

Facilitating and Responding to User Feedback: An M25 Quality Group Checklist for Best Practice

Feedback Mechanisms and their advantages	Disadvantages	Tips for success
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Day-to-day		
<p>Face-to-face</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediacy: many issues can be dealt with on- the-spot quickly and efficiently by well-trained staff • Appropriate library staff contact details can be given in the event of follow-up action being required • Service-user gets personal attention and feels their 'issue' has been recognised/acted upon or referred appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback (good and bad) may go unrecorded • Staff on a busy desk may forget to refer the feedback on appropriately or may not actually recognise it as feedback which needs to be passed on to service managers • 'Instant' feedback (from service users <i>and</i> from staff is not necessarily <i>well-considered</i> feedback • Poor response at service point could increase user dissatisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training is paramount. A courteous, responsive and informed front-of-house team will engender user confidence in the feedback system • It's easy for face- to-face feedback to get lost in the hurly burly of the day, so ensure you have effective procedures in place to capture and act on it • Encourage staff to 'own' feedback they receive by taking responsibility for seeing it through the system and confirming that it gets followed up by others • When 'instant' feedback is given, staff should get in the habit of consulting with the Feedback (or service) Manager to confirm their response was correct • Consider having a staff-use only 'Feedback Daybook' available behind service points. It will allow staff to record informal/verbal feedback, noting the action taken or required. Include some brief examples of the kinds of feedback it would be sensible to document • Consider a complaints form for users who want to make a formal written complaint and back this up with a published complaints procedure • Avoid being too rule-bound. A pragmatic response, sensibly applied, can often help to satisfy user concerns without damaging overall consistency of approach or policy.

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<p>Comments Book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible, well-positioned Comments Book is quick to use • Users can identify themselves or remain anonymous • Can feedback in their own words • Feedback is visible to others and may trigger other related and useful comments • Publicly expressed plaudits can put staff and other users in a positive frame of mind • Negative feedback is productive too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative feedback can be catching! • Negative feedback, if left unanswered, or if answered ineffectively, is highly visible and will reflect badly on the service • Manual nature of the feedback makes analysis more cumbersome • They can attract personal comments • High visibility of the book means its success is often dependent on the maturity of the users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site your Comments Book prominently • Allow both user and Library sufficient space to make meaningful comments and responses • Tell users how quickly their comments will be responded to and stick to your promises • Designate a named staff member and 'deputy' to 'own' the book and to respond, or to organise responses, by others • Number each page of the book so that you can, if necessary refer users to a previous but related response (saves time and repetition where users make essentially the same comment/complaint) but make sure you don't ignore new issues or leave the user feeling ignored • Before you respond, make sure you have understood the comment properly – users can often express themselves ambiguously • If you, or one of your staff knows the user in question, try to speak to them in person if it seems appropriate. Your written response can then make reference to the conversation and it shows others that the Comments Book is taken seriously

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<p>Suggestions Box</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible well-positioned box offers quick and anonymous feedback route • A well-designed Suggestions Form will prompt users to give relevant information including their contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might become part of the furniture. Could be ignored by users if they lack confidence that suggestions will be checked and acted upon • Without a pre-printed Suggestions Form, the onus is on the user to include all relevant info and they often forget contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have one, site it prominently and label it clearly • Remember, it's of limited use unless it's emptied regularly and acted upon • Indicate how frequently the box will be checked and how comments will be dealt with • Assign responsibility for management of the suggestions to a named staff member or to your designated Feedback Manager • Provide a Suggestions form for people to use. As a minimum, include the following fields/questions on it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running number to facilitate filing and retrieval of forms - Date and time - User name and contact details (optional) - Suggestion/comments field (ensure you allow plenty of space for feedback) - Happy for comments to be made public? (yes/no tick box) - Library response - Action taken or required (completed by the service provider).
<p>Online Feedback Form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick, easy and visible method for users to make contact • Easy for staff to manage • Users can remain anonymous or identify themselves to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be invisible in an overly 'busy' website • Can be unpopular with some users • Some web forms limit the amount of free text that can be input • Many web forms are not print-friendly so users can't track their message by retaining a copy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form must be visible throughout website • Unlimited message length (no maximum character limits) • Feedback function should be distinguishable from a general online enquiry service • Print-friendly forms so user can keep a printed record of message • Offer user the option to copy the message to their own mail box • Forms must be sent to an inbox address that is checked frequently • Indicate how long the user can expect to wait for a response • Indicate what the user should do, or who they should contact, if they fail to get a requested response.

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<p>Survey kiosks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming increasingly popular in retail and other commercial sectors. Also used in museum and local government contexts. Often placed at a service point or in a reception area • Easy to use and to tailor to local needs • Can provide real time feedback from customers. • Simple information gathering, for example monthly, quarterly, rolling or spot surveys • Service or product-specific information gathering. E.g. what do users feel about our new opening hours, copy and printing services etc? • They can be purchased outright or rented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boredom factor, once novelty wears off. Survey fatigue • Ongoing need for management and evaluation of data • Expense of installation, maintenance and upgrades etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think carefully before acquiring one • Check to see if another Library is using one to see what their experience is • See if the manufacturer will allow you to trial it before permanent installation • Will it add value to your current evaluation methods? • Site the kiosk prominently • Publicise it well, particularly if you regularly change the survey questions • Feed the results back to users regularly. <p><i>Below are some links to UK-based Kiosk and software suppliers. NB. Quality Group members do not have personal experience of using any of these companies. Their inclusion here is by way of information not recommendation</i></p> <p>http://newsletter.leonardokiosks.co.uk/0504_1.html</p> <p>http://www.kioskmarketplace.com/news_story_23585.htm</p> <p>http://www.snapsurveys.com/focuson/home_focus_1205.shtml</p> <p>http://www.data-sphere.co.uk</p>

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Surveys		
<p>User Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library can solicit specific feedback from defined target audience/s • Off-the-shelf software packages commonly in use by many libraries, allowing benchmarking between organisations • 'Do it yourself ' packages available commercially and allow institutions to tailor the content to their particular needs • Statistically valid returns will help to inform service developments by highlighting trends/patterns in relation to particular audience groups • Feedback can be linked into evidence-based strategic aims and objectives and even help to leverage funds, or high-level support, from within or outside the organisation • Survey outcomes can assist with Charter Mark applications • Positive action can be taken on 'quick win' issues. ('You said' and 'We did') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Off-the-shelf' Library survey software (e.g. LibQual, LIBRA) may or may not suit all Library types • Diminishing responses can be a problem if same or very similar survey questions are presented too frequently • Can be time-consuming and costly to set up and evaluate • Completion rates may be significantly lower than response rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise potential for 'questionnaire fatigue' by considering a full survey every two years rather than annually • Canvas your audience and your front-of-house staff <i>before</i> you survey to be sure you are addressing users' key concerns • Vary the focus of your surveys so that you can target, and act upon, <i>key</i> issues • Incentivise your audience by offering affordable but attractive prizes for survey completion • Include a question asking if the respondent would be willing to help in further evaluation exercises; a focus group, for example. This way you can start to build up a bank of willing participants • Publish the findings in an easily digestible format (key findings rather than reams of statistics) • Thank respondents by publicising the findings and the actions you've taken in response to them, highlighting quick wins and future plans. <p><i>Selected software packages</i></p> <p>http://www.libqual.org/</p> <p>http://www.priority-research.com/ (LIBRA. Site under construction)</p> <p>http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/</p> <p>http://www.snapsurveys.com/</p> <p><i>Article</i></p> <p><i>A survey of surveys</i> Christopher West, Sconul Focus no.31, Spring 2004 http://www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/newsletter/31/7.pdf</p>

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<p>1-to-1 survey interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediated by an interviewer (who may or may not be a member of staff) with a predefined set of questions, usually presented and answered 'in person' but also by phone • Can be done via a dedicated appointment or as part of a 'spot survey' of passing users • Can be used for issue-specific or general feedback • Useful for targeting specific audience groups whose take-up of online/paper surveys is historically low but who are happy to engage with another human being • 1-to-1 interaction may encourage respondents to provide more <i>informative</i> feedback • The personal nature of the process makes it easier to go back to the respondent for clarification or with supplementary questions or information • Can be conducted outside the service environment so useful for soliciting views from people who <i>don't</i> use the service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service users don't always respond well to be interrupted by a 'cold' survey. • Service users (and non-users) may decline to be interviewed or may agree but then rush through the questions without giving them much consideration (the same can be true with paper and online surveys) • Dependent on the on the interviewer's motivation and ability to engage the interest of a reasonable numbers of respondents • Successful 1:1 surveys very dependent on the interviewer being able to interpret and transcribe accurately responses to open questions • Analysing, collating and reporting responses to interviews can be more time-consuming than other survey methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with all other surveys, be clear about your aims and objectives. Make sure you understand the target audiences' needs and concerns • If you have a minimum target of returns in order to make your survey statistically valid, be clear what the target is before you start. (The number of returns may not be quite so important in this context). • Choose your interviewers carefully. Ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that they are well-informed about the services/facilities they are surveying and can impart information if it is requested - that they are well-motivated, enthusiastic, and have good listening and interpretation skills • Think carefully in advance about how you are going to analyse, collate and present the survey returns effectively and how much staff time it will absorb.

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<p>Issue-Specific Focus Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library can solicit feedback on known issues from a carefully selected target audience Can be used to follow-up issues which have emerged from a formal Survey Critics, admirers and neutrals can debate key issues and future developments with the assistance of a group facilitator to mediate Participants are volunteers and, hopefully, committed to active and constructive participation Appropriate incentives can be offered to encourage participation Can be one-offs or for ongoing feedback from, for example, 'User Advisory Groups, Academic and Student Committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poorly planned and/or executed focus groups will deliver poor results However interested they are in the subject, participants may lose enthusiasm if event is in-expertly facilitated Can be difficult to incentivise some participants without offering significant material rewards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you need a focus group (e.g. is your 'issue' <i>really</i> of concern to your users or just to the Library managers?) Where you've identified a genuine issue, pre-canvas some users to clarify areas of concern Take advice from an experienced facilitator if this is your first attempt and, where possible, use an experienced/professional facilitator to run the session If you use a facilitator, make sure that they are well-informed about your services. This will avoid misinformation about your services being imparted during the session Have a note-taker present and/or make an audio-recording Be clear about objectives: draft an agenda with some timed exercises and a timetable and run it by colleagues and a few known users before finalising Be there to listen rather than to promote services/resources Offer appropriate incentives (gift/book vouchers, copying credits etc.) but don't go over the top – important that feedback is objective Pick group members carefully – important to have <i>active</i> participation – and aim for a range of opinions Small group sizes up to a maximum of 10 work best, but make sure you invite more than you need as some will, inevitably, drop out Run the session at a user friendly time and offer refreshments At the end of the session always include 'Next Steps' so that participants are clear about action points Publicise findings and outcomes as soon as you can.

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<p>Evaluation Forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually paper-based and made available at service points and in other easily accessible high visibility areas • Can be used for fairly basic ongoing service evaluation at a general or issue-specific level (e.g. 'how was your visit today?' or for testing the success of a new product or service) • Users know that the Library is interested in hearing their views all year round not just at survey time • Ongoing feedback helps to inform service improvements • Cost effective and easy convenient feedback method for users • 'Happy Sheets' are often handed out at the conclusion of an event (a training session, seminar etc.). Their purpose is to solicit immediate and constructive feedback about content, materials and the performance of trainers or presenters and to inform the ongoing development and improvement of the service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General sense of 'survey fatigue' might cause low take-up • Permanently available forms may become invisible to users • Conversely, data collection and reporting can be time-consuming for managers if take-up is high. • Participants in training and other events often not keen to linger afterwards to complete an evaluation form • People can be over-polite when filling in evaluation forms, particularly if attending a free, small and fairly intimate event where they feel their return will lack anonymity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site service evaluation forms prominently and ensure someone has ownership of them • Ensure <i>event</i> evaluation sheets are brief and to the point and that respondents who wish to can make their returns anonymously • Respond to constructive feedback and use it enhance future performance • If appropriate publish the results and subsequent action plan/s both on the web and in a prominent physical location frequented regularly by users. 'You said, we did'.

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<p>Mystery Shoppers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoppers exposed to the 'standard' user experience • Anonymity of the exercise encourages accurate and objective feedback • Positive and negative experiences can be reported and acted upon • 'Quick win' service issues can be identified and acted upon to the benefit of users and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff need to be pre-warned and that could affect the outcomes • Staff maybe nervous or fretful if the benefits aren't explained properly • Poorly run exercises have the potential to damage staff confidence and trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the need for an exercise: what are your objectives? • Take advice from an organisation which has already run a Mystery Shopping Exercise to familiarise yourself with the potential benefits and pitfalls • Consider forming a co-operative with other local libraries so that staff can mystery shop across a range of libraries with reciprocal benefits • Consider paying an external consultant to devise and run the exercise with you (but recognise they generally operate in a commercial context and will need take account of the non-commercial Library environment) • Discuss the exercise openly with staff: explain why you think its necessary and what the benefits are • Let staff know the criteria the shoppers will be using to assess staff: e.g. smiling, friendliness, empathy. • Announce the start and closing dates for the exercise • Include all staff, not just junior staff and not just those identified as having poor customer-service skills • Report back generally to all staff on the findings and outcomes and specifically to individuals where appropriate • Where possible, run a follow-up workshop with all the participants to agree next steps.

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<p>Unsolicited Plaudits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise is always rewarding and is all the more valuable when it is unsolicited • Very occasionally, excessive praise can also highlight service and/or training issues (e.g. staff being over-helpful). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received verbally or in writing, compliments should always be captured and communicated to staff • If you receive unsolicited thank you letters/e-mails keep a file and make it available to staff and senior managers • Ensure verbal feedback is captured, perhaps by encouraging people to report it back to a 'Feedback Manager' • Include positive feedback in your staff bulletins.

The M25 Quality Group encourages feedback from M25 members. If you would like to comment on this checklist or to suggest additional material for inclusion, please contact Nicky Kershaw at:

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