

National Benchmarking Service

INTRODUCTION

The Government requires local authorities to measure their performance and, more importantly, their improvement. Local government are the major investor of public money in sport and over 60% of their net expenditure on sport is typically on indoor sports facilities. Sport England's National Benchmarking Service (NBS) is for sports and leisure centres with main halls and/or swimming pools (although other facilities have also found it useful). It has created authoritative performance indicators and national benchmarks for these key local authority sports facilities.

There is much debate in local authorities and professional associations about the best means of achieving performance evaluation. Regardless of the merits of qualitative methods such as mystery customer visits, focus groups and customer panels, it is important to recognise that objective, quantitative evidence is vital in performance evaluation. Only this type of evidence is representative and reliable.

Leisure-net Solutions are the managing agents for the NBS contracted by Sport England, supported by our technical partners at Sheffield Hallam University.

This partnership is designed to provide an effective service for helping local authorities, sport and leisure trusts, or leisure management commercial contractors to report the performance of their indoor sports facilities accurately, compare their performance with national benchmarks, and utilise this performance information to improve their service delivery.

Aim and Objectives of the National Benchmarking Service

The aim of the NBS is to provide local authorities, sport and leisure trusts and leisure management contractors with rigorous and robust information on the performance of their sports and leisure centres compared with that of equivalent facilities elsewhere in the country. For each centre, clients of the NBS select an appropriate level of support for their data collection, deliver the required data and receive a facility-specific report on performance relative to national benchmarks.

The objectives of the service are:

- to contribute towards an effective focus on improvement in the context of facility performance management
- to allow local authorities, sport and leisure providers to measure a facility's performance that include financial performance, access and utilisation, and importance and satisfaction scores from customers
- to allow comparisons that are reliable and rigorous but also simple and effective for management purposes
- to allow local interpretation and determination of performance in response to local policy decisions
- to update the static national benchmarks annually, thereby providing a new set of benchmarks for the following year's reports. With dynamic benchmarking available online with all your results

The NBS is normally for centres with one or both of the following:

- at least one sports hall of at least four badminton courts' size
- at least one swimming pool of at least 20 metres in length.

The service may be provided for centres with neither of these, but the comparisons with national benchmarks will be less valid because the benchmarks are calculated for centres with one or both of these facilities.

NBS Reporting Options

Clients can select from three NBS reporting options:

- **The Full Report**, which includes comparative performance information on access (use by different groups of customers), utilisation (overall throughput at the facility), finance, and customer satisfaction. This requires clients to organise a user survey and complete a financial return.
- **The Efficiency Report**, which concentrates on finance and utilisation performance. This just requires clients to complete a financial return.
- **The Effectiveness Report**, which focuses on access, utilisation and customer satisfaction. This requires clients to organise a user survey and complete a management return.

STAGES IN THE NATIONAL BENCHMARKING SERVICE PROCESS

Planning

When you subscribe to the National Benchmarking Service, you will be required to provide information to enable the production of your report for each participating centre. It is necessary to plan carefully for the collection of this information.

- For the full report you will need to purchase or organise a user survey and complete a financial return.
- For the efficiency report you will only need to complete a financial return.
- For the effectiveness report you will need to purchase or organise a user survey and complete a management return.

Planning tasks include:

- Arrange the dates, methods and resources for the user survey with
- Check the availability of required financial information

Completion of Questionnaires and Financial Return

In the selected survey period, you will need to achieve the following:

- complete 350 user survey questionnaires **over 9 days**
- complete a financial/management return, which includes an estimate of the attendance at the centre for the user survey period.

Participants in the NBS and their employees/agents will be provided with sufficient resources to enable them to undertake the necessary data collection, i.e. for each centre's full or effectiveness reports, web access to user survey questionnaires, plus for all three reporting options a financial/management return. NB the latter differ, depending on which report is being purchased.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Within four weeks of submitting your completed questionnaires and answering any queries raised your reports will be ready to view on your online platform.

Each platform comprises:

- Static and Dynamic benchmarking
- The centre's scores for the relevant performance indicators (depending on which report is being purchased) compared with the latest available benchmark scores for centres nationally. These benchmarks are selected to represent similar type of centre, similar size of centre, similar socioeconomic profile of the centres' catchment area, and similar centre management type, based upon the information provided by the centre
- For the full report and effectiveness report, mean scores, gap analysis and grid analysis for the customer satisfaction and importance scores
- Facility-specific interpretation of the performance results
- A catchment area map for the centre, with key population statistics for this area
- For the full report and effectiveness report, frequency distributions for all the questions in the user survey.

DATA COLLECTION

Each participating organisation in the NBS is responsible for collecting of the required data and uploading/sending them to the NBS analysts.

User Survey (full or effectiveness reports)

350 completed user survey questionnaires are required, from a sample collected in a period of 9 consecutive days. It is very important that this selected period should be as normal as possible in terms of the centre's programmes and usage. If you struggle to achieve 350 respondents in 9 days, you may extend the survey period in order to achieve more respondents.

It is also vitally important that the user survey is conducted with appropriate arrangements to ensure that the sample is representative of the centre's normal users and that valid answers are given by the survey respondents. You may be confident about your ability to follow the guidance below and undertake the work yourself. However, support is available to organisations that feel this better suits their circumstances – from Leisure-net Solutions.

User Survey Option by Leisure-net Solutions

Full externalised survey administration:

Leisure-net Solutions only use fully trained interviewers and are members of the MRS (Market Research Society). All interviewers have contact with a supervisor at all times (including evenings and weekends).

We provide one trained interviewer to cover all opening hours of your facility for 9 days (covering 2 weekends). All interviews are led by the researcher (rather than passed out for self-completion). Leisure-net Solutions provides everything the interviewer will need to conduct the project and the interviewer will collate all the questionnaires before returning to our supervisor. All questionnaires are then back checked for accuracy and a number of the clients are called to back check the interview. To complete the project all questionnaires are uploaded into your NBS platform and prepared for analysis.

If you would like Leisure-net Solutions to conduct the fieldwork on your behalf the cost is £2700 (+vat). This does not include the £850 NBS fee.

User Survey Questionnaires Paper

400 questionnaires will be provided to each participating centre in the NBS, with the objective of achieving 350 completed questionnaires. The questionnaires are printed to a standard required for scanning the data entry; they are distributed to centres upon booking the service. **Please do not attempt to copy and use your own questionnaire for your survey.** The questionnaire is designed for either self-completion or interviewer administration. Interviewer administration is the best option, if only because you can then control the way responses are indicated in the questionnaire – they should be crosses in the appropriate response boxes, in black ink. If you are using the self-completion method, it is vital that close attention is paid to a number of procedures: first, to the random distribution of the questionnaires, second, to the monitoring and assisting of respondents, to ensure that they are providing responses which are correct; and third, to the effective collection of completed questionnaires once respondents have finished. The top line details on the first side of each questionnaire need to be completed by the survey administrator, i.e. centre name and time and date of completion. They also need to initial each questionnaire at the bottom of the last page, on completion by the respondents.

User Survey Questionnaires Electronic

A minimum of 350 questionnaires will need to be completed for each participating centre in the NBS. A web link will be provided for each separate facility. One tablet is available per facility. This will be delivered to site prior to the research commencing and needs to be returned within 7 days of the agreed finish date. The member of staff supervising the project needs to be familiar with the device and read through the instructions before starting the survey. All questionnaires need to be submitted before moving on to the next interview. Once submitted it is not possible to retract a questionnaire. All questions need to be completed

The questionnaire is designed for either self-completion or interviewer administration. Interviewer administration is the best option. If you are using the self-completion method, it is vital that close attention is paid to a number of procedures: first, to the random distribution of the questionnaires, second, to the monitoring and assisting of respondents, to ensure that they are providing responses which are correct; and third, to the effective submission of questionnaire and return of the device once respondents have finished.

The named contact on the booking form is fully responsible to the electronic device during the survey and any damage, theft or loss will result in a fee of £200. Results and reports will not be available until this has been paid.

Devices need to be safely packaged and returned to Alison Dack, NBS Manager, Leisure-net Solutions, Park Farm, Hethersett, Norfolk, NR9 3DL. It is strongly recommended that the delivery is insured and traceable.

User Survey Methods

The survey should be conducted over a standard survey period of nine consecutive days, including two weekends. The survey period should be one of 'typical' usage, for example not during school holidays.

If you do choose to organise the user survey in-house, then it is important that you follow some simple rules for sampling.

- Establish the number of site exits at which to conduct the survey, and make an estimate of the throughput for the survey period.
- Using your own attendance records, calculate the value of 'n' that will generate a sufficient number of completed questionnaires by sampling every 'nth' person, building in a contingency for nonresponse. (Estimate attendance for 9 day survey period divide this figure by 350 [number of questionnaires required] to give the value of 'n'. Round off 'n' to nearest whole number, and interview every 'nth' user. For example, if 1,700 visits are expected in the survey period, surveying every fourth visitor in this period should give a sample of less than 400, allowing for refusals and ineligible people.
- Employ sufficient staff to achieve a minimum of one person asking questions or distributing and collecting self-completion questionnaires throughout the 9 days, spread over the opening hours.

	0730-1430	12.30-1930	1430-2130
Saturday		1	
Sunday	1		
Monday	1		1
Tuesday	1		1
Wednesday	1		1
Thursday	1		1
Friday	1		1
Saturday	1		
Sunday		1	

- Provide a training session for the staff who will be undertaking the survey, including interview techniques where an interview survey is planned, rather than self-completion. Arrange for the display of suitable posters alerting users and carers/parents to the survey.
- To be as representative as possible of users, the survey should be conducted across all opening times in the period and you should employ random sampling (not quota sampling).
- You must sample every 'nth' person systematically, from *all* visitors - do not 'second guess' beforehand whether or not they are eligible to be questioned. If an 'nth' visitor turns out to be one of the non-eligible people listed below, approach the next 'nth' person.

You should survey users aged 14 years and above, who are doing at least one of the following at that visit:

- taking part in a sport or exercise activity at the facility
- watching someone else taking part in a sport or exercise activity at the facility
- visiting the bar/cafe
- attending a meeting or party
- taking part in another non-sporting activity
- participating in extra-curricular school activities, clubs or societies.

Conducting the survey

Since many of the questions in the survey are retrospective - that is, they ask users for their opinion on a range of aspects of their visit which they cannot judge until the visit has finished - **the questionnaires should normally be completed as users leave the centre**. However, in certain circumstances (pay car parking, swimming lessons) it may be more appropriate to issue questionnaires earlier.

There are three main stages to the interview:

- 1. The introduction:** Begin by explaining not just the purpose of the interview but also the purpose of the survey. Before commencing the questions check that they are eligible by asking if they are in one of the ineligible categories – if they are ineligible, thank them and finish the interview. Give eligible respondents some indication of the likely length of the interview (5-10 minutes). Inform them that their responses will be recorded and confirm that the information given will remain confidential. Make sure the centre's name and the time and date of distribution has been filled in.
- 2. The interview:** Ensure that you are entirely neutral during the interview and do not signal the desirability or expectation of a particular answer. If the survey is self-completion, however, certain help for respondents may be necessary: Each self-completion respondent needs to be instructed to make the appropriate responses by each question.
- 3. Closure:** Finally, include an appreciative comment such as, 'You have been really helpful. Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.' Please ensure that the interviewer or survey administrator puts their initials into the appropriate place. When the survey is finished, you need to ensure it has been saved/uploaded.

Financial/Management Returns

You will be sent copies of the financial/management returns with integrated guidance notes for each question. You will be sent a copy of this document that should be completed by a person with access to accurate financial and managerial information. The financial return should relate to the whole centre's operations, with any exceptions detailed in the guidance for individual questions. One major difference will arise in the case of joint provision centres on school sites, where two typical situations occur:

- If the public use is managed by the local authority (or a DSO, trust or commercial contractor) and school time is managed by the school, the financial return should relate to the public

use managed by the local authority or its agent. It should not include costs incurred by the school in running the centre in school time.

- If the local authority manages a dual use centre all the time and is responsible for all the costs, receiving a fee from the school or local education authority for school use of the centre in school time, then all the costs and the fee for school use should be included in the financial return.

The financial/management return includes questions on the type of centre and contextual information, on admissions and, for the full and efficiency reports, on income and expenditure. For the full and effectiveness reports the required admissions data includes an estimate of the number of visitors for both the full year being reported and for the 9 day user survey period - so it is only possible to complete the latter question after the user surveying has been completed. If you know that your admissions data has certain weaknesses, e.g. inaccurate recording of numbers attending classes and block booking elements of the programme, please make an effort to moderate the data to improve its accuracy for both the annual figure and the user survey period.

In the expenditure section of the return, only certain expenditure items are asked for in addition to the total operating expenses. The sum of the individual items is not meant to equal the total.

The NBS analysts will use the data from these financial/management returns only for the compilation of a report to the relevant client who has provided the data, and for the purpose of assembling aggregate benchmarks in the future. The data will not be disclosed to any third party.

REPORTING

Report will be available online on your own platform. All data will be benchmarked against the national NBS benchmark and also categorised into 'family' groups. You will receive a phone call to talk you through the reporting and online platform

For details of the NBS, please visit the website <http://www.questnbs.org/> or email Alison Dack alison.dack@questnbs.org or telephone **01603 813703**.