characteristic, and one parent from each of these three groups might be asked to participate; representatives from minority groups, including parents with disabilities, as well as of disabled children, might also be represented; and also parents from different geographic areas, and so on. The characteristics will be listed before the group is composed, and parents identified as representing these. Such groups are usually led by a trained facilitator. Focus groups may be used as an ingredient of a wider scale survey: by discussing and formulating the questions that will be asked in a questionnaire, for example.

Expert Panels
Such panels are groups, selected in the same way as focus groups, but which meet regularly over time, often to discuss the questions and issues that should be covered in wider surveys of users. A Sure Start programme might set up such a group as part of the function of its stake-holder or parents' forum.

Choosing the Method of Asking Questions
Based on your knowledge of your Sure Start area, and the groups within it, you will need to consider which of these methods will be most appropriate. The Survey needs to be as scientific as you can make it, so if you know that there are high levels of literacy difficulties, it is best to choose a method which minimises the demand for reading and writing when answering questions.

Remember, too, that you will have to plan to reach all parents, which will mean thinking about translation and interpretation, providing support for visually and hearing impaired parents, and for parents who may have other special needs. This will

have resource implications – producing questionnaires in large print, or languages other than English, for example. If you feel that you cannot reach all the groups in the area by one survey method, think about using more than one way to collect views.

Piloting Questionnaires

All questionnaires will need to be piloted with a small group of parents which is representative of your sample using the application technique you have chosen, and revised in the light of this.

Questionnaires have to be tried out beforehand and changed so that they work as you intend them to. Sometimes questionnaires can be borrowed from other research projects, but you will always need to make sure that they work with *your* population and produce the data you require. Piloting helps not only with the way questions are worded, but also with matters like the design of the letter of introduction, and from whom it should come, the sequence of questions and how to keep the response rate high.

The sample of people you use to pilot a questionnaire can be quite small, but make sure that minority groups are represented in it. From 5 – 10 people will be sufficient, if you get clear and detailed feedback from them. Apply the questionnaire in exactly the way you plan to apply it to your whole sample, and ask respondents to comment on everything – even the colour of the paper you use, whether you enclose a stamped addressed envelope, how you assure respondents of confidentiality, what interviewers should wear. Use parents as collaborators, so that you learn what will work best.

8. Personnel to Conduct Surveys

The choice of personnel to conduct this research will fall broadly under two headings: those already working for the Sure Start Programme, or extra people who are employed or contracted to carry out this specific task. It should be clear by now that such User Satisfaction Surveys are a considerable task.

Getting Outside Help

Many local Sure Start Programmes have already appointed external organisations to carry out local evaluations, and are thus experienced in the commissioning process. You may find it convenient to commission the same agents to carry out your User Satisfaction Survey, and it may already be an integral part of your local evaluation design. See also "Getting started with your local evaluation" on the NESS website, sections 10-14.
 http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/pdf/GettingStartedWithLocalEvaluation.pdf

Outside expertise is especially useful if:
- satisfaction with the coordination of services is one of the subjects you plan to investigate;
- a technically demanding sampling method/instrument/or means of analysis will be used;
- you have any concerns about bias creeping into the survey. This can happen at any stage of the process – sampling, instrument design, collection of information, analysis, reporting;
- it is already available through an existing relationship with researchers.

If you are commissioning outside agents for the first time, the following checklist should be borne in mind.

What to look for when commissioning research agents

• Are candidates broadly understanding about the Sure Start approach. Do they give parents a central role in the design and management of the research? Do they understand about bottom-up approaches? Ask: 'What do you think we are trying to do?'

•What kind of experience have the candidates had, both of carrying out research with parents and in disadvantaged communities? Have they published work which gives you an idea of their experience? Are there other organisations they have worked for, which you can contact to ask about it?

•Do candidates belong to any recognised body of researchers who specialise in community-based approaches? The Association of Researchers in Voluntary and Community Action, or the Register of Independent Researchers, both have researchers with this kind of experience in their membership.

• How far will the researcher be expected to support and help Sure Start staff, and to work in collaboration with them? Make this clear to candidates.

•Will support for the researcher – secretarial, technical, and so on – be required from the Sure Start core team, or provided as part of the contract? Be clear how much the local Programme is able or prepared to invest.

• How does the researcher see their role? Information collector? Consultant? Expert? Adviser? Compare this with your own expectations.

• Do parents trust the researcher or the research team? Do Sure Start programme staff trust them? Trust your instincts.

• Can the researcher do the job they are proposing in the budget you have available? Make sure the research design is realistic.

Using Sure Start Staff to Conduct Surveys

Some local Sure Start Programmes have appointed research staff to carry out local studies, and many are training core staff and practitioners within the programme in basic research tasks. It can be difficult for an organisation's staff to be involved in a User Satisfaction Survey without bias. However carefully you design and apply your survey instrument, if parents feel it is linked with practitioners they know, there is the possibility that their responses will be affected. In small scale programmes like local Sure Start, links between parents and practitioners are one of the goals of operation and it will be important to distinguish this relationship from experience of the services offered. If you have doubts about this, it will be best to look for some outside help.

Where staff are to be involved in the survey, it should be included in their job description and they should know how much of their time is to be spent on it. They will need to be trained adequately in what they have to do, and if several people are involved in an aspect of the survey, they will all need to be trained to carry it out in the same way. This is especially true if the survey instrument is applied by interview. *(See Section 7)*.

Training in survey methods may be available locally, through colleges and universities, or through national organisations which support community-based research. For further information about what training is available contact the training officer at*: ARVAC, 2d Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA. Telephone 020 7704 2315*.

Consider whether *some* of the survey tasks can be handled by Sure Start staff, while others would benefit from outside help. You might employ a professional researcher to take your sample, design your instrument and train Sure Start staff to apply it, for example. Or you might use an agent to analyse your data for you. In choosing the combination of personnel you want to use, it's the rigour of the results you need to remember.

An advantage of using internal staff is that they will have an interest in the process and the results of the survey, and may feel more committed to responding to what emerges from it, and incorporating changes to the Programme subsequently. But similar commitment will need to be obtained to the results of any User Survey. Just make sure that the whole Sure Start team know what is going on, and recognise from the outset that the survey has implications for their practice. Staff will need to be briefed on the User Satisfaction Survey plan, introduced to any outside contractors, and given an opportunity to ask questions about the timetable and the methodology.

Involving Sure Start Parents in User Survey Research

As a principle, the involvement of Sure Start parent users in research projects is a good one. Any researcher will tell you that the process of collecting information, analysing it and drawing conclusions from it is an empowering one, which gives a sense of knowledge and control. These are good things to have: they bring self-confidence with them, and it seems a pity not to use this, as well as many other opportunities, to give users confidence too.

However, the same considerations apply here as they do to the use of Sure Start Programme staff. In order to prevent bias, it is advisable for parent/researchers to work on a stipulated part of the Survey only. The obvious places where they can participate fruitfully are:

- on the project planning/steering group;
- in the design of the instrument: contributing to and screening questions and participating in the piloting phase (though make sure that parents who help to pilot your questionnaire are excluded from your final sample);
- helping to apply the questionnaire *where it is self-administered*.
- analysing data.

It is not recommended that parents are involved in all these stages of a User Satisfaction Survey, and consideration of where they can contribute should occur under the Personnel topic at the planning stage. *(See Section 2).*

Those local Sure Start programmes which have already trained parents in research techniques are likely to be particularly keen to involve them in the User Satisfaction survey. However, remember that where parent-researchers are well-known within the Sure Start area, the potential for bias could be increased. One option might be for Sure Start programmes who have trained parents in this way to get together and carry out surveys for one another.

You can find out more about training parents in research methods from your local college or university, or via: ***ARVAC*** (details above).

9. Confidentiality

All survey data must be treated as confidential.

Particular care needs to be taken at the following stages:

Drawing the Sample
This will obviously give you the names and addresses of parents who will be approached. Although this information will be used if you post questionnaires or apply them through interview, it should be kept in safety and copies should be limited to those directly involved in conducting the survey.

You will need to put some effort into obtaining the addresses of all families in the area with children in the 0-5 age-range. Some Sure Start Programmes will already have access to comprehensive lists. If you have not yet done so, this will be a good time to make sure that you have this information. Use members of your Partnership to locate it for you: health representatives should be able to help, or someone from the local authority. It will not be enough to use the names and addresses of parents already registered with Sure Start – that will miss those not in contact with the programme, and those whose children are 4 plus.

Arranging the Application
In any approach to parents, the confidentiality of the information they give should be made clear in a statement. (The training of internal researchers, staff or parents, will address this issue). Respondents should be told that their names will not be noted on the instrument, and that all questionnaires will be distinguished by a number only. Numbers will not be linked to the names of respondents.

Applying the Instrument
Put a confidentiality statement in a prominent place on the front of the survey instrument. It could say something like this:

> ***The contents of this form are <u>absolutely confidential</u>. Information identifying the respondent will not be disclosed under any circumstances***

It is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity in this kind of survey – you have contacted people by getting their names and addresses. However, respondents may be reassured if you give them a code number. This can work in the case of self-administered, postal *questionnaires* (because the returned questionnaires cannot be identified). It creates a logistical problem, however, because it is impossible to send out postal reminders to parents who do not respond. You can, of course, send reminders to everyone in your sample, but this will be expensive and runs the risk of annoying those who *have* responded.

Where an interview technique is chosen, interviewers should carry a short confidentiality statement, and should be trained to assure respondents of the confidential treatment of the information they give, by showing them this and describing how the questionnaire will be handled when it is completed.

Analysing the Information (Data)
Whatever methods are used to *analyse* (sort out) the information you collect, the names of parents should not be attached to the information. It is essential that those who are doing the analysis do not know whose responses they are looking at.

Reporting on the Satisfaction Survey
The same strict rules apply to feedback and reports. Sometimes direct quotations from parents are used in reports, either taken from a survey instrument, or from accompanying interviews. These certainly give some life to sometimes dull reports, but they should never be identified. Sometimes direct quotations are printed with a name, perhaps a first name only, underneath. No names should be used at all in this exercise, even substitute or made up ones.

10. Analysing Data

You will need *data processing* facilities in order to deal with the answers to your survey when they arrive. Some thought will need to be given to this when you were designing your questionnaire. It is assumed that you will be using a computer and software for data processing: make sure that adequate computer time will be available when you need it. Indications of how the data will be processed are often included on the questionnaire, - that's what that column that says 'for office use only' means.

The aim of data processing is to render the responses to the questionnaire into numbers. To do this, the questions need to be *coded.* Numerical values will need to be given to every answer in the questionnaire. In addition, each question or item in the questionnaire will need a *shortened label* and an agreed allocation to *variables* which are places in the computer's memory.

We can apply this process to a factual question that you may well decide to ask in your User Satisfaction Survey:

The question has the shortened label PARSTAT (for parental status)

"Are you [TICK ONE]

a. the mother……….[ ] 1
b. the father………...[ ] 2
c. the grandparent….[ ] 3
d. the carer…………[ ] 4
e. other……………..[ ] 5"

All the person *inputting* the data has to do here, is put in the number which is alongside the box that has been ticked. These numbers have no significance in numerical terms. You could use letters of symbols. The survey results will be based on the addition of all the 1s, all the 2s and so on – so that you can say how many respondents you had from each category.

In some questions, however, the numbers will be significant:

"How many times do you visit the library in a month? [ENTER NUMBER IN BOX]

You can simply add the number of library visits reported to show whether library use increases or decreases. You can also discover how many people go once, and how many twenty times.

Data can be entered into *spread sheets* or *forms*. Spreadsheets are like files in which rows represent respondents and columns represent variables. A form uses the whole computer screen for each respondent whose answers are being entered. It may look exactly like the questionnaire itself, and you just fill in the tickboxes and highlight the answers as they appear on the questionnaire of each respondent.

A *codebook* is where you keep all the information about how you will analyse the data. This will give each variable a number, say where is located (e.g.: in which column on the spreadsheet), give the name, and describe the code system.

For example, in the question about parental status examined above, the codebook entry might look like this:

Variable:

No	Location (column)	Name	Description and Comments
1	1 – 6	PARSTAT	Single digit 1 = mother, 2 = father, 3 = grandmother, 4 = carer, 5 = other. Use 0 if no answer

Once the responses to all questions have been inputted in this way, your computer will be able to produce a simple two-way table of respondents and *variables* (that is characteristics of interest to the survey). To derive any further meaning from this material will require the preparation of *coding frames* for the answers to questions

like the one about the library above. Basically, we don't know how many visits parents make until they tell us. So we can't really make a pattern through which to understand the answers until we have had a look at the answers we are getting.

Say, for this question, we found that the least frequent visitor paid 0 visits, and the most frequent paid 16, then we might code these responses in a frame that looks like this:

1. none
2. 1 - 3
3. 4 – 8
4. 9 – 12
5. 13-16
6. no answer
7. don't know, can't remember

These categories have been chosen after looking at the responses that have been received and finding that 16 could be the top of the range, and that 'don't know' would need to be a category.

There is a lot more to coding and data processing than has been covered here. The 'HELP' button on the software you use can take you through the choices in some detail, and there is a list of helpful references at the end of this Guidance. Many Sure Start areas will have administrative staff with some experience of date bases. But this may well be the part of your User Satisfaction survey where you decide that you could do with some expert assistance. (See Section 8 on commissioning outside agents)

11. Making Judgments and Telling People about them

Surveys that have been thoughtfully designed and properly implemented should deliver some clear messages. A User Satisfaction survey for a local Sure Start Programme can provide the management group and Partnership with an insight into what is working well for parents, what is working less well, and what is a mixture of successful and unsuccessful bits.

A lot of services tend to fall into the latter category, especially when they are being established. Since the Baseline Survey is going to be conducted at an early stage in your Programme's development, you may find that the first messages are rather mixed.

Contents of the Report on the User Satisfaction Survey

The report which you publish on your research should contain:

• **An Introduction**, explaining why the study was carried out and its aims. You can incorporate some of the information given at the beginning of this Guidance.

• **Research methodology**, describing exactly what was done, when and by whom. Your research plan will provide you with the basis for this.

• **Tables, graphs and diagrams** showing the findings.

• **Written commentary** on the findings.

• **Conclusions** which relate directly to the findings and link what has been found to what the local Programme plans to do in the future.

The purpose of the report is to communicate the learning from the User Satisfaction Survey to others – readers. Always ask yourself if the people who gave you the information for your research – the users - will understand and want to read the report.

Understandable Tables
One way of presenting a survey in table form is to reproduce the questionnaire that you used, including the analysed responses. Here is an example:

Reporting Results Using a Questionnaire

Q. Since you have been receiving visits from the Sure Start outreach worker, how much of the time have you felt depressed?

MARK ONE BOX WITH A **X**

☐ All of the time   5%
☐ Most of the time   2%
☐ A good bit of the time   8%
☐ Some of the time   42%
☐ A little of the time   32%
☐ None of the time   10%

This is called presenting *raw data*. It gives the reader a bit of work to do, but it is a very honest way of revealing what your survey has found.

You could decide to report the same results in a Table which includes other relevant data around the same question

Table showing satisfaction with outreach service and number of visits in relation to self-report on depression from 223 parents

Reported condition (% of total parents visited)	Average No of outreach visits received	% satisfied with outreach service	% dissatisfied with outreach service
Depressed all the time (5%)	9	52%	48%
Depressed most of the time (2%)	12	47%	51%
Depressed a good bit of the time (8%)	9	42%	58%
Depressed some of the time (42%)	2	31%	68%
Depressed a little of the time (32%)	2	43%	57%
Not depressed (10%)	2	76%	24%

Note that the satisfaction scores on this table have been reached by combining scores for three variables which showed levels of satisfaction (satisfied, very satisfied, extremely satisfied) and three which showed dissatisfaction (dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, extremely dissatisfied)

This Table provides a great deal of information. For a reader to get the most out of it, it will require a commentary, explaining some of the judgements that can be reached. First of all, there is no link *(correlation)* between the number of outreach visits people receive and the level of their satisfaction. People who receive fewer visits are actually most satisfied with the service, except if they are people who are depressed some of the time. This is the biggest category of parents, so it is rather worrying. However, there is a link, or correlation, between the parents who are having the higher levels of depression and the number of visits from the outreach service they are receiving. This suggests that the outreach serviced has identified people in the most need and is concentrating its attention on them. So that aspect of the service is working well. However, it may be that the largest group of parents, which is a group which reports being depressed some of the time, needs more help. Maybe these parents are not being supported as much as they would like because they do not *always* present with depression problems. Perhaps the average number of visits to these parents needs to be increased?

Guidelines for Presenting Tables

• Decide how big - how many columns, how many rows – a Table can be and still be readable.
• Tables need Titles: to summarize the purpose and content of the Table.
• Tables need numbers – if you are using more than one in your report.
• Give the source of the data in the Table, if it is not obvious.
• Define any words which may not be clear to the reader, or explain how
you arrived at certain items, in a different script, under the Table, (eg. the Note under the Table above).
• Choose a format for your Tables and use it all the time. You could, for example, present the same information as that shown in the Table above, without the vertical lines.
• Present data in logical order, from most to least, or vice versa.
• Make it clear when you are using numbers, percentages or other statistics.
• State your sample size

There are Table functions in Word processing programmes which can help you create tables.

You can also present data in Pie Charts, Bar Graphs and Line Graphs**.**

The Structure of a Survey Report

A formal report on a survey would contain all of the following elements. You can modify this structure if you find it too complex, but only leave elements out when you've had a good think about why you don't need them.

1. **Abstract** This will be between 200 and 250 words long, and could look like this:

Structured Abstract
Purpose: To establish levels of satisfaction with services among users of five Services delivered by Sure Start Anywhere, and levels of satisfaction with the Programme as a whole.

Research Design: Cross Sectional survey of 200 people

Survey: 20-page self-administered questionnaire, distributed by post

Response: An 87% response rate was obtained. 3% were expectant mothers, 24% were parents of 0 – 1 year olds; 40% were parents of 1 – 2 year olds; 33% were parents of 2 – 3 year olds. Respondents were sampled at random from those eligible to use Sure Start services in the Anywhere area.

Main outcome: Majority of respondents very satisfied or extremely satisfied Sure Start programme as a whole
Results: 53% extremely satisfied with Sure Start Programme; 22% very satisfied; 12% satisfied. Less satisfied categories: 13%. Levels of satisfaction with five services: Home visits: 71% satisfied categories; Sure Start café: 85% satisfied categories; Laundry Service: 98% satisfied categories; Clinic: 88% satisfied categories; Language development support: 63% satisfied categories.

Conclusion: Overall levels of satisfaction are good, but user experience of the Language development and Home visiting services suggest some need for changes in organisation and practice.

2. **Summary** Should cover the main parts of the report: objectives, methods and findings and be about three pages long.
3. **Contents** Give main headings and pages numbers
4. **List of Tables and Figures** with a number and title for each and the page on which it appears.
5. **Why you did the Survey**
6. **What the Survey focussed on**
7. **Methods**
   - The type of survey and any limitations you found from your choice eg. postal survey, hard to get the questionnaires back
   - Questions asked – include the questionnaire at the back of the report if it is not in the text
   - Survey logistics: when carried out, over what period of time, who administered it, how were they trained etc.
   - Survey construction: how questions formulated and piloted
   - Sampling and Response rate
   - Analysis
   - Ethics: how was confidentiality maintained, were respondents warned?

8. **Results –** usually given as statistics

9. **Conclusions** What do the findings mean?
10. **Recommendations** What needs to be done as a result?
11. **References** List anything you used in alphabetical order (or the order you mention them in the text).
12. **Appendices**

Although this structure is rather formal, you can still make this kind of report accessible and easy to read by the writing style. If you feel the exercise has been interesting and that you have learned from it, your readers are likely to feel the same.

12. Costs

If you commission every aspect of a User Satisfaction Survey from an outside agent, it is likely to cost between £5000 and £10,000 but could be a lot more, depending on the size of your sample and the status of the agents. This figure can be cut if you employ agents for *part* of the work only: designing the instrument and framework for analysis, perhaps. It is sometimes possible to get cheaper expertise from post-graduate students.

If the User Satisfaction survey is amalgamated with your local evaluation, you may have the expertise available already from within the evaluation team.

Remember that there are quite a lot of expenses in a survey, over and above the expertise required. Paper, telephone, computer costs, incentives for parents to participate, travel and so on will need to be anticipated.

13.Combining User Satisfaction Surveys with other Research

If there are other Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) operating in your Sure Start Programme area – and there are in most – you could consider combining to conduct User Satisfaction Surveys. ABIs include things like Health Action Zones, Neighbourhood Nurseries, the Children's Fund, On Track, Neighbourhood Renewal. All need to conduct their own User Satisfaction studies. Many will be carrying out Baseline Survey work.

A survey of Sure Start Users could be integrated with a wider neighbourhood study commissioned by an ABI, asking the general population about their experience of services, with specific questions for those with children of Sure Start age. The advantages of this could be that it is cheaper for your programme and gives an opportunity to use comparative information about services from other members of the community. The likely disadvantage is that the research process, being on a larger scale, would take longer, and the Sure Start management would have only a partial role in its design.

Local Sure Start Programmes could themselves combine to carry out a similar study, using a standard instrument, (a questionnaire, for example) across their programme areas. This approach might work particularly well where there is more than one Sure Start Programme based in a local authority. Although Baseline User Satisfaction surveys may be harder to coordinate in this way (because Programmes in different

waves will be working to different time scales,) it may nevertheless be possible to combine subsequent surveys.

Within a Sure Start Programme, there is much to be said for combining the User Satisfaction survey with the local evaluation study. We saw at the beginning of this Guidance that Programme monitoring provides us with initial insights into what users feel about services. Evaluation studies are likely to be using other methods to collect information from parents about their experience of the Programme: case studies, group and individual interviews, observation, measurement of change in children, pre and post testing of parents – measuring things like parental stress, for example. These methods and others can provide information to complement and illuminate what the User Satisfaction Survey is telling you.

Example:
The local evaluation of Sure Start includes an evaluation of the Playlink scheme. Among the measures to be used are:
- monitoring of daily use to show how numbers of users have grown/ fallen from quarter to quarter;
- interviews with staff and volunteers who work in the scheme;
- interview with the manager;
- comparison of data on users of Playlink with other Sure Start parents, (to see if it appeals to all parents, or more to particular parents – those that live nearest, for example);
- face-to-face interviews with ten parent users.
- a graffiti board on which parents can write suggestions about the service
- the section of the User Satisfaction Survey which is about Playlink.

If you find that despite your best efforts, there is a feeling of 'research overload' among parents, consider altering the timetable for your work, or using a method that is not being used by other projects. Group interviewing may be an attractive option, because you can combine it with entertainment, food and some fun for the children.

14. Can we find out if children are satisfied with the Programme?

Ultimately Sure Start is a programme about the needs of small children. Parental satisfaction will be linked to their perceptions of improvements they see for their children. But can we find out anything more directly from children themselves?

Recently, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially by the Article that states that children have 'a right to be heard', studies have been initiated which collect the views of children. Children under 3 cannot contribute a great deal verbally to an investigation of service quality, but it is possible to observe their behaviour and draw some conclusions from that. Advice and useful publications on consulting with children under five are available from the following voluntary organisations:

Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD

The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, Margery Street, London WC1X 0JL

NSPCC, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH

ChildLine, Royal Mail Building, Studd Street, London N1 0QW

Coram Family, Coram Family Campus, 49 Mecklenburgh Square,
London WC1N 2QA

Some local Programmes have invented playful ways to involve children in expressing their opinions:

- A 'Wish Fish' where children's wishes for the service are written on their   behalf

- A 'Continuum' line on the wall or floor, with BRILLIANT at one end and 'NO GOOD' at the other, where children can put a sticker to mark their response to an activity.

The guidance document "Conducting ethical research" on the NESS website http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/pdf/ConductingEthicalResearch.pdf has information about conducting research with children.

Useful Publications

Classic Texts on Survey Research:
Rossi, PH, Wright, JD and Anderson AB (eds) (1983) *Handbook of Survey Research.* Academic Press. New York

Hoinville, G, and Jowell, R. (1978) *Survey Research Practice.* Gower. Aldershot

Bynner, J, and Stribley, K (eds) (1978) *Social Research: Principles and Procedures.* Longman and the Open University Press. London

Fink, A and Kosecoff, J. (1985) *How to Conduct Surveys: a Step by Step Guide* Sage. London.
Good for beginners!

On Designing Questionnaires
Converse, J and Presser, S. (1988) *Survey Questions.* Sage. London

Oppenheim, AN (2000, revised) *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement* Continuum. London

Analysis
Hedderson, J. (1991) *SPSS/PC+ Made Simple* Chapman and Hall. London
Explains how to use one of the most widespread computer programmes, designed for survey work

Krippendorf, K (1981) *Content Analysis*. Sage. London

Research with children
Listening to Young Children by Alison Clark and Peter Moss
Available from the National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE
Telephone: 020 7843 6000

Children as Partners in Planning by Lina Fayerman
Available from Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD