NATIONAL BENCHMARKING SERVICE FOR SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRES

GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL FACILITY FULL REPORT

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NATIONAL BENCHMARKING SERVICE FOR SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRES - FULL REPORT GUIDANCE

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1   The accompanying centre report has been produced as a result of the facility's participation in the *National Benchmarking Service for Sports and Leisure Centres* (hereafter referred to as 'NBS'). The information collected from each facility is used to calculate current scores for a series of performance indicators, which are then compared with the latest available national benchmarks, (2016).

1.2   The NBS is a form of data benchmarking, whereby performance is measured and compared with national statistical benchmarks for each indicator. This information is useful for strategy development and action planning as well as immediate management decisions.

1.3   The performance information and benchmarks provided in the accompanying centre report relate to all users of the centre (including spectators) and to the operational performance of the whole centre. The only exception is for joint provision arrangements where, for example, a school pays for and runs the school time programme - in which case this report would be concerned with the public use and management.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE FULL NATIONAL BENCHMARKING SERVICE

2.1   The full NBS uses three principal data sources: user survey, financial / management information, and estimated catchment population profiles, in order to calculate scores for a standard set of performance indicators, which are then compared with the latest available national benchmarks. The first two data sources are produced locally by each facility. The estimated catchment population data, for a specified population around the facility, is provided by Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC), at Sheffield Hallam University. The catchment area is defined by a national model which uses national statistics (2011 Census) on usage of facilities (particularly travel modes, distances and times) to identify the area which the centre should be servicing, taking into account natural barriers (such as major roads) and competition from other

similar facilities. The preparation of the benchmarks and the analysis of individual facility performance scores are conducted by SIRC staff.

2.2   Different agencies and systems have constructed performance indicators for sports centres and swimming pools using different data sources. The NBS has significant strengths compared with other systems. This service offers the largest national range of performance indicators available for facility performance management. The service uses local catchment population data for each facility, so that the user profile for a facility can be compared with the equivalent local population profile. This comparison provides performance indicator scores in relation to benchmarks for access to facilities which relate directly to policies combating social exclusion. The number of user surveys, on which the 2016 national benchmarks for access performance indicators are based, is 35,960. The NBS also provides an interpretation section in the facility report, to summarise the performance of the facility across four dimensions: access (usage by target groups); efficiency (mainly finance: subsidy, income and costs; and throughput); utilisation (types of usage and market penetration); and customer ratings (for the importance of, and their satisfaction with, a variety of service attributes).

Family types

2.3   A family type is a means of ensuring 'like for like' comparisons of performance indicator scores between facilities. Each facility can compare its performance with the benchmarks for other facilities in the same family types.

2.4   Four types of families are used in the NBS, to provide logical and consistent results: type of facility, type of location, size of facility, and type of management. The family categories are identified below, along with the number of centres in each category for the 2016 benchmarks. It is not statistically feasible to combine these four family types into one composite family, so an individual facility's scores have to be compared with each of the four family types separately. We illustrate below in Section 4 how this can be done in practice.

Family type 1: type of facility

2.5   There are good reasons to suggest that many aspects of performance vary by the type of facility, e.g. many costs are known to be higher for swimming pools than sports halls; specific market segments are known to use some types of facility more than others. In addition, the presence of other facilities such as

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outdoor pitches is known to have a distinctive effect on user profiles, finances and other performance variables. A four-way categorisation is used, as shown in the table below.

Type of facility	Number of centres in family categories for different performance indicators			
	Access	Efficiency	Utilisation	Satisfaction
dry	14	15	14	14
mixed with outdoor	24	24	24	24
mixed without outdoor	28	25	28	28
wet	39	42	39	39

The only distinguishing characteristic of these family categories is the type of facility. Each of these categories contains centres with a variety of location types, a variety of sizes, and a variety of management types.

Family type 2: type of location

2.6   It is highly likely that many aspects of both policy and performance in facilities will be heavily influenced by the type of neighbourhood in which the facility is located. Consultations with industry representatives revealed a strong preference for the type of location family to use the facility's catchment area socio-economics rather than a broader location such as the local authority, or the region. The estimated catchment area is defined by a national model (see 2.1 above) - it is hypothetically the area which the centre should be serving. The socio-economic characteristics of the catchment population are important to issues of market segmentation, a key principle underlying policy and performance in access/social exclusion. A three-way categorisation uses the percentage of NS-SEC groups 6&7 in the estimated catchment population, from the eight class version of NS-SEC as shown in the table below. People from NS-SEC groups 6&7 are some of the most deprived people in society.

Type of location	Number of centres in family categories for different performance indicators			
	Access	Efficiency	Utilisation	Satisfaction
less than 15% of estimated catchment population in NS-SEC groups 6&7	13	14	13	13
15% to less than 20% of estimated catchment population in NS-SEC groups 6&7	32	32	32	32
20%+ of estimated catchment population in NS-SEC groups 6&7	60	60	60	60

The only distinguishing characteristic of these family categories is the type of location. Each of these categories contains centres with a variety of types of centres, a variety of sizes, and a variety of management types.

Family type 3: size of facility

2.7 Studies have indicated that the size of a facility may have a significant impact on performance. In particular large facilities may benefit from economies of scale. A four-way categorisation of internal floor space of facilities is used, because it is a direct and unambiguous measure of size of facility - see below.

Size of facility	Number of centres in family categories for different performance indicators			
	Access	*Efficiency*	*Utilisation*	*Satisfaction*
small (less than 1500 sq.m.)	9	9	9	9
medium (1500 to less than 3000 sq.m.)	28	31	28	28
large (3000 to less than 5000 sq.m.)	45	44	45	45
very large (5000+ sq.m.)	23	22	23	23

The only distinguishing characteristic of these family categories is the size of facility. Each of these categories contains centres with a variety of types of centre, a variety of location types, and a variety of management types.

Family type 4: type of management

2.8 An increasing proportion of sports and leisure centres are being managed by external partners (operators with three or more separate contracts and no local origin from within a centre's local authority boundary), rather than by in-house local authority teams or local trusts. The different types of management complicate the objectives of the facilities concerned and lead to differences in performance. A three-way categorisation of management types is used, see below.

Type of management	Number of centres in family categories for different performance indicators			
	Access	*Efficiency*	*Utilisation*	*Satisfaction*
external partner	88	83	88	88
local authority	12	11	12	12
local trust	5	12	5	5

The only distinguishing characteristic of these family categories is the type of management. Each of these categories contains centres with a variety of types of centre, a variety of location types, and a variety of sizes.

Performance indicators

2.9 A performance indicator is a piece of observed data representing the performance of one or more organisations, which can be compared over time,

or with other similar organisations. The performance indicators utilised in the full NBS service fall into four groups.

- Access: representing the extent to which facilities are used by disadvantaged groups, existing users and new users. These are indicators of effectiveness, particularly in the context of social inclusion.
- Efficiency: representing financial performance such as subsidy, cost, income and various measures of operational performance.
- Utilisation: representing the nature of usage of facilities and scale of market penetration.
- Satisfaction and importance: representing the extent to which users are satisfied with different attributes of the facility and how important these attributes are to them.

2.10   The main criteria for selection of performance indicators were:

- it is relatively easy to interpret either changes in them, or differences between the facility's score and the benchmarks for the performance indicator;
- they are relevant to policy and management of sports facilities generally;
- they embrace as wide a variety of performance dimensions as is feasible; and,
- predominantly, they concern outputs rather than inputs.

2.11   Typically the performance indicators for access, efficiency and utilisation are expressed as ratios, e.g. subsidy per visit; or visits per square metre of floor space. Ratios are used rather than absolute numbers because they provide a reference point for comparisons: e.g. comparing absolute levels of subsidy is less useful than comparing subsidy per visit, because the latter standardises the comparison. A common ratio used in the performance indicators is percentage of visits by a certain type of user divided by the percentage of the facility's estimated catchment population who are this type of person, which can be termed a 'representativeness' ratio. Others include expressing efficiency performance indicators on the bases of 'per visit' and 'per square metre of internal floor space'. For satisfaction and importance performance indicators, respondents are asked to rate each attribute on a five-point scale, the performance indicator being the mean score for each attribute.

2.12   One type of ratio is used only when a better alternative is not available - this is what can be termed 'share' ratios. This is the case for certain access performance, i.e. % of total visits by the unemployed; discount card holders;
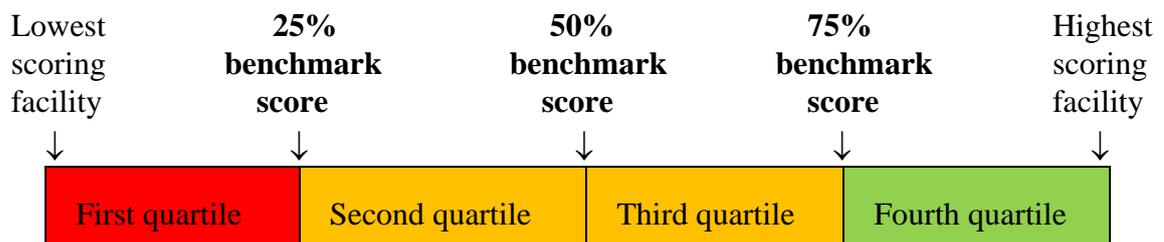
and first time visitors. Such 'share' ratios' values can change because of changes in other contributions to the total. For example, % visits by the unemployed can fall even if the level of visits by the unemployed stays the same, if visits by other employment status groups increase. Also, some of these ratios are influenced by the size of the groups in the catchment population. For example, the % of visits by the unemployed may be low because there is a low % of unemployed people in the catchment population. Therefore, interpretation of these '% of visits' access ratios has to be conducted with care.

Benchmarks

2.13   A benchmark is a value for a performance indicator which is a reference point for comparisons. The accompanying centre report provides benchmarks for centres in the same family categories as the facility being reported. The current facility scores can also act as benchmarks for future performance.

2.14   For each access, efficiency and utilisation performance indicator, the benchmarks employed are at the 25%, 50% and 75% points in the distribution of scores. In other words they represent the individual centres at the quarter, half and three-quarters marks when all centres are placed in rank order of performance according to the indicator.   These three benchmarks identify the facility scores which separate four quartiles of performance.

This is represented as shown in the diagram below:

Lowest scoring facility	**25% benchmark score**	**50% benchmark score**	**75% benchmark score**	Highest scoring facility
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
First quartile	Second quartile	Third quartile	Fourth quartile	

2.15   The 50% benchmark is the median and is an appropriate mid-range score when, as is often the case, the distribution of scores is skewed or unduly influenced by unusually high or low scores. A mean (average) score would be distorted by these influences and would therefore be unreliable.

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2.16   In the diagram the lowest and highest scores are also identified, so that centres performing in the first or fourth quartiles have these important reference points against which to compare their own performance.

3   **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: INTERPRETATION**

3.1   The performance indicators used in the NBS are arranged into first, access indicators; second, efficiency indicators; third, utilisation indicators; and fourth, customer satisfaction indicators.

3.2   If a centre has actual central establishment charges of £0, managers are asked to estimate on the financial return what these charges would have been if they had been charged. These estimated central establishment charges are then included in the total costs which are used to calculate the total operating costs indicators and the subsidy indicators in the centre's report. This is done to ensure like for like comparison with other centres which face such charges. The central establishment charges include any head office / regional / central support recharges.

3.4   The NBS report provides the centre's scores for numerous performance indicators and it would be unwise to treat them all as equally important. Each local authority and/or management organisation needs to decide on their key performance indicators, to reflect their local policy priorities.

3.5   The tables which follow identify the performance indicators for access, efficiency, utilisation and satisfaction/importance. Brief guidelines are provided for the interpretation of the performance indicators' numerical results.

Performance indicators

	Access	Definition and guidelines for interpretation
1.	% of visits 14 - 25 years ÷ % of catchment population 14-25 years	1 indicates that the level of visits by the 14 - 25 years group is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent the 14 - 25 years group in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent the 14 - 25 years group in the local population.
2.	% of visits from social classes 6 & 7 ÷ % of catchment population in social classes 6 & 7	1 indicates that the level of visits by the NS-SEC 6 & 7 social groups is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent NS-SEC 6 & 7 social groups in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent NS-SEC 6 & 7 social groups in the local population.
3.	% of visits from black, Asian & other ethnic groups ÷ % of catchment population in same ethnic groups	1 indicates that the level of visits by these ethnic groups is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent these ethnic groups in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent these ethnic groups in the local population.
4.	% of visits from 65+ years ÷ % of catchment population 65+ years	1 indicates that the level of visits by older people is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent older people in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent older people in the local population.
5.	% of visits from disabled under 65 years ÷ % of catchment population disabled under 65 years	1 indicates that the level of visits by disabled people under 65 is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent the disabled under 65 in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent the disabled under 65 in the local population.
6.	% of visits disabled, 65+ years ÷ % of catchment population disabled, 65+ years	1 indicates that the level of visits by disabled people aged 65+ is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent the disabled, 65+ years in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent the disabled, 65+ years in the local population.

7.	% of visits 26 - 64 years ÷ % of catchment population 26 - 64 years	1 indicates that the level of visits by the 26 - 64 years group is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent the 26 - 64 years group in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent the 26 - 64 years group in the local population.
8.	% of visits which were first visits	Higher % score is better for effectiveness in access for new participants. NB care is needed when interpreting a 'share' ratio such as this.
9.	% of visits with discount card	A discount card is part of a leisure card or passport-to-leisure scheme whereby discounts on entrance charges are given to the card holder. Higher % score is better for effectiveness in use of discount card. NB care is needed when interpreting a 'share' ratio such as this.
10.	% of visits with discount cards for 'disadvantage'	Higher % score is better for effectiveness in use of discount cards to target the disadvantaged (i.e. over 50s, students, unemployed, disabled, single parents, those on income support/ family credit, and GP referrals etc). NB care is needed when interpreting a 'share' ratio such as this.
11.	% of visits female ÷ % of catchment population female	1 indicates that the level of visits by females is representative of the local population. < (less than) 1 indicates visits underrepresent females in the local population. > (more than) 1 indicates visits overrepresent females in the local population.
12.	% of visits unemployed	Higher % score is better for effectiveness in targeting unemployed visitors. NB care is needed when interpreting a 'share' ratio such as this
13.	average monthly frequency of visits per user	Higher score is better for effectiveness as a result of achieving higher usage from existing users. This indicator can be viewed as a measure of adherence.
14.	estimated number of unique visitors per month	Higher score is better for effectiveness as a result of reaching more users.

	Efficiency	Definition and guidelines for interpretation
15.	subsidy per visit	(Annual total operating costs – annual total income) ÷ annual visits A positive score indicates a subsidy; a negative score indicates a surplus. Lower score is better for financial performance.
16.	cost recovery	(Annual total income ÷ annual total operating costs) × 100% < (less than) 100% indicates a subsidy. > (more than) 100% indicates an operating surplus. Higher % score is better for financial performance.
17.	subsidy per head of catchment population	(Annual total operating costs – annual total income) ÷ relevant estimated catchment population A positive score indicates a subsidy; a negative score indicates a surplus. Lower score is better for efficiency for local taxpayers.
18.	total operating cost per visit	Annual total operating costs ÷ annual visits Lower score is better for economy.
19.	maintenance and repair costs per square metre of indoor facility space	Annual maintenance and repair costs ÷ total indoor floor space of the centre Lower score is better for economy in use of space, but there may be adverse effects on quality. This measure needs to be interpreted with care and in relation to a facility's local context.
20.	energy costs per square metre of indoor facility space	Annual energy costs ÷ total indoor floor space of the centre Lower score is better for energy efficiency.
21.	energy efficiency rating	Lower score is better for energy efficiency.
22.	staff costs as % of total income	(Staff costs ÷ total income) × 100% Lower score is better for staff efficiency.
23.	total income per visit	Annual total income ÷ annual visits Higher score is better for financial effectiveness.
24.	central establishment charges as a % of total expenditure	(Central establishment charges (actual or estimates) ÷ total operating costs) × 100% Lower score is better for central establishment efficiency.

25.	total income per square metre of usable indoor facility space	Annual total income ÷ usable indoor floor space of the centre (i.e. total floor space minus offices, corridors and storage space) Higher score is better for financial effectiveness in the use of space.
26.	direct income per visit	Annual direct income ÷ annual visits Higher score is better for financial effectiveness demonstrated by the sale of activities.
27.	secondary income per visit	Annual secondary income ÷ annual visits Higher score is better for financial effectiveness demonstrated by sales of catering, vending, merchandise, etc.
28.	fitness income per station	Fitness income ÷ number of stations Higher score is better for financial efficiency in generating income from each fitness station.
29.	swim income per square metre of water	Income from all pools in the facility ÷ water space for all pools Higher score is better for financial efficiency in generating income from each square metre of water space.
30.	swim lesson income per square metre of water space	Total lesson income from the pools (excluding any schools swimming income) ÷ water space for all pools in m^2 Higher score is better for financial efficiency in generating income from swimming lessons per square metre of water space. This measure needs to be interpreted with care and in relation to a facility's local context.
31.	main hall income per badminton court	Total income from main hall ÷ total number of badminton courts Higher score is better for financial efficiency in generating income from each badminton court-sized space.
32.	AGP income per square metre of AGP area	Total income from the AGP(s) ÷ total AGP area in m^2 Higher score is better for financial efficiency in generating income from each square metre of AGP space.
33.	annual visits per square metre of usable space	Annual visits ÷ usable indoor floor space of the centre (i.e. total floor space minus offices, corridors and storage space) Higher score is better for efficient use of space.

34.	average number of members per fitness station	Average number of members per month ÷ number of fitness stations Higher score is better for efficient use of fitness stations.

	Utilisation	**Definition and guidelines for interpretation**
35.	% of visits casual, instead of organised	Casual visits are 'pay and play' customers who are not led in their activity by a member of staff. Organised visits have a coach, instructor or other member of staff leading the activities. This indicator is a measure of programme effectiveness. Whether a higher or lower % score is better depends on policy objectives. NB care is needed when interpreting a 'share' ratio such as this.
36.	weekly number of people visiting the facility as % of catchment population, 14+ years	The number of visits in the survey period is converted into number of unique people attending, by applying the frequency of visit results. Number of unique visitors ÷ estimated number of residents in the relevant catchment area. Higher % score is better for effectiveness in market penetration.

3.6 For importance and satisfaction scores, the centre report presents the facility's mean satisfaction and importance scores for all the attributes, together with the rankings of the attributes for satisfaction and importance. This helps managers to identify quickly the attributes which are most and least important to customers; and the attributes with which customers are most and least satisfied. Means scores are between 1 and 5 and do not include 'not applicable' responses (e.g. not all users buy food and drink). Higher importance scores signify more important attributes for users. Higher satisfaction scores are better for service effectiveness. The attributes are listed in the table below.

3.7 The last satisfaction indicator in the list below is measured differently to the other attributes. The *Net Promoter Score*[1] for the centre is the percentage of customers scoring 9 or 10 out of 10 (promoters) when asked if they would recommend the centre to a colleague or friend, minus the percentage that score 0 to 6 out of 10 (detractors). The higher the Net Promoter Score (NPS) score the better.

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[1] Net Promoter, Net Promoter Score, and NPS are trademarks of Satmetrix Systems, Inc., Bain & Company, Inc., and Fred Reichheld

Satisfaction and importance attributes

Accessibility

37. Availability of activities at convenient times
38. Ease of booking in advance
39. The range of activities available

Quality of facilities/services

40. Quality of equipment
41. Availability of car parking on site

Cleanliness

42. Cleanliness of changing area
43. Cleanliness of activity spaces

Staff

44. Helpfulness of reception staff
45. Helpfulness of other staff
46. Standard of coaching or instruction

Value for money

47. Value for money of activities
48. Value for money of food and drink

Overall satisfaction

49. Overall swimming experience
50. Overall satisfaction with visit
51. Net Promoter Score

3.8 For the satisfaction and importance service attributes, four tables are presented in the relevant section of the centre report:

- first with all the mean scores and ranks for both satisfaction and importance;
- second in rank order according to the gaps between the importance and satisfaction mean scores - e.g. mean score for importance 4.35, minus mean score for satisfaction of 3.93, gives a gap of 0.42;
- third, in rank order according to the gaps between the importance and satisfaction ranks - e.g. importance rank of 5, minus a satisfaction rank of 12, gives a gap of -7;
- fourth, a comparison of the centre's satisfaction scores with industry averages for similar facility types - i.e. wet, dry or mixed centres.

Attributes with the highest gaps are most likely to warrant further investigation and management action.
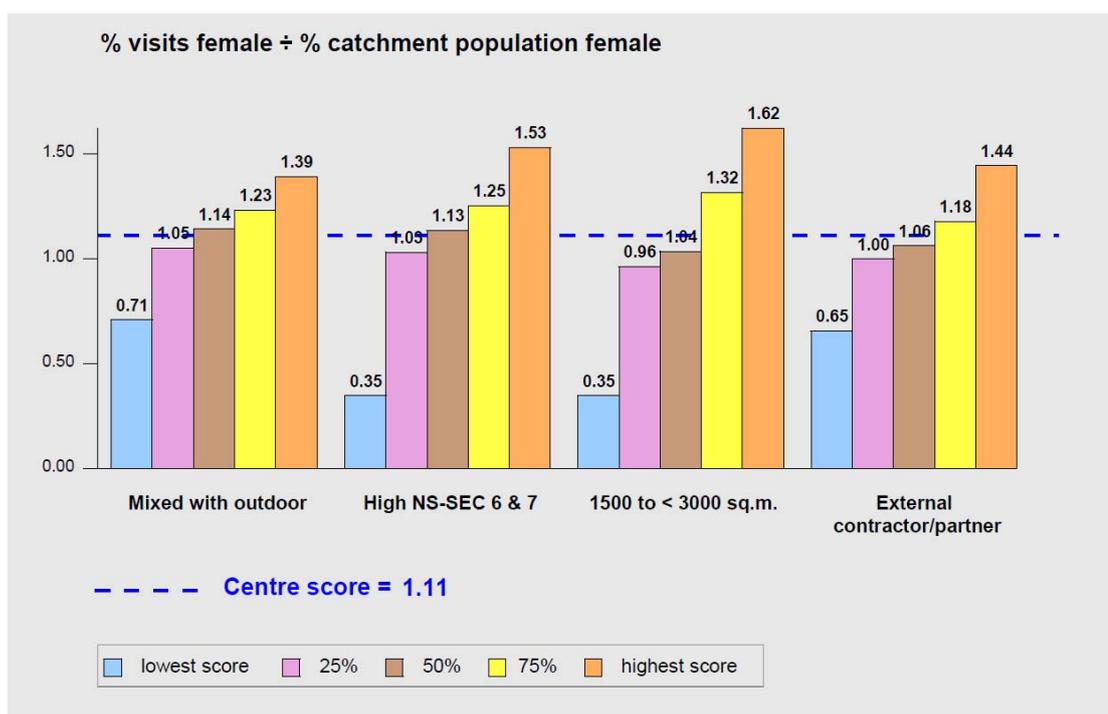
3.9 In addition to the gap analysis, the centre reports also provide a grid analysis, whereby each service attribute is positioned in one of four quadrants, each with different implications for interpretation and action. These are summarised conceptually in the following figure. The quadrants are separated by lines at the centre's average importance and satisfaction scores for all attributes

S A T I S F A C T I O N	HIGH SATISFACTION AND LOW IMPORTANCE: possible over-resourcing? check for efficiency gains	HIGH SATISFACTION AND HIGH IMPORTANCE: good correlation; maintain this performance
	LOW SATISFACTION AND LOW IMPORTANCE: no need for action unless satisfaction is particularly low or there are other implications (e.g. financial)	LOW SATISFACTION AND HIGH IMPORTANCE: in most urgent need of action to increase satisfaction
	IMPORTANCE	

4. INTERPRETATION OF THE NATIONAL BENCHMARKING SERVICE EVIDENCE

4.1 The benchmarks and the facility performance indicators reported here are essentially the start of a process, not the end. Interpretation, particularly to identify possible reasons for differences between individual facility scores and benchmark scores, is an important task for individual facility managers and local authority officers. This process of analysis will lead to the preparation of strategies and action plans, including appropriate targeting. The interpretation may also involve a more specific search for relevant comparison facilities, either to illustrate methods under management control whereby performance may be improved; or to demonstrate factors outside of their control which account for performance differences. The NBS provides a function for clients to select appropriate comparison facilities for such process benchmarking (see NBS website www.questnbs.org).

4.2　The accompanying centre report provides the benchmarks for the four different families: facility type, location type, facility size and management type. It is appropriate to interpret the facility's score in relation to its average position with respect to the benchmarks. For example, in the following case the centre score of 1.11 is between the 25% and 50% benchmark levels for two of the four family comparisons, and between 50% and 75% benchmark levels for the other two comparisons. An 'average' positioning for this centre score is at the median (50%) benchmark level overall.

% visits female ÷ % catchment population female

Centre score = 1.11

lowest score　　25%　　50%　　75%　　highest score

	Mixed with outdoor	High NS-SEC 6 & 7	1500 to < 3000 sq.m.	External contractor/partner
lowest score	0.71	0.35	0.35	0.65
25%	1.05	1.05	0.96	1.00
50%	1.14	1.13	1.04	1.06
75%	1.23	1.25	1.32	1.18
highest score	1.39	1.53	1.62	1.44

4.3　Sometimes the judgement of a centre's score relative to the national benchmarks using the 'average' position is difficult, because of a wide discrepancy in the relative position across the different family categories. In such cases a further consideration may help - the strategic priorities of the centre – which may cause one or two family categories to be more important than the others. For example, a priority for social inclusion may cause greater weight to be attached to the second family category – the socio-economics of the local catchment population.

4.4　When interpreting facility performance against the benchmarks, a 'general rule of thumb' is as follows. Poor facility performance against the benchmarks offered for one family signals an area for investigation rather than a cause for concern. This might lead to investigation of reasons but not automatically trigger remedial action on access policy.

4.5 Alternatively, relatively poor facility performance against the benchmarks of three or four families would probably be a cause for concern and policy action, as this may indicate a 'failing' facility. This depends critically on the priorities of local policy - the concern will be heightened if the relatively poor performance indicator scores are in areas of policy priority.

4.6 There are a number of considerations relevant to the interpretation of the satisfaction and importance performance indicator scores. The scores given to each service attribute from the respondents are from 5 (very satisfied/very important) to 1 (very dissatisfied/very unimportant), therefore higher is better for the satisfaction scores, and more important for the importance scores. The simplest level of interpretation, therefore, is to examine the average scores given by users. If any of the average satisfaction scores are lower than 3, the neutral score (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied), this signals an absolute problem worthy of further investigation and appropriate planning and action. If the remedy is beyond the short-term resources of the centre, then a longer term, strategic approach is required. If the average satisfaction scores for all the attributes are higher than 3, which is typically the case, there are no absolute problems but the relative strength of performance can be examined further.

4.7 A useful way of interpreting the satisfaction and importance scores is to compare the averages and rankings of the satisfaction and importance scores. Tables for the mean scores and rankings of attributes are presented in the results, to provide a 'gap analysis'. From the rankings tables, you can identify the most important and the least satisfactory attributes to customers – two obvious focuses of attention - and the attributes with the largest gaps between their importance and satisfaction, either by mean scores or by ranks. For example, 'cleanliness of the changing areas' often has one of the highest importance scores, but one of the lowest satisfaction scores, therefore one of the largest gaps. Even if the average satisfaction score is above 3, the gap between importance and satisfaction may warrant managerial attention.

4.8 It is also important to note that not all the attributes are relevant to all users. If an attribute is not relevant, then a respondent records 'not applicable'. The average scores for attributes do not include the 'not applicable' respondents. The frequency distribution figures for the user survey (provided as an appendix in the centre report) identify how many respondents gave a satisfaction score for each attribute.

4.9   The appendix showing the frequency distributions for each indicator also enables you to identify exactly what percentages of your customers, in the user survey, rated each attribute at each of the five scores for importance and satisfaction. This provides another important piece of information - the percentage of customers who are dissatisfied with each attribute. An attribute may have an average satisfaction score above 3 out of 5, and also low gap scores, but it may still have a significant minority of customers dissatisfied with it - sufficient to cause management concern.

4.10   Another comparison for satisfaction scores is with the industry averages as shown in the last table in the satisfaction part of Section 4. These industry averages offer simpler benchmarks to show whether satisfaction levels for individual attributes at the centre are higher or lower than the average nationally.

4.11   A final consideration in evaluating the importance and satisfaction results is the grid analysis. The figure after paragraph 3.9 above explains how different positions of attributes on the grid lead to different interpretations and actions. The position normally associated with management action is the high importance/low satisfaction quadrant (bottom right).

4.12   Consideration of local authority policy is important to the interpretation of performance indicators because local policies will affect the expectations for and performance of sports and leisure centres. As such, it is necessary to consider policies when accounting for performance against the benchmarks. It was not possible to construct a meaningful or valid family representing different policy types; this is why policy is such an important element in overall interpretation.

4.13   To represent local policy priorities in the interpretation of the evidence provided by this service, it is necessary to select an appropriate mix of performance indicators. Examining one performance indicator in isolation is inappropriate and is likely to be misleading. Examining all the indicators is too indiscriminate. You must decide on a relevant and manageable sub-set of indicators to concentrate on for your facility planning and management.

4.14   An example of the need to take policy into account is as follows. The facility may be in the lowest quartile for subsidy per visit, below the 25% benchmark scores, indicating a high subsidy for the facility. If the local authority has a policy of low pricing in order to encourage access, this may make this

apparently poor financial performance explainable and acceptable. This is likely to be indicated by a good performance against the access performance indicators' benchmarks. The reverse is also true; a poor performance against access performance indicators' benchmarks may be explained by a policy of revenue generation, supported by high scores against the benchmarks for financial performance.

4.15   Other considerations are important when interpreting the comparisons of facility scores with the benchmarks, such as the age and quality of the facility. These are not part of the families used, so they are important to bear in mind when interpreting the results. For example, if a facility has high energy costs per square metre in comparison with the benchmarks, it may simply be because it is an old facility which is in need of refurbishment and more energy-efficient plant.

4.16   Finally, one of the likely tasks after interpreting the results from the NBS is the setting of targets for performance. Selecting the performance indicators to target is typically determined by a combination of policy priorities and the performance data itself. Priority performance dimensions will be determined by councils and service organisations. The performance data identifies particular weaknesses. The national benchmarks help to identify the feasible range within which targets should fall. As an example, for *subsidy per visit*, if a facility is performing at the bottom quartile benchmark level, then it will not be realistic to set a short term target that aspires to achieve third quartile performance. Targets should be challenging but feasible and close examination of the benchmarks should help managers to identify reasonable improvement targets.