

NAPEP PARENT/CARER SURVEY

COMMON QUESTIONS

1. What are we trying to achieve?

In a survey for NAPEP¹, looking at what evaluation work EP services undertake, approximately half regularly surveyed the views of parents and many others were conscious of the need to do so. A recommendation that followed was to consider developing a common parent feedback questionnaire (across services) and this was the focus of the workshop in London on 6th July 2011.

Representatives from Educational Psychology Services from the following Local Authorities participated in the workshop: Cardiff; Derbyshire; East Riding; Essex; Kent; Hampshire; Hertfordshire; Kingston; Solihull; Somerset; Southwark; Stockport; Sunderland; Tower Hamlets.

Advantages of this approach include:

- services not having to “*re-invent the wheel*” by devising their own questionnaires.
- there being a larger data set of responses against which services could make comparison (e.g. in Hampshire 90% of parents perceived the EP involvement as helpful² but the question remains as to whether this outcome is good, bad or mediocre. Currently there is no mechanism for making any sense of this, beyond the figure being high).
- the questionnaire being more widely agreed thus avoiding charges that the outcome might have been biased through the selection of questions or the way they are worded.

It is also acknowledged that having a common core of questions does not preclude services adding questions that reflect their own particular context or relate to current priorities. All we ask is that this information not be included in the central feedback.

2. How is this system going to work?

The suggestion under consideration is that if a questionnaire can be agreed, then all services that wish to participate should be allowed to do so. The research & Evaluation Unit of Hampshire Educational Psychology Service (HEPS) have agreed to produce a SurveyMonkey version of the questionnaire. Parents either complete the online version or each service takes responsibility for entering individual paper returns onto SurveyMonkey.

At the end of the trial period (suggested to be two full terms) HEPS will report on the overall findings and provide coded tables showing the data for each service. Only the service concerned will know their particular code but can share this with others if they choose to do so. This should enable each service to be able to make comparisons of their data against the overall norm that arises.

¹ NAPEP (2010) “*How do educational psychology services currently evaluate themselves?*”

² HEPS (2009) “*What do parents, children and young people think about the service offered?*”

As services vary significantly in capacity and the way in which they operate an attempt will be made to profile those participating in order to allow *like for like* comparisons to be made.

Given that one objective is to provide comparative data it implies the questionnaire will need primarily to be quantitative, however, some qualitative elements can be included where most relevant. An analysis of the qualitative aspects will be included in the overall outcomes. The pilot will determine if this can be undertaken at a service level or whether the workload is prohibitive. Minimally it would be possible to provide each service with a spreadsheet of their qualitative responses.

At the end of the trial period there will be a review of arrangements. This will allow an opportunity to decide if services wish to continue with this exercise. If they do, there will then be an opportunity to amend and revise the questionnaire and reporting arrangements.

3. Is data in SurveyMonkey safe?

The simple answer is “yes”. Whilst any service can access the questionnaire online only the Research and Evaluation Unit in HEPS has the access key to all the completed responses. The data collected is kept private and confidential and is regarded as the Unit’s property. (Please note, it will be kept private and confidential from managers in HEPS.) In addition Survey-Monkey is listed on the United States Department of Commerce’s safe harbor list and meets the European Union requirements relating to data privacy.

4. Why are we asking for parent feedback?

There are many reasons a service might consult with parents. The focus of this questionnaire is to obtain feedback from parents about the quality of the service they have received, with the view that it might lead to changes in the way individual EPs or the service operates. It is not, for instance, intended to be a tool by which managers appraise the performance of EPs. Hence the intention is to keep the questionnaire anonymous with the view to securing a more honest and open response.

5. What do we want to know from parents?

Discussion of this point focused on the problem of the differences in service delivery models. What is common across services however was described by the Scottish Executive (1999)³ as communicating effectively and working effectively with parents. The related indicators they identified included:

- parents knowing why the psychologist is involved
- psychologist being able to put parents at their ease
- psychologist valuing the feelings and views of parents and taking full account of these
- parents being treated as active partners and plans being jointly formulated

³ Scottish Executive (1999) *Quality Assurance in Education Authority Psychological Services*. Available at <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/qaeps-14.htm>

- psychologist communicating clearly with parents regarding the aims, nature, extent and outcomes of any work undertaken
- psychologist being available to answer parents' questions
- psychologist being familiar with legislation, policies and best practice regarding the rights and involvement of parents
- all contact being marked by sensitivity, promptness, reliability and efficiency
- parents having confidence the psychologist is working in the best interests of their child, unfettered by local authority restriction
- written information about the service being available to parents

This seemed to capture the broad thrust of what we considered important in this context.

6. What will we do with the feedback?

It is essentially up to each individual service to decide what to do with the data that are collected. Minimally we would suggest that the service publish the report on their website and if it warrants any modifications to existing arrangements they provide a response. In this way it moves from being a static exercise to become a form of dialogue with parents.

7. Should we be led by parents wishes – isn't the child the main focus?

Monitoring parent's experience of the service they receive does not imply any changes at all will necessarily result. However, parents are important stakeholders in the work we undertake on behalf of their children and it seems right they are given a voice, which might influence, rather than lead, any changes deemed necessary. The views of other stakeholders will also need to be taken into account, including those of the children and young people concerned.

The DfES (2006) report recommended that services have a framework of evaluation which takes into account the views of parents (amongst others).

The point could also be made that the responsibility parents have (in particular, the emotional commitment and the 24-hour contact with their children) places them in a unique position from which to comment on services to children.

Many articles have also suggested that parental involvement in service evaluations is not only politically appropriate, but has contributed to service developments (Anthon, 2000; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Squires et al, 2007).

8. What should parents understand happens with the survey data?

Ethically parents should be made aware exactly why we have asked them to complete this questionnaire and what use will be made of the information. We also need to make it clear that the information will be treated confidentially and kept safe. This question also has links to question 5. We have suggested the results are published because parents have an ethical right to receive feedback on the outcome of the exercise they have engaged in. We intend to address some of these issues in the introduction to the questionnaire but services may wish to add to this depending on what they intend.

9. Can we pilot with parents first?

It is vital that the questionnaire expresses questions in a way that is comprehensible to parents. The issue is when to consult them. There was some consensus to the view that we first pilot the questionnaire and arrangements, to ensure we have

identified the questions we really want and then consult with parents. It might be possible to include a few questions about the intelligibility of the questions which would provide information about which ones were most problematic and warranting revision. We would then intend to use a revised version if the project continues.

10. How can we access all parents (e.g. English as an Additional Language)?

Akin to the answer to question 9 it would seem appropriate to have confirmed and consolidated the questions before we seek to have the questionnaire translated. Presumably each service would know what languages would be most relevant to them but between us we should be able to provide as many as required. The responses would need to be translated before they are entered onto SurveyMonkey.

11. How should we sample parents to send a questionnaire?

An approach which found some favour was to send a questionnaire as a fixed ratio of an EPs significant involvement (e.g. every fourth piece of work). This reduces the potential for the EP to select which parents are approached. In HEPS, the EP is asked if sending a questionnaire might exacerbate a sensitive situation, if so they can veto it going if they can defend such a position.

The actual ratio is not critical; services can sample at a higher or lower level if they wish. One limiting factor is cost in that a stamped addressed envelope will need to be enclosed. The questionnaire can be given to parents at the time of involvement or sent out afterwards.

12. How do we monitor response rates?

A lack of response always introduces the notion of a bias, which may skew the results and threaten the validity of the exercise. Dowling and Leibowitz (1994) remarked upon the unreliability of some parental surveys, due to low return rate. Hence, it would be useful to monitor response rates in order to determine if there any particular problems in obtaining feedback in the local authority. We will report the response level in the overall feedback so that a service can determine how they compare with others. Hence it would be useful to record how many questionnaires were distributed.

13. What constitutes significant involvement (as used in question 11)

By significant involvement we were referring to a reasonable period of involvement with a child or young person. This might have been at any stage of the code of practice (school action, school action-plus or Statement). It might have been in the context of casework, assessment or consultation session. It is not envisaged that this questionnaire would be used to evaluate training or therapeutic intervention which would probably be evaluated separately. The other critical criterion is that it needs to be work of which parents have some knowledge, either through a meeting or associated paperwork (report or letter describing what was done or found).

It might be necessary to record on the form the nature of involvement and type of issue in order to ensure services can compare feedback about similar types of work.

Dr Roger Norgate & Dr Phil Stringer
Hampshire Educational Psychology Service Research & Evaluation Unit