



# Complaints Survey Toolkit: Implementation Guide

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## About this handbook

This Implementation Guide is a handbook, part of the Complaints Survey Toolkit, designed to assist health and social care organisations in implementing the survey with the aim to collect feedback from their complainants using a robust survey tool. The survey can be implemented as a postal survey, an online survey or as both.

## Background

The report of the Francis Inquiry into the failings at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust was published in February 2013 and placed heavy emphasis on the need, across the NHS, for organisations to recognise the importance of patient complaints and to create robust systems and cultures that were able to deal with and learn from them.

In November 2014 'My Expectations For Raising Complaints And Concerns' was published. The report documented the findings from research, conducted by an independent research company with service users, advocacy groups and national bodies. It identified a need for measurement tools that allow health and social care services to measure the experience of those wanting to raise concerns or make a complaint.

This Complaints Survey will allow organisations to survey complainants in a consistent and systematic way. It provides:

- a means of recording how complainants experience the complaints system and the extent to which the organisation learns from complaints.
- a resource that NHS and social care complaints managers can use to assess effectiveness of their approach to complaints.
- a resource that senior executives can use to scrutinise complaint handling and take steps to improve complaint handling.
- a way for commissioners to hold providers to account locally for how they handle complaints.
- a way to drive improvements in complaint handling and resolution.

# Timeline

The survey is intended to be implemented as a rolling survey with a new sample of complainants being drawn once every two weeks. The complainants included in the sample should be those complainants who have received their outcome 4-5 weeks prior to sampling.

All complainants should be notified in their acknowledgement letter and outcome letter about the survey and should be given the information to opt out if they do not want to receive this survey. Therefore we recommend adding the following sentence in your standard acknowledgement letter as well as the outcome letter (please replace the 'XXX' with a telephone number):

## **Post-outcome survey only**

### ***Acknowledgement and outcome letter text***

*'We may send you a survey about the complaints process after you receive your outcome. If you would not like to receive this, or if you have any questions, please contact. XXX.'*

## **Pre- and post- outcome survey**

### ***Acknowledgement letter text:***

*'We may send you a survey about the complaints process to understand your experiences. This will be sent in two parts – before and after you receive your outcome. If you would not like to receive either of these surveys, or if you have any questions, please contact XXXX'*

### ***Outcome letter text:***

*'You may have already received a survey from us about your experiences so far. We will send you the second part of this questionnaire following this response. If you would not like to receive this, or if you have any questions, please contact XXX'*

All complainants in your sample will be contacted by post or email. Please note that each complainant should be contacted through **one** method only, by post with the paper-based questionnaire or by email with a link to an online survey. There will be 2 mailings - an initial mailing followed by one reminder to non-responders with a gap of 2 weeks between the mailings.

Figure 1 below provides an illustration of the survey timetable for a 12 week period.

Once you have decided the start date for fieldwork (week 6 in the timetable below) you should count back 4-5 weeks and sample all complainants who have received their outcome during this two week period, this is Sample A. This is the first sample of people who should be sent a questionnaire.

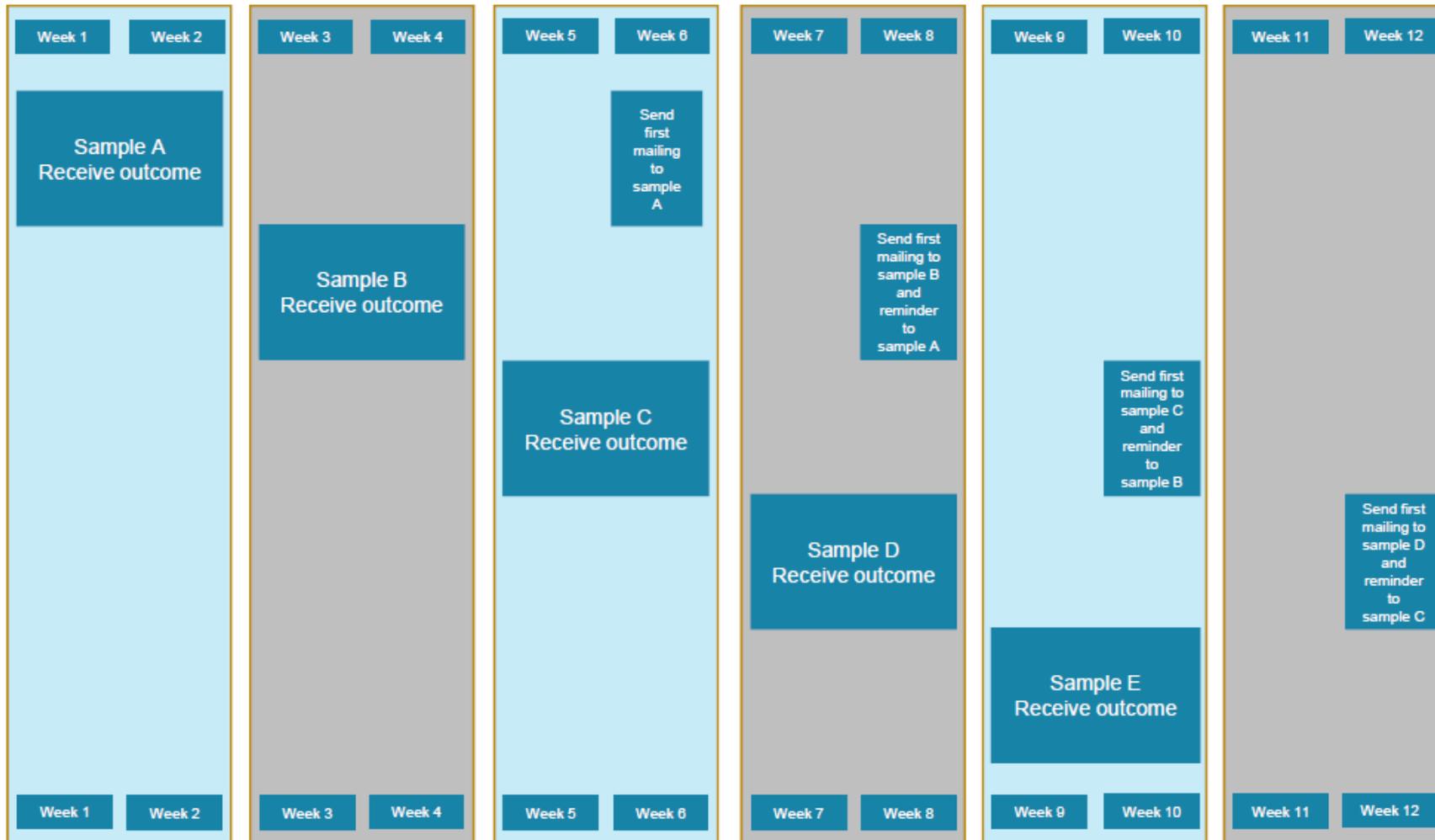
After two weeks you will need to send all non-responders in Sample A the reminder mailing (see week 8 in the timetable). You will also need to draw your next new sample, Sample B. Again, do this by counting back 4-5 weeks and selecting all complainants who have received their outcome during this two week period, this is Sample B.

Two weeks later (week 10 in the timetable), you will need to send all non-responders in Sample B the reminder mailing. You will also need to draw your next new sample, Sample C. Again, do this by counting back 4-5 weeks and selecting all complainants who have received their outcome during this two week period (weeks 5 and 6 in the timetable), this is Sample C.

This rolling cycle should be followed throughout the year.

Figure 1: Timetable

Start of fieldwork



## Sampling

You will need to follow the separate document named '*Sampling Compilation Guide*' to select your sample of complainants who will be sent a survey. If any complainant has indicated that they do not want their records used for secondary purposes (e.g. they have asked to be excluded from all surveys or they do not want their address details being used for any reason other than responding to their complaint), please ensure that these people are excluded from your sample mailing list. This should be checked using your local records.

## Materials and practicalities

### Questionnaire and covering letters

The questionnaire is included in this Toolkit. The front page of the questionnaire mentions the purpose of the survey and explains how to fill it in.

The front page also has space for a telephone number to be included if a helpline has been put in place. If it is felt necessary to add in two telephone number, e.g. one for questions and one for opting out calls, this can also be inserted.

Complainants (especially those in primary care) should be made aware that the anonymity of their response is not guaranteed, but instead that their responses will remain confidential to the practice manager/ complaints department and will not be shared with clinicians or care providers.

#### *For paper questionnaires*

On the bottom left side of the front page of the paper questionnaire there is a textbox visible, highlighted in yellow, stating: **INSERT URN HERE** e.g. ABC1001.

Here you have to insert the Unique Reference Number (URN)<sup>1</sup> for every record, this can either be done (i) via mail merging<sup>2</sup> the number on the front page when printing OR (ii) printing a label with the URN for each record and sticking these on the front page individually. Every record will receive one URN which they will keep until the end of the fieldwork.

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<sup>1</sup> This field should be a combination of a 3-character code that is identical for every record (you can use a survey code such as 'COM' or if you are an NHS Trust you can use your three-character Department of Health code), followed by a series of 4-digit numbers ascending from **1001** assigned by you e.g. ABC1001. The final 4-character number should be unique for each record.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the use of mail merge see: <https://support.office.com/en-in/article/Use-mail-merge-to-create-and-print-letters-and-other-documents-f488ed5b-b849-4c11-9cff-932c49474705>

The paper questionnaire can be printed in black/white as well as colour. Questionnaires will be sent with the first mailing and with the reminder.

### For online questionnaires

The survey can also be carried out online however please note that the questionnaire should be set up and hosted by the organisation running the online survey. The online questionnaire should contain all the questions seen in the paper version of the questionnaire and all those invited to take part should receive an identical online questionnaire. It is also important that the online survey package you choose logs who has completed an online survey so that reminder emails can be sent to non-respondents only.

### Covering letters/emails

The covering letters/emails for both mailings are available in this toolkit. You will need to add your organisation logo at the top of the letters as well as completing the missing information, such as adding organisation name, survey link (if using an online version) and signatory details. All the areas where this is required are highlighted.

Organisations are encouraged to carefully consider the subject lines used for email invitations. It is important to make sure that these are easily understood. Possible subject lines include: Your experience of making a complaint, or [Organisation Name] Complaints Survey, or Complaints Survey: Invitation.

## The Mailings

Please remember that each complainant should be contacted through **one** method only, by post or by email.

### First mailing

The first mailing should be sent to all complainants who received their outcome 4-5 weeks previously. From the Toolkit you will need:

- Printed questionnaires, **numbered with the URN**. The number must match the number on the address label, and the number on the list of complainant details. The Royal National Institute of the Blind recommends the URN be printed in size 14 font and located inside the box on the bottom left side of the front page of the questionnaire
- Mailing 1 covering letter or email template – with the relevant fields completed for your own organisation, including your logo/ letterhead

- Multi-language helpline sheet<sup>3</sup> (recommended but only to be included if a telephone helpline with a link to language-line is being provided)

From your own stocks/resources:

- Envelopes (size A4 or A5) for mailing survey materials to complainants
- Labels for addressing envelopes
- Labels for sender address on reverse of envelopes
- FREEPOST envelopes<sup>4</sup> for return of questionnaires
- Hosted online survey (if being offered as an option)

Once the first mailing has been sent, questionnaires will be returned completed. This data needs to be entered in the '**Data Entry Template**<sup>5</sup>'.

## Second mailing

The second mailing should be sent approximately **10 working days** after the first mailing, to all complainants who do not respond to the first mailing (except, of course, those who withdraw). Usually you will need to send reminders to around 55-75% of the original service user sample. The following items are needed:

From the Toolkit:

- Printed questionnaires, **numbered with the URN**. The number must match the number on the address label, and the number on the list of service user details.
- Mailing 2 covering letter or email template - with the relevant fields completed for your own organisation, including your logo/ letterhead
- Multi-language helpline sheet (if used in first mailing).

From your own stocks/resources:

- Large envelopes for mailing questionnaires to complainants
- Labels for addressing envelopes
- Labels for sender address on reverse of envelopes
- FREEPOST envelopes for returning questionnaires
- Hosted online survey (if being offered as an option)

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<sup>3</sup> This document can be found in the toolkit, the languages covered by this document are: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Cantonese), Farsi /Persian, Gujarati, Hindi, Kurdish, Chinese (Mandarin), Punjabi, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish.

<sup>4</sup> Please see the section 'FREEPOST address' on page 9 for more information

<sup>5</sup> This template is included in the Toolkit, as well as instructions for entering the data in the 'Data Capture Instructions'.

To know which respondents to send reminder letters, the '**Data Entry Template**' should be visited. When a questionnaire is returned, blank (which implies an opt out), or completed, the date and URN should be captured in the entry template, together with the survey status as listed in the table below:

Code	Survey Status	Action
1	returned a completed questionnaire	Enter survey data in the ' <i>Data entry template</i> ' AND remove from further mailings
2	survey returned undelivered i.e. wrong postal or email address	remove from further mailings
3	deceased	remove from further mailings
4	opted out of survey e.g. via returning a blank questionnaire or opting out over the phone/email	remove from further mailings
5	not eligible to take part (e.g. haven't made a complaint)	remove from further mailings

The 'Outcome Code (survey status)' (Column Q) of this file should be updated **fortnightly** throughout fieldwork.

When the reminder mailing is due, this column from the '**Data Entry Template**' is copied in the Outcome Code (survey status) (Column B) of the '**Mailing File**', as shown in Table 1. Then the **outcome** column can be filtered to 'blanks', and these records can be sent the reminder. **We recommend you keep this file encrypted.** Mailing lists of complainants' names and addresses should be **destroyed** when the mailing process is complete.

Table 1 – Example mailing file

Unique Reference Number	Outcome Code	Title	First Name	Surname	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	Address 4	Address 5	Postcode	Email address
COM1001		Miss	Zoe	Yong	6, Street One,	Swindon				AB1 1YZ	Zoe.abbot@swindon.com
COM1002	1	Master	Fred	Yoo	Flat 2,	Street Two, Swindon	Swindon			AB2 6XZ	
COM1589		Miss	Daisy	Ahmed	7, Street Three,	Swindon				AB4 7MX	
COM1599	4	Master	Ben	Abbot	Flat 3,	Street Four, Swindon	Swindon			AB9 5ZX	byoung@flat.com

## Sending out paper questionnaires and the reminder mailing

Address labels are needed for each complainant. We recommend using the mail merge feature in a word processing package to create the address labels from your database of service user names and addresses. **It is essential that the unique record number (URN) is on each address label**, as this has to be matched with the number on the front of the questionnaire. The label should not include any other information except the complainant's name, address and postcode details, and the unique record number.

### Address Label Format

First name Surname

Address 1

Address 2

Address 3

Address 4

Address 5

Postcode

Unique Record Number

**Remember that you should check your own records for deaths before sending out reminders.**

## FREEPOST address

A FREEPOST address lets complainants return completed paper surveys at no cost to themselves. After you have paid for the licence, you will only pay for the responses you receive. The FREEPOST address can be printed on the envelopes you send out with the questionnaires. Printed envelopes must comply with Royal Mail guidelines.

Details of how to apply for a FREEPOST licence can be found at the Royal Mail website: <http://www.royalmail.com>.

## Survey helpline

The covering letter/email to complainants should include a telephone number to call if they have any questions or worries about the survey, or if they would like to opt out. All staff who are likely to take calls should be properly briefed about the details of the survey, and be aware of the questions or worries they are likely to receive. You might want to set up a FREEPHONE line for this purpose.

Upon receiving a call, ask the complainant to tell you their Unique Record Number. This should be (i) on the address label of the envelope they received, AND (ii) on the front of the questionnaire itself. You can then use this number to identify people who do not want to receive any further reminders to remove them from further mailings.

**You will be required to remove any opt outs from complainants prior to survey mailing dates.**

## Language Line (optional)

Limited understanding of English could be a barrier for completing the survey and it would therefore be good practice to offer additional support or interpretation service (e.g. completing the survey via telephone for those with limited understanding of English). This service, a three-way conversation between you (or your helpline operator), the complainant and the interpreter is mostly working on a pay-as-you-go basis. If you decide to offer this service, a '*Multi-language leaflet template*' is available in this toolkit and can be sent with both mailings. This leaflet gives directions in the 20 most common non-English languages spoken in England. Please insert your helpline number on this leaflet.

## Storing completed questionnaires

The data entered from completed questionnaires must be stored in a separate file and computer to the lists of complainants' names. If you have carried out an online survey as well as sent paper based questionnaires then the data should be combined in the data entry spreadsheet. Mailing lists of complainants' names and addresses should be destroyed when the mailing process is complete. Paper questionnaires should be kept for six months after the fieldwork closes.

## Data Protection and Confidentiality

When carrying out the survey, you will need to ensure that you comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, and ensure that all responses are kept confidential. **If you have not already done so, please ensure that you add research to your Data Protection Act registration, as one of the purposes for processing personal data supplied by data subjects.**

If you are part of an NHS Trust, you will also need to comply with the NHS Code of Practice on Confidentiality (2003)<sup>6</sup>, which incorporates the Caldicott principles<sup>7</sup>.

It is important to make sure that any statements you make about complainant anonymity are accurate. In most cases when a survey is carried out by the organisation that the complainant complained to, it is not accurate to claim that complainant responses will be anonymous as the person within the organisation who receives the completed questionnaires is usually able to match these responses to complainant names and addresses.

Where there are likely to be fewer than 10 respondents to the survey, please note that the generalisability of the findings will be limited and should be treated with caution. Small numbers of respondents will also increase the likelihood that respondents can be identified, particularly where responses are broken down by demographic criteria.

It is essential that any survey is conducted in such a way that the complainants' confidentiality is respected and given a high priority. Complainants' responses must not be presented to anyone in a way that allows individuals to be identified. Additionally, the Survey Mailing file containing the complainants' names and addresses should be stored securely (password protected) and the raw data set should not be provided to any member of staff at the organisation who does not need to view it (i.e. those who are not directly working on the project).

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<sup>6</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/200146/Confidentiality\\_\\_NHS\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/200146/Confidentiality__NHS_Code_of_Practice.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> For more information please see: [systems.hscic.gov.uk/infogov/igfaqs/quickreferencecf.doc](http://systems.hscic.gov.uk/infogov/igfaqs/quickreferencecf.doc)

It is your legal responsibility to ensure that you meet any guarantees of anonymity or confidentiality made in covering letters and on the questionnaire form. Your organisation's Caldicott Guardian, Data Protection Officer, information governance board or legal advisors should advise you on these matters<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the Data Protection Act 1998 see: ICO – Information Commissioner's Office: <http://ico.org.uk/> . Further guidance can be found on the Market Research Society website: [http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/data\\_protection/](http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/data_protection/)