Questionnaire and Survey Policy Guidance

Wessex Deanery

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Introduction

Wessex Deanery supports surveys, questionnaires, audits and local evaluation when they will improve the professional practice of local educators, improve trainee education and hence improve patient care. Innovation, education, research and feedback are essential to the development of high quality healthcare education.

However, the Deanery recognises the importance of not overwhelming trainees with surveys that may not be required or those that duplicate existing information. There are significant resource implications and risks if invalid conclusions are drawn from poor research. Therefore each survey request requires an application to the Deanery Quality Management team for approval to ensure that they are well constructed and asking relevant questions which have not been answered elsewhere.

This policy applies to all survey and questionnaires, involving Wessex Deanery trainees, trainers and the Wessex Courses Centre, that are looking to target a whole specialty group or those based in multiple trusts. It also applies to any external survey requests the Deanery may receive. Please note however that it is not applicable to local departmental feedback or focus group work.

Annual Deanery-wide or national anonymised screening surveys, such as the national GMC trainee and trainer surveys, act as screening tools and provide comparative information to other similar settings in England and Wales. These should be seen as providing a snapshot of training in a particular Trust or specialty. The Wessex Deanery uses these to help facilitate further discussion to validate potential issues or notable practice that has been identified.

The more frequent end of post surveys used by a number of Schools produce cumulative data, which can be anonymised and over time will give more focused local feedback than an annual snapshot survey. Wherever possible these should integrate with data from other sources such as the national GMC Trainee survey and local departmental feedback.

Local feedback, with trainee permission, gives a more immediate and specific feedback that can be acted on locally and reviewed with local knowledge. Examples include feedback after sessions such as appraisals, induction or teaching. These can be open group discussions, written comments or responses to questions.

Some survey applications include requests for deanery assistance for distribution of surveys or distribution of invitations to undertake a survey. There are significant time resource implications for the Deanery so mailing can only be undertaken when there is a clearly relevant research question and a focussed approach to non responders. Data will be treated in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and Wessex Deanery/SHA procedures and protocols. Please note we cannot release any personal data, including email addresses, names or any other identifiable data.
**Ethical principles**

Applying a survey does take up resources, which include the time for preparation, completion, follow up of non-responders, results review, results summary, dissemination of results and follow up. The resources for these should be outlined in the survey application.

Survey completion may only take 10 minutes but this is a relatively small part of the process. Survey completion time is multiplied by the number of respondents and represents a significant workload across a deanery.

These are some of the ethical issues to consider when planning a survey and will form part of the review by the Deanery when deciding if a survey request can be supported:

- Does the benefit of the survey, in terms of improved education, outweigh the time and cost of resources used?

- Does the information being collected already exist? E.g via the national GMC Trainee Survey or existing research?

- Does the survey answer the specific issue being considered or is there a better approach that will give a clearer answer and use less resource?

- Are the survey questions themselves going to give an answer to the issue being considered? Are they well designed and specific?

- Is there scope for collaboration with others to get the answer to the question?

- Is the response rate likely to be high enough for useful action to take place? A low response rate invalidates results and does not justify the resource required. If the response rate is going to be low then is another approach, such as sampling or focused interviews, better? An expected e-mail response rate is 20% and is unlikely to rise above 40% unless other approaches to follow up of non-respondents are used. The Deanery will only consider a survey where there is the potential for a good response rate (above 60%).

- Does the tool used to distribute and hold the survey enable focused follow-up of non-responders or is this a blanket survey where repeated e-mailing of responders will generate duplicate responses and complaints? If people have been contacted to complete a survey and have taken the time to do this the method/tool to contact non-responders should be focused. The Deanery will only consider a survey where there is well designed non-responder follow up. The Deanery will normally only undertake a single mailing and will only consider a repeat mailing to identified non-responders.
Anonymity and Feedback

Any feedback should be
- Respected,
- Triangulated with other existing feedback, and
- Acted on appropriately in a way that is proportionate to the risk presented

*Open feedback* is given with trainees permission to use elsewhere to improve education.

*Anonymised feedback* is given on the basis that no trainee can be identified.

Where fewer than three trainees respond to a survey which is stated to be anonymised, the data should not be reported with more than one identifier. Where there are fewer than three respondents and an identifier, such as speciality and trust is noted, this will result in a trainee being identifiable and is a breach of confidentiality. Identifiers such as the trainers name, with fewer than three trainees, are a breach of confidentiality for both the trainee and trainer.

Data with fewer than three respondents should be treated as anecdotal data unless triangulated with other sources. Comments can be coming from one disgruntled individual and may not be objective.

Inclusion of trainee or trainer names in any report is not appropriate unless full permission has been given to include their name in the way it is being applied. Personalised data should only be available to the person it relates to unless explicit permission is given by them to share it with named others.

The nature of the type of feedback (open or anonymised) should be explicitly stated to the respondent at the time of completion. Responders should have the opportunity to request that their data remains anonymous if wished and so will not be identifiable and reported if fewer than three responders. Clear guidelines on what the collected data will be used for and who will have access to the results should be made available to all respondents. Whilst the majority of surveys will be carried out by individual schools to improve the quality of their training posts, such data will be useful to other Deanery teams (for example the Quality Management team) and may be shared internally within the Deanery. For all external or individual Wessex Deanery trainee survey requests an agreement on whether data will be shared should be in place prior to the start of the survey.

Feedback to specific individuals should be provided by a person experienced in communication skills and able to handle issues that may arise in these discussions.

Survey timing

The Deanery has a responsibility, as outlined in Standard three, Standards for Deaneries, *(The Trainee Doctor, GMC 2011)*, to promote the maximum response to all surveys conducted by the GMC. In addition all registered doctors have a responsibility to partake in quality improvement, of which the national GMC Training Surveys forms a part. Therefore no other surveys should take place during the period of the national GMC surveys (previously April to June). This is because it will have an adverse effect on response rate for both surveys. Wherever possible this national GMC trainee survey data should be used to inform the local surveys.
Survey application and Process

As outlined below, an application is required for all surveys.

Questions should be designed to minimise bias.

Questions about quality of training should map to national trainee survey questions wherever possible, ideally using the same wording and response options. In 2012 a full set of questions used for the GMC Trainee survey could be found [here].

Data handling and dissemination should be planned in advance.

Responses should be handled confidentially and only seen by those with permission from the respondent unless fully anonymised.

Wessex Deanery Schools
Many individual Schools have developed their own surveys. The Deanery needs to be aware of these and have a copy of any surveys used on file, accessible on request. A survey application checklist must be submitted for review.

Wessex Courses Centre
Any surveys undertaken that are more than feedback for a course need to be checked by the Quality Management team. A survey application checklist must be submitted for approval.

Wessex Deanery Individual Trainee Requests
A survey application checklist must be submitted and the survey approved before it can take place. Each application will require the name and contact details of a sponsor within the Deanery – an educator who will be prepared to support this survey. Sponsors will be contacted for verification.

External/Other Requests
A survey application checklist must be submitted and the survey approved before it can take place. Each application will require the name and contact details of a sponsor – an educator who will be prepared to support this survey. Sponsors will be contacted for verification.

Completed survey application forms will be reviewed by the Deanery and relevant educational leads and where deemed appropriate, by the Deanery Quality Management Board, where approval will either be granted or denied. All applications must demonstrate that they meet the expected criteria. Applicants will be informed of the outcome as soon as possible. Any documents to be distributed must meet the Deanery’s expectations in relation to layout, clarity of questions, grammar and spelling.

Due to the nature of the process the Deanery recommend applications are submitted at least six weeks prior to the proposed distribution date. Please note that processing applications will not take place during the Christmas period.
Please see Appendix 1 for a detailed survey process guide.

Please see Appendix 2 for the survey checklist that needs to be completed.
APPENDIX 1 - Wessex Deanery Survey Application Process (June 2012)

Survey request received by Quality Team
With completed checklist?

- No
  - Response letter
  - Checklist
  - Policy
  - Sent to requestor for completion

- Yes
  - Response letter sent to requestor

Do survey dates clash with GMC Survey?

- Yes
  - Requestor advised survey cannot take place during this period. If they would like us to keep application on file to review once national survey period closed, please advise.

- No
  - Send application and accompanying documents to educational leads for review
  - Quality Management Board to review application if appropriate
  - QT to contact sponsor

Not approved
- Requestor informed with reason for decision

Approved
- Requestor informed
- Deanery Information team informed (if appropriate)
APPENDIX 2 Wessex Deanery Survey Application Checklist

Please complete this checklist and submit to the Wessex Deanery Quality Team for review (quality@wessexdeanery.nhs.uk).

Please note that before agreeing to any survey a detailed review will take place at the Deanery. Please allow at least six weeks for this process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Check</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of your project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aim of your project</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the specific survey question/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesis?</td>
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<td>Can it be answered by this survey?</td>
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<td>What are the anticipated conclusions from your survey?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the target group for this survey (please include details of specialty and location)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the estimated number of people you will be surveying?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a smaller subgroup that could be used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If yes - who are they?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Survey/Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is this during the GMC Survey period (April to end of June)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If yes please note that no surveys will be approved for this period.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please advise if you would like this application to be kept on file</td>
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<td>until after that date?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How long will the survey be open for?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is it an Anonymised or Open survey?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will results be reported if there are fewer than three respondents?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will individuals be identifiable in the presentation of results?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How will your survey invitation be distributed to your target group?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How will non responders be identified from responders to allow individual reminders for completion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your expected response rate</td>
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<td>Have any collaboration(s) been explored?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If yes, what are they?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has question design been checked for validity? Are any questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>Are there sufficient administration resources to cover each stage of work that is required?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a system to administer your survey in place – ie. IT and Data handling support Or Who are you requesting help from for dissemination of the survey?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How will the survey results be reported and to whom?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the data to be shared with other teams? If yes – please note who and how.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OFFICE USE:**

- Request received by Quality Team (date)
- Contact sponsor
- Survey Approved
- Date
- Signed by Quality Team
- Applicant Informed (date)