

Quality Assurance Policy

We are determined to maintain the highest standards in all of the work that we undertake, and to this end we use our own, rigorous quality approach. Each component part of a project includes an element of Quality Assurance (QA), and the Project Manager takes responsibility for ensuring that all work is reviewed against the relevant QA standard.

We have different QA standards for different types of work, whether it is building a database or designing a questionnaire, but each standard is designed to ensure that:

- Outcomes conform to the specifications and expectations of the client
- All work is peer-reviewed by someone with appropriate knowledge and experience
- Work takes into consideration leading thinking on best practice
- Work is of a high standard
- Work represents good value for the client
- Work conforms to relevant legal and regulatory requirements

Data collection, input and analysis

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

Benchmarking

Benchmarking data is validated by the system on entry (for each PI it must be within a certain range) automatically. It is then manually checked by the benchmarking team against the other members in the group to identify outliers.

Data file transfer

Acuity requires all clients to use a secure data file transfer method. As a minimum we accept password protected data files sent by secure file transfer, with the password sent in a separate file or relayed via a telephone call. Acuity is happy to work with clients who subscribe to commercial data transfer services and can provide access to our own secure file sharing if required. Access to client data files at Acuity is restricted and the process is managed by our data controller.

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 client 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) and that the information is up-to-date and contains valid records where applicable.

Data analysis

Once the raw data output files are available, checks by our Data Analysts are made to validate (and clean where applicable) the data. For manual data output files this includes checking internal





consistency, routing errors, and missing value re-coding assessments. In built checks are in place for Forsta client dashboard data files. Further technical details are available on request.

Data tables are produced which include sets of cross-tabulations with breaks as agreed with the client. After any data tables have been run they are checked by another member of the team for accuracy and sent to the client. In built checks are in place for the running of data tables by the client through the Forsta dashboard.

Reporting

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 double checked.

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

Acuity observes closely the provisions of Data Protection Legislation and, as Company Partners, we adhere strictly to the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct in relation to quality, data protection and respondent confidentiality. Our project management, training and quality processes adhere fully to our ISO accreditations. The MRS 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 2018 Data Protection Act, the ISO20252:2019 standard, ISO9001/27001 standards and the MRS Code of Conduct, Acuity ensures that all personal data 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/client 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 unless permission had been given. 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.

Any data files sent to the social landlord/client for further analysis are completely anonymised prior to being released, with only a client reference code provided against those records who have given permission, in line with Data Protection Act 2018 guidelines. Data directly accessible by the social landlord/client for further analysis through their dashboard will be anonymised unless permission given.

Telephone interviewers

Our researchers regularly conduct telephone interviews on a wide range of subjects. All telephone work is fully supervised, and interviews are monitored on a regular basis by Team Leaders/Supervisors. All interviewers are briefed prior to the commencement of fieldwork, to ensure that interviewers understand the purpose of the exercise and are fully aware of the requirements of the questionnaire.

We understand the sensitivities of some research projects and only suitable and experienced interviewers are used for these surveys. All telephone interviewers and fieldwork will operate in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct 2023 (further information can be obtained from https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code_of_conduct).

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.

All interviewers selected to work on projects will work to a brief, provided prior to fieldwork starting. This brief will cover aspects such as the background to the project, the type of people they are looking to talk to and the likely contact that people may have had with the client.

All calls are recorded. Team Leaders/Supervisors listen to a minimum of 5% of all completed calls for each project to ensure the interviews were conducted correctly in line with MRS guidelines and all responses were recorded accurately. Our clients are welcome to listen to a random selection of calls for quality purposes.

Additionally, we would flag the records of respondents who would like to be re-contacted (who have given permission if applicable) 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 an 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 (data and information is backed up including the SQL database in which the records are held, current interviews, previous data sets, exchange server etc.). Forsta Plus SaaS data is backed up daily, with weekly full back ups. This will ensure in the event of a disaster all data can be recovered quickly and securely
- Strictly limited administrator access to the database.
- Data destruction by means as appropriate for the type and sensitivity of the data. MS Office 365 allows for files to be permanently deleted so that no trace of the data remains. All paper documents including questionnaires are securely destroyed with full documentation.
- All calls are recorded and stored for auditing purposes for 90 days. If the client wishes to listen to calls on request, we can securely 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

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 to an adequate length.
- 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 standard call centre times are from 9:00 to 20:00 Mon-Fri and 10:00 – 18:00 on Saturdays although times of calling are agreed with each client and set according to the needs of a particular project. (Sunday calling can be arranged with clients where required).
- Our software ensures that numbers are tried at different times of the day and week before assuming a non-response.
- Interviewers are 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 manage any call –backs arranged.

Data protection

Acuity takes data protection very seriously and our Privacy and Data Protection Statement regarding Research Projects may be found on our website here: <https://www.arap.co.uk/who-we-are/#policies>
Acuity is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office, reg. number: Z9651144.



Data retention

Acuity will retain client data for a limited period of time following completion of a project, in order that we can provide any additional reports or information requested by the client. The normal period of time for which Acuity retains personal data are 365 days for all types of records e.g. digital records, paper records, recorded data, etc. This data retention period is also included in the project specification brief. The period can be altered to meet the Client's requirements.

Acuity's Privacy and Data Protection Statement regarding Research Projects may be found on our website here: <https://www.arap.co.uk/who-we-are/#policies>

Document version

Version: QA_Policy 2025.Docx

Last Reviewed: 13 January 2025

Next Review: 31 December 2025