

NHS Staff Survey – Note explaining survey confidentiality

It is important to continuously reassure staff about the confidentiality of the staff survey.

Confidentiality of responses can be completely guaranteed no matter what their role is in their organisation. This is because all responses are sent off site and gathered by an independent survey contractor. NHS England does not allow survey contractors to report back data to any organisation where there are fewer than 11 respondents in a department or demographic group. The independent survey contractors collate the results for the organisation and produce a report that shows the results at an organisational level, divisional level or department level. No report is ever provided by them that identifies staff responses at an individual level.

Respondents cannot be individually identified from their survey results because independent contractors are responsible for processing and aggregating the Staff Survey data. Bar codes and personalised logins are used purely to identify if a person has previously responded, this stops additional mailings being sent to those who have already responded. The organisation does not have access to the online responses or paper questionnaires or to any personal data (including names and addresses). The report that is sent back to the organisation presents the survey findings in summary form, and does not reveal the identity of the staff surveyed.

For paper surveys, each questionnaire contains a unique identification (ID) number so the staff member's name and work contact details are not on the questionnaire. Survey contractors use the ID numbers to ensure that reminder letters are only sent to staff who have not returned a questionnaire. As staff return their completed questionnaires directly to an external survey contractor, there is no way that anyone in an NHS organisation will be able to link data with a particular ID number or individual.

Effectively communicating these messages to staff provides assurances about the confidentiality of the survey and can help maintain and improve response rates. The attached letter is from Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust. In this instance, the letter is signed by a senior manager, the Chief Executive though there may be a case for a co-signed letter which includes staff side representatives.