

## Quality Assurance and the Data Protection Act

Acuity is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office, reg. number: Z9651144.

### Data collection, input and analysis

Acuity will be responsible for the data analysis on completed surveys, including checks for the representativeness of the population as a whole, with weights applied as appropriate.

### Quality control and data cleaning

Acuity and our researchers carry out a series of processes throughout the survey to ensure a high quality of data accuracy and analysis. Before carrying out any survey, our Data Analyst will check the initial data file supplied by the landlord to ensure that the data provided is sufficient for the fieldwork, that it contains the necessary property-related information (e.g. bed no, property type) to check representativeness and calculate weightings, and that the information is up-to-date and excludes, for example, void properties. Once the raw data files are available, a series of checks, which have been developed by our Data Analysts using SPSS, are made to 'clean' and validate the data. These include checking internal consistency, routing errors, and missing value re-coding assessments. Further technical details are available on request. After the report has been written it is checked by another member of the team for clarity and grammar; and all figures and percentages are re-calculated.

### Data analysis

Sets of data tables will be produced which will include sets of cross-tabulations and cross-breaks as agreed with the client and produced at overall, at regional level and by the key diversity characteristics, including ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, religion and sexual orientation.

### Equal opportunities, confidentiality and the Data Protection Act

When the surveys are completed, a unique reference number will enable them to be linked with names and addresses, but we retain this information and would not release this to The client without the express permission of the respondents. When reports are written by Acuity, comments will not be made on the opinions or traits of very small subgroups, when it becomes possible to identify individuals.

### Our policies and standards

We have included within our proposal details of our terms and conditions and summary insurance information. We would be happy to provide any of the further documents as required: anonymised reports, equality and diversity policy, insurance certificates, risk assessment and our customer standards policy.





Acuity observes closely the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and we adhere strictly to the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct, as revised in 1999, in relation to data protection and respondent confidentiality. This Code of Conduct is designed to support all those engaged in social research to maintain a professional standard; it gives assurance that research is conducted in an ethical manner; and it is needed to create confidence in, and to encourage co-operation among, the business community and the general public.

In following the principles enshrined in the 1998 Data Protection Act and in the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, Acuity ensures that all personal data we collect are:

- processed fairly and lawfully
- only used for the specific and lawful purposes for which they are collected
- adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate and up to date
- not kept beyond fulfilling the purpose for which they are collected
- processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects
- kept secure
- not transferred outside the EU unless adequate protections are in place.

We ask that any social landlord we work with ensures that its Data Protection registration entitles them to release the names and addresses to Acuity for this survey.

We assign a unique reference number to each questionnaire in the case of a postal survey (and each respondent if interviews are conducted) this enables us to link with other information in the sample relating to each respondent, such as property type, for further use in the data analysis.

This information is retained in complete confidence by Acuity, however, and under no circumstances would any information be released from the survey that enabled individual responses to the survey to be identified. In addition, when we write up the survey results, comments will not be made on the opinions or traits of very small subgroups, when it becomes possible to identify individuals.

All data files provided to the social landlord for further analysis are completely anonymised prior to being released, in line with Data Protection Act 1998 guidelines.

### **Telephone interviewers**

Our researchers regularly conduct quantitative and qualitative telephone interviews in consumer and business markets on a wide range of subjects. All telephone work is fully supervised, and interviews are monitored on a regular basis by supervisors. All interviewers would be given a comprehensive briefing prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, to ensure that interviewers understand the purpose of the exercise and are



fully aware of the requirements of the questionnaire. They would also conduct back-checks of 10% of each interviewer's quota, which involves telephoning the respondent to ensure key facts were recorded correctly during the interview and that the interviewer was courteous.

We understand the sensitivities of this project and only suitable and experienced interviewers are used for this survey. The MRS accreditation means that we work to ICQS standards.

Our researchers work only on research surveys and are fully trained and experienced in handling sensitive questions and social housing clients. Emphasis is placed in the training that whilst needing to remain impartial, the interviewers are effectively an element of the customer service that the respondent receives and appropriate professionalism is highly important.

Our researchers will give a detailed briefing to all interviewers selected to work on this project. This will cover aspects such as the background to the project, the type people they are looking to talk to and the likely contact that people may have had with the client. We like the client to have input into the briefing notes.

All calls are recorded (and kept for a period of 6 weeks). Our supervisors listen to 5-10% of all live calls made on a project. This enables feedback to be given to interviewers immediately to retain a high standard of interviewing. Our clients are welcome to listen to a random selection of calls for auditing and questionnaire development.

Additionally, we would flag the records of respondents who would like to be re-contacted by the client, for example if they are dissatisfied with the service or just need further contact. We also ensure that any respondent who needs assurance that the call is genuine is supplied with the appropriate contact number.



## Further quality controls

Our researchers will safeguard the data supplied in accordance with the Data Protection Act and professional memberships to ensure that the data subjects are protected at all times. This includes:

- Continuous off-site backups (all data and information is backed up including the SQL database in which the records are held, current interviews, previous data sets, exchange server etc.) so that in the event of a disaster all data can be recovered quickly and securely.
- Strictly limited administrator access (including a physically, locked server cabinet) to the database and, therefore, contact details.
- Data is disposed of using rule controlled data and voice archiving (all record identifiers removed when the data has been accepted by the client – including off-site backups).
- Calls are stored for auditing purposes for 6 weeks or until the project is concluded - whichever is soonest. If the client wishes to listen to calls on request, we can send selected call recordings as .wav files for any call made during this period to ensure that they are happy with the quality of our interviewers.

## Response rates

For the majority of our surveys we regularly achieve an adjusted response rate of 70% or more with a true response rate of 50%. The discrepancy in the figures relate to the number of telephone numbers that are incorrect. Key points on maximising response rates are:

- Ensuring that telephone numbers are correct at the outset using data append
- Ensuring that if the program becomes a continuous approach, that numbers are actively sought. We can provide a list of those who had incorrect numbers for the client to assist in the correct process – e.g. send a letter or ask managers to keep this up to date.
- That the script and survey is relevant and simple; it needs to be kept short (ideally not more than 5 to 8 minutes).
- That the data cleaning exercise is treated as a separate exercise to the survey.
- Respondents aren't re-contacted too frequently
- Maximise fieldwork times – our call centre is open from 8.30am until 8.30 pm during the week and 10am – 7pm weekends although times of calling are set according to the needs of a particular project.
- Our software ensures that numbers are tried at different times of the day and week before assuming a non-response.



- Our number is generally withheld – but we ensure that once a number has been dialled a couple of times without response, we try with our number (particularly important for mobile numbers).
- Interviewers are also trained to be aware that someone called on their mobile phone may not be in a convenient place to complete a survey. If this is the case, the interviewer will arrange a time convenient for the respondent to call back, on either on the same number or an alternative number
- We have a call scheduling part of our program to ensure that any call –backs arranged are conducted on time.