

Research Report DFE-RR002

Tellus4 Evaluation

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Executive summary

Background

The Tellus survey was originally developed by Ofsted, with support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), but full responsibility transferred to DCSF in 2009, with Tellus4. DCSF commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to administer Tellus4 and Tellus5. A number of important changes were introduced to the design and delivery of Tellus4 to increase participation in, and support for, the survey by local authorities, schools and pupils. The changes made included:

- A dedicated Tellus website www.tellussurvey.org.uk
- Changing the survey live period from the summer to autumn term
- Improved access for disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs (SEN)
- Giving local authorities and schools the option to add questions to personalise the survey to support their own priorities and self-evaluation
- The provision of materials so schools could deliver Tellus as part of the citizenship curriculum
- Providing schools with feedback about their own findings for the first time
- Giving local authorities and schools access to a web-based analytical tool to help with their analysis of their own data.

These and other changes to the management and delivery of Tellus4 brought about a considerable increase in participation. Over 250,000 pupils took part in Tellus4, an increase of around 100,000 from Tellus3. In addition, 5,322 pupils used the new alternative formats, and many of these children would not have been able to participate without such provision.

Tellus4 Evaluation and its objectives

This evaluation was undertaken as a small-scale, targeted piece of work aimed at providing insight into the delivery of the survey, rather than being a large, comprehensive evaluation examining all aspects of the survey.

Word of Mouth was commissioned by DCSF to evaluate the improvements made to Tellus4, and enhance understanding of the local authority and school experience of the Tellus4 survey.

The key objectives of this evaluation were to:

- assess the overall satisfaction level of local authorities, schools and children and young people with the survey and identify key lessons learnt including areas of best practice.
- evaluate the effectiveness of the supporting material and guidance provided in supporting a consistent mode of delivery in class.
- establish how successful the improvements to increase the accessibility of the survey have been, and in particular the use of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) versions in addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs.

Research Methodology

In order to address the above objectives, Word of Mouth adopted a qualitative research approach, involving a mixture of school visits (incorporating both a face-to-face interview with the Tellus co-ordinator and a pupil group discussion within each school), telephone interviews with Tellus coordinators, and telephone interviews with local education authorities/Service Children's Education.

In total, interviews were conducted with 12 local authority/Service Children's Education link officers, 27 Tellus co-ordinators in participating schools, nine representatives from non-participating schools, and seven pupil discussion groups. Fieldwork was conducted in February-March 2010.

Main Findings

Overall satisfaction with Tellus4

Tellus co-ordinators in participating schools expressed high levels of satisfaction with the delivery of Tellus4, with no major problems reported. Local authority link officers were also very positive and felt that Tellus4 was a significant improvement on previous Tellus surveys.

It was difficult to assess overall satisfaction amongst pupils, as they generally had limited recall of the survey. Notwithstanding this caveat, most pupils had enjoyed taking part in the survey and many had found some of the questions "fun" to do. On the whole they had found it easy to complete, but a mixture of views were expressed on confidentiality.

Participation

The headteacher was generally the main person in schools who decided whether to take part in Tellus4, either alone or in consultation with another senior teacher. The availability of school-level results and ability to allow the 'pupil voice' to be heard were the main reasons given for participation. The importance of the 'pupil' voice was particularly strong in special schools and PRUs, who felt it was important that their pupils' views were considered alongside those from mainstream schools.

Some local authorities spoken to, played an important role in encouraging schools to take part, suggesting that, even with the prominent role played by NFER, the local authority can be an important influence on schools' participation.

The main reasons given by non-participating schools for not conducting the survey mostly related to lack of time, the staffing and resource implications, and the perceived burden on teachers, with several schools commenting on the number of external surveys they are asked to complete.

All local authorities saw the data that they would obtain from Tellus4 as the main benefit of their involvement in the survey, in particular because of the relevance of the survey to 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, with some wanting more of their schools to participate for a more complete or representative coverage of pupils in their authority.

Communication and support

Participating schools and local authorities were generally positive towards the communication and support they had received from NFER. Local authorities also gave positive feedback on the stakeholder workshops, which they saw as an important part of the consultation process, and were impressed with the management information tool, which allowed them to monitor their schools' progress efficiently.

Survey timing

Both local authorities and schools were mostly positive towards the autumn timing. Local authorities saw it as an improvement, as it gave them the figures they needed towards the end of the financial year. Schools felt that autumn was a better time than the summer, as there were no exam commitments. However, the timing of the survey was an issue for PRUs, because they tend to have small numbers of pupils in the autumn term, thereby impacting on the quality of the data for their setting.

Inclusion of whole years

The evaluation found that, in general, smaller schools were more likely to include the whole year group, with larger schools citing logistical difficulties in allowing a large number of pupils to conduct the survey. Schools that did include the whole year group thought that this was fairer (as all pupils were allowed to have their say) or easier (as they did not need to decide which classes should be included). Some schools that did select classes said that they did not always follow the guidance provided to select which classes to participate.

Delivery models used in schools

With a very small number of exceptions, the survey was seen primarily as an administrative task. It was delivered in a way that was seen as most efficient and that fitted in best with practical constraints, such as whether ICT support was required by the class teacher or whether the level of ICT support/access in the school meant a whole class did the survey in one session or in stages with smaller groups.

In most cases, schools said they had a dedicated Tellus4 co-ordinator, but in some schools there was no clear co-ordinator role, and typically the headteacher or deputy head would delegate the administration of the survey to individual class teachers, sometimes shortly before the survey had to be conducted; this could impact on teachers' ability to incorporate curriculum materials and use the SEND versions.

Only a few of the schools interviewed integrated the survey into PHSE or Citizenship lessons, or planned lessons around the survey. These respondents found the materials "user-friendly", useful and well designed. However, some respondents said they would consider using the materials in the future and could see a potential benefit of doing so.

Survey set-up and practical issues

Most respondents in participating schools found the survey easy to set up, with no major administrative or technical problems reported, and this was given as one of the main reasons for satisfaction with the survey.

Most respondents from participating schools used the Tellus school support pack, and found it useful and easy to use. A small number of respondents said that the hard copy of the support pack initially looked quite intimidating, as it contained a lot of information, while in some schools the hard copy materials were not always passed on to the relevant teacher(s) as part of the delegation process.

The majority of participating school respondents did not feel there were any issues of confidentiality for their pupils, but some doubted whether pupils understood that teachers wouldn't see the answers, and therefore felt that some pupils may not have been completely honest with their responses.

Several pupils felt that an on-line survey was more confidential than filling in a paper questionnaire, but others expressed concern over confidentiality; as a result they felt awkward when completing the survey or felt that they could not answer all the questions honestly. This was a particular issue for questions on alcohol and smoking.

Survey questionnaire

Local authorities were positive towards the survey questionnaire, on the basis that it gave them the data they needed for performance indicators, although there was the odd concern about questions being changed (affecting trends). Nearly all respondents in participating schools said that the questionnaire content was relevant to pupils and to the school as a whole. However, there were comments that some of the questions (e.g. on smoking and alcohol) were less appropriate for younger pupils, and this view was echoed by some of the pupils that were interviewed.

While some participating schools were happy with the design of the questionnaire, there were a number of comments about the questionnaire being too long or containing long questions. Some pupils (at both mainstream and special schools) confirmed that they sometimes needed help to understand what the questions meant, and to identify appropriate answers.

All local authorities interviewed in the evaluation had taken the option to add their own questions and most felt that this was an important feature. The participating schools included in the evaluation were split between those that added their own questions and those that didn't. Most schools who added their own questions said this was a useful and important feature, allowing them to reflect the school's own/current agenda. Where schools didn't add questions, this was usually because of time constraints or because it was additional work. Some local authorities and schools who added two extra questions said they would have liked to have added more than two.

SEND versions

The SEND versions were generally less used in mainstream schools and in the PRUs interviewed, and there was no evidence of SEND versions being 'tried out' by pupils who were able to access the questionnaire in the standard format.

Of the six special schools included in the evaluation, a couple did not use the alternative formats, because they either did not have time to look into the suitability of the different formats, or because pupils had one-to-one support with the survey, and the SEND formats were not seen as adding to this level of support. The others used either the symbol or BSL versions and they were seen as straightforward to set up and "worked fine".

The symbol version was seen as crucial to pupils' participation in one special school, and a couple of other special schools felt that it improved access to the survey for some pupils. However, some of the special schools included in the evaluation felt that their pupils had problems with cognitive capacity, and the SEND formats did not really address this issue. Most of the special schools gave pupils one-to-one support when they were completing the survey, irrespective of the version used.

Feedback of results and analysis

Most respondents at participating schools said that the school-level feedback was important to them, and in a couple of cases that this was crucial to their participation in Tellus4. Equally, in schools where pupil numbers were too small to allow school-level feedback, respondents were frustrated that they could not get any school-level analysis. Participating schools were most likely to say that the results would be used to provide input into planning documents, or to allow them to address current issues in the schools.

The majority of the local authority respondents said that they would use the analysis tool and one authority said they would encourage their schools to use it too. Most authorities found the idea of an analysis tool appealing but had not been able to test its usefulness.

The evaluation fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2010, and at this point schools had not received school-level analysis for the survey. This was a source of frustration for some respondents, who felt that the gap between the fieldwork and school-level results was too long. Local authority interviews were also conducted before authority-level data became available. One of the key messages that some authorities wanted to feed back was that the lack of results was causing problems, as they needed the information to feed into their end-of-year reports.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background on Tellus4 survey

The Tellus survey is administered through a quantitative, on-line questionnaire, completed by children and young people in year 6 (aged 10-11), year 8 (aged 12-13) and year 10 (aged 14-15). Tellus is a particularly important survey for two reasons, namely:

- It is the only annual survey across England covering all five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, namely Be Healthy; Stay Safe; Enjoy and Achieve; Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being.
- It has a very large sample size, being completed by 253,755 children and young people from 3699¹ schools at Tellus4. Contributing schools include not only mainstream primary and secondary schools, but also academies, special schools, pupil referral units (PRUs) and Service Children's Education (SCE) schools abroad.

Changes implemented for Tellus4

Tellus was originally developed by Ofsted, with support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), but full responsibility transferred to DCSF in 2009, with Tellus4. DCSF commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to administer Tellus4 and Tellus5, with the specific remit of improving the survey quality by increasing participation among local authorities, schools and pupils, and improving survey accessibility for specific 'hard to reach' groups.

A consultation was carried out with key stakeholders, and this led to the implementation of a number of important changes for Tellus4. The main changes were as follows:

- The data collection period changed from summer to autumn term (October 5 to November 20 2009).
- Selection of additional questions from a Question bank, to personalise the survey - local authorities and individual schools were each allowed to choose up to two additional questions, to supplement the core questionnaire.
- PSHE and Citizenship curriculum materials were made available to support delivery of Tellus4 within these lessons, with the aim of developing children and young people's sense of empowerment.
- Schools were provided with feedback on their own results, for the first time, allowing them to make comparisons against their local authority area and the national benchmarks.
- Local authorities and schools were given access to a web-based analysis tool to enable them to conduct their own analysis via a secure portal.
- In order to make the survey more accessible for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the questionnaire was translated into alternative formats, namely Audio, British Sign Language and Symbol/Widgit.

¹ Contributions from the 11 participating Service Children's Education schools are not included in these figures.

The Audio version was developed to be of assistance to children and young people with special educational needs and/or having English as an additional language.

- A dedicated Tellus4 website was provided to support all aspects of the survey delivery.

These, and other changes to the management and delivery of Tellus, brought about a considerable increase in participation, which can be observed from a comparison of the last two surveys (as shown in table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Numbers participating in Tellus3 and Tellus4

	Participating local authorities	Participating schools	Participating pupils
Tellus4	151	3,699	253,755
Tellus3	144	3,113	148,988

From this table we can see that the number of participating pupils increased by 70%, the number of participating schools increased by 19%, and all but one of the local education authorities in England made a contribution to Tellus4. In addition to these improvements, 5,322 pupils used the new alternative formats, and many of these children would not have been able to participate without such provision.

Further details about the Tellus4 survey and the results can be found in the Tellus4 National Report (Chamberlain et al, 2010).

1.2 Objectives of the evaluation

The improvements made to Tellus4 survey represent a significant investment by DCSF, to improve the inclusiveness and data quality of the survey. In order to evaluate these developments, and enhance understanding of the local authority and school experience of Tellus4, DCSF commissioned Word of Mouth to conduct a qualitative study among local authority link staff, school staff responsible for survey delivery, and children and young people who completed the survey.

The Tellus4 evaluation was therefore undertaken as a small-scale, targeted piece of work aimed at providing insight into the delivery of the survey, rather than being a large, comprehensive evaluation examining all aspects of the survey.

The evaluation had a number of overarching, strategic objectives, which were to:

- assess the overall satisfaction level of local authorities, schools and children and young people with the survey and identify key lessons learnt, including areas of best practice.
- evaluate the effectiveness of the supporting material and guidance provided in supporting a consistent mode of delivery in class.
- establish how successful the improvements to increase the accessibility of the survey have been and in particular the use of the SEND versions in addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs.

1.3 Research Methodology

In order to address the objectives, Word of Mouth adopted a qualitative research approach, involving a mixture of school visits (incorporating both a face-to-face interview with the Tellus co-ordinator and a pupil group discussion within each school), telephone interviews with Tellus co-ordinators, and telephone interviews with local education authorities/Service Children's Education.

A sample was drawn from the Tellus4 database, stratified by region and type of school (i.e. primary, secondary, special, PRU, SCE). In order to achieve the target number of interviews within the relatively short fieldwork of 3-4 weeks, the sample had a ratio of five selected schools for every one interview required. Each selected school was sent an advance letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting cooperation. Table 1.2 shows the number of interviews with each group.

Table 1.2: Number of interviews included in the Tellus4 evaluation

School visits: interview with Tellus coordinators	10
School visits: pupil discussion groups	7
Telephone school interviews: Tellus coordinators	26
Telephone interviews: local authority/SCE Link Officer	12

The school visits were undertaken with participating schools, to enable the interviews with the teacher/Tellus coordinator to be supplemented by discussion groups with children and young people who had completed the survey.

The pupil discussion groups covered the three year groups eligible for the survey (year 6, year 8 and year 10). A teacher was present in each of these discussion groups.

The sample design targeted mainly participating schools, but also included a number of non-participating schools, as we were keen to understand the reasons behind non-participation. Table 1.3 gives the breakdown of participating and non-participating schools, and Table 1.4 shows the types of school included in the evaluation.

Table 1.3: Number of interviews with schools

	Participating	Non-Participating
School visits: interview with Tellus coordinators	10	n/a
Telephone school interviews: Tellus coordinators	17	9

Table 1.4: Types of schools included

	Primary	Secondary	Special	PRU	SCE
Participating	5	10	6	4	2
Non-participating	3	2	1	2	1

The sample of schools and local authorities was drawn across a spread of Government Office regions, and where possible the sample of participating schools was matched to the local authority areas in which local authority interviews were conducted.

Interviews with co-ordinators in participating schools typically lasted between 25-40 minutes. Interviews with non-participating schools and local authority personnel were much shorter, typically around 15-25 minutes. Pupil discussion groups lasted around 30 minutes. Topic guides used in these interviews can be found in the appendix of this report.

1.4 Analysis and Interpretation

Each interview was recorded (with respondents' permission). The interviewer used the recording and their own notes to summarise the findings from each interview. The findings were then itemised under emerging themes and topics. This provided the framework for the analysis.

As noted above, this report is based on a small-scale qualitative evaluation. The report indicates the strength of respondents' views, and indicates how common these views were across the sample (e.g. 'very few' or 'most' respondents held a certain opinion), but does not include percentages, as this is not appropriate for a qualitative evaluation.

It should also be noted that the nature of qualitative research can lead to an emphasis on negative feedback. The vast majority of respondents interviewed in this evaluation were positive towards the delivery of Tellus4, but the evaluation sought to identify where improvements could be made, with interviewers prompting respondents towards specific issues.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that this evaluation took place in February-March 2010, four-five months after the fieldwork for Tellus4. As a result, respondents were not always able to recall aspects of the survey in detail, and could be mistaken in their recollection of particular issues. This was a particular issue for children and young people, who often could remember little or nothing about the survey. In the group sessions with children and young people, after some initial questions to test instant recall, the interviewer gave the group some reminders and visual prompts to help them remember the survey more clearly.

2 Overall satisfaction with Tellus4

This chapter looks at the overall satisfaction levels of local authorities, schools and pupils with the implementation and delivery of the survey. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the key features of the survey and how these were perceived by schools, pupils and local authorities. These issues are then discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

2.1 Participating schools

Overall satisfaction

Almost all of the participating schools included in the evaluation were positive towards the implementation and delivery of Tellus4, and no major problems were reported. The main reasons given for satisfaction were that the survey was easy to set up and ran smoothly in their school.

“Very, very user friendly – I was definitely impressed with the whole package”
(participating special school)

“Quite straightforward, quite a painless procedure the survey itself was quite easy to work through” (participating special school)

In some cases, participating schools based their satisfaction on the support they had received from NFER, and the quality of support materials. Some respondents appreciated the fact that the survey was quite short and easy to complete, while others liked the fact that it was an on-line survey, which was felt to engage pupils in the survey.

There were a couple of instances where the respondents expressed concern, either because of the perceived effort involved in administering the survey, or the fact that school-level results had not been received by the time of the evaluation. A few other schools (although generally positive) also commented on the lack of school-level results, and felt that any significant delay in the receipt of their data could potentially mar the positive impression they had of the survey’s delivery. Some schools also experienced minor IT problems. All of these issues are discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Comparison with previous Tellus surveys

The participating schools that were included in the evaluation showed an approximately even split between those participating in Tellus for the first time and those who had taken part previously - these schools had often taken part two or three times before. Most special schools were taking part for the first time, and none of the SCE schools had participated before (as Tellus4 was the first time SCE schools had been included).

Comparisons with previous Tellus surveys were generally favourable. One respondent described Tellus4 as:

“the best [Tellus] we’ve ever done” (participating secondary school)

Other respondents commented positively on the longer lead-time which gave them more time to plan, the quality of the support materials in Tellus4, and the smoother running of the survey compared with previous years.

There were other schools who recalled Tellus4 as being very similar to previous Tellus surveys. Their experience of previous Tellus surveys allowed them to administer the survey efficiently without spending too much time on the support materials, but this may have meant that they missed some of the new features of Tellus4 (such as the availability of the SEND versions).

One or two respondents reported aspects of the Tellus4 that they felt were less successful than in previous years: difficulties in accessing the website, and the time taken to enter usernames and passwords.

Respondents from non-participating schools either said that their school had not participated before of, if they had done so, they had little or no recollection of their schools' previous experiences. As a result, there is no evidence from the evaluation that previous experiences of the survey had any impact on non-participation.

2.2 Local authorities

Overall, local authorities were very positive towards Tellus4, and felt that it had worked better than previous Tellus surveys.

"It got substantially better. It's an increasingly improving survey and when NFER took it over they improved it a bit more. It's on an upward curve as a survey" (local authority)

"Regardless of the level of take-up it is very important that this sort of exercise - to get the views of young people - takes place, and this year the way it was constructed was better than it had been in the past. To engage people and ask the right sort of questions" (local authority)

One local authority respondent summed up the feelings about the survey expressed by the majority by saying:

"It was better planned, better run, better informed" (local authority)

In the majority of cases, local authorities had left most of the administration to NFER. In previous years they had managed this aspect of the survey themselves and they were happy with the outcome this year. They also recognised the decrease in administrative burden the new way of working had meant for them. One respondent summed up the feelings of many:

"One of the good things about Tellus is that it is very resource-light from our perspective" (local authority)

The data that local authorities received from the survey was a key aspect of the survey, in particular the data on the national indicators which was crucial for them. The majority also thought schools would find it useful, possibly for the first time, as it would enable them to compare pupil information locally. As one respondent said:

"A big bonus this year is that schools will get their own data" (local authority)

Respondents particularly liked the management portal, which gave them the opportunity to monitor progress and take-up by schools, without the administrative burden usually present when managing a process of this type. They still felt that they had an important role to play, however, in monitoring the participation and response levels of their schools. As one respondent said:

“You felt as though you were a partner in this, rather than someone who had to do it”
(local authority)

There was an instance where a local authority respondent was disappointed with the outcomes of the survey for his authority. This was partly because they had worked quite closely and actively with their schools but, despite this, had not achieved a high response rate from their schools, many of whom had done the survey with only one class: “just to tick the boxes.” Because of this low response, the respondent felt the data would not be representative of the pupils and schools in the authority as a whole.

However, such cases were very much the exception, although other respondents (while generally positive) felt there was scope to expand the survey to include more schools or more year groups, to make the results more robust (as discussed further in the next chapter).

Overall, local authorities felt that the delivery of the survey was much improved on previous years. The support provided to schools by NFER meant that authorities could take a less active role in the administration of the survey. However, this did mean that some local authority respondents had not had any feedback from their schools about how the survey had run, nor how relevant the schools felt the survey was for them.

2.3 Pupils

As noted in the introduction, most pupil groups had difficulty recalling the survey in any detail. However, the prompts and the ‘screen shots’ used in the classroom sessions helped to refresh the pupils memories, enabling them to discuss their overall experiences of the survey.

Most pupils had enjoyed taking part in the survey and many had found some of the questions “*fun*” to do. A few pupils described the survey as “*scary*” or “*boring*”. On the whole they had found it easy to complete, although some pupils had found it a bit long or found the questions difficult.

Some of the pupils remembered the “*funny password*”, and also what they felt were personal questions (on religion or ethnicity) or sensitive questions (on alcohol, smoking and drugs). They were not always comfortable with these questions.

There were mixed views from pupils over confidentiality. Some thought that an on-line survey was more “*anonymous*” than a paper-based survey. However, other pupils were concerned about confidentiality, and felt it was difficult to be honest as teachers or other adults might see their answers.

Overall, however, most of the pupils seemed happy to take part again. From the pupil’s perspective one of the best things about the survey was that by taking part they got out of another lesson. Most of them had found the questionnaire easy and quick to complete and they had enjoyed doing it on the computer.

2.4 Summary

Participating schools and local authorities included in the evaluation were mostly very positive towards the delivery of Tellus4. They felt the survey ran smoothly and did not experience any major problems. Many local authority link officers felt that Tellus4 was a significant improvement on previous Tellus surveys.

The pupils that were included in the evaluation had limited recall of the survey, so it was difficult to assess their overall satisfaction. On the whole they had found it easy to complete, but a mixture of views were expressed on confidentiality.

3 Participation in Tellus4

This chapter examines the reasons why schools did or did not participate in Tellus4, as well as the process schools went through in making a decision about their participation. The chapter also examines local authorities' views on their own participation as well as their schools'.

3.1 Local authority participation

As noted in the Introduction, every local authority except one participated in Tellus4, to the extent that at least one school in each authority took part in the survey. However, local authorities do not 'participate' in the survey directly, and because NFER took an active role in liaising with schools in Tellus4, this meant that there was little that local authorities *had* to do as part of the survey. At the same time, it was possible for local authorities to play a positive role in encouraging schools to take part (as discussed below), and to add their own questions; equally, local authorities could withdraw their schools from the survey².

In most cases, the decision about the level of involvement the local authority would take in the survey was taken at director level, and in most cases followed a discussion between the respondent (who was the person responsible for managing the survey within the authority), their director and sometimes other colleagues in the authority.

All local authorities saw the data that they would obtain from Tellus4 as the main benefit of the survey, in particular because of the relevance of the survey to 'Every Child Matters' outcomes.

3.2 Local authority views on sampling and selection

Most authorities were happy with the ability to be able to sample all of their secondary and up to 60 primary schools, and some had taken up this option. However, two of the authorities interviewed were too small for this option and, as a result, all their schools were invited to take part, which may have caused a problem for some:

"Because we are a small authority; then the same schools are in the sample every time. I think some schools are finding it an onerous process" (local authority)

One authority was very pleased that NFER had selected the sample because it meant that they could not be accused of 'cherry-picking' schools for inclusion.

Some local authorities wanted participation to be extended to more of their schools or a larger number of pupils in each school. This stemmed from a desire for a larger sample size and a more complete or 'representative' coverage of pupils in their authority. In fact, one authority had set a specific target to achieve a larger sample than they had achieved for Tellus3. There was also a recognition in some authorities that they needed to achieve a certain sample size to enable robust survey results and meaningful feedback for their authority. Only one local authority respondent was negative about the survey, and this

² This happened in only a small number of cases, where for example a local authority withdrew all of the secondary schools in their area as they were conducting a similar survey at the same time.

related to some extent to his views on the size of the sample, which was seen as too small and therefore: *“it is statistically invalid... the survey is meaningless.”* Another respondent, while generally positive about Tellus4, felt that the exclusion of independent schools meant that the sample in his authority was not fully representative.

Some local authorities would have liked a wider coverage in terms of the pupil groups selected, with a preference that all years be surveyed in secondary schools and at least years 5 and 6 in primary schools. One respondent felt that the current restriction was an issue, not only for the local authorities but also for their schools. This respondent highlighted the fact that year 6 pupils would soon be leaving the school so would see little benefit from their participation and said:

“An issue for schools is that it’s only years 6, 8 and 10. For a primary school (year 6 only), it gives them only limited information. If they’ve done a pupil survey of all the pupils in the school, they’ll know what the issues are for the school and they can do something about it” (local authority)

3.3 Schools’ decision to take part

In the participating schools included in the evaluation, the headteacher was generally involved in the decision as to whether to take part in Tellus4, and in some schools s/he was the only person involved in the decision. Alternatively, the headteacher made a decision together with the deputy head or a senior teacher. In a minority of cases, the deputy head or a senior teacher made the decision rather than the headteacher. The senior leadership team (SLT) was involved in only a small number of cases, and where this was the case it was generally the SLT that actually made the decision as to whether to take part.

3.4 Consultation on participation between local authorities and schools

Based on the interviews with participating schools, two of the local authorities included in the sample appeared to have been particularly active in encouraging schools to take part. Local authority interviews confirmed that some authorities spent a lot of time contacting schools to encourage them to take part, and that increasing school numbers was a key priority for them in Tellus4.

“Being realistic, it needs someone in the local authority to dedicate time to phoning and chasing up the schools that don’t come in on the first letter” (local authority)

One local authority respondent noted that, over the years, the authority had become more successful in encouraging schools to take part in Tellus, but admitted that it was *“still a tough job to get schools to commit.”* Overall, most of the local authorities included in the evaluation said they actively encouraged their schools to take part, while a small number just sent an initial letter or did not do anything at all.

Where authorities were active in encouraging schools to participate, this appears to have been central to schools' participation. According to some respondents in participating schools, this was because schools had not noticed the invitation letter, or if they had noticed it they had not managed to respond (i.e. the local authority served as a prompt or reminder to schools). A local authority respondent felt that schools could easily ignore correspondence from NFER, as they tend to prioritise correspondence from people/organisations that they know; therefore, the local authority's role in prompting schools was critical. In other cases, the local authority persuaded schools that they should take part, when otherwise they would not have done so.

"We got a letter from the local authority saying 'it would be really good if you could do it', and following that I basically took it upon myself to do it. I took the hint it was compulsory to do it in a voluntary way!" (participating primary school)

"The local authority were very keen we took part and sent countless letters asking us to take part" (participating secondary school)

Overall, these findings suggest that, even with the prominent role played by NFER, the local authority can be an important influence on schools' participation. In fact one respondent from a non-participating school felt that his local authority should have played a more active role in the survey.

3.5 Reasons for schools' participation and perceived benefits

There were two main reasons for participation given by schools. The first was that the survey allowed the 'pupil voice' to be heard. This was a particularly strong factor for special schools and PRUs, who felt it was important that their pupils' views were considered alongside those from mainstream schools.

"It's good that our children had some input. Because our children have learning difficulties they are so often forgotten and left out, so there's every reason for us to feed into a survey wherever we can" (participating special school)

"Often pupil referral units miss out in the loop, so if we get anything like this we like to contribute, so that it's not just a mainstream view that people are getting" (participating PRU)

The 'pupil voice' was also important in schools that were keen to listen to pupils' views, while other respondents emphasised the importance of pupils expressing their views and participating in surveys.

"I think [the headteacher] is interested in the student voice. We have a very good school council here and there is a lot of things going on about how kids view the school - they vote on things. The headteacher is very keen on making sure the kids do feel like they're having their say" (participating secondary school)

The 'pupil voice' was also seen as a positive aspect of the survey amongst non-participating schools, as indicated by a comment from one school that was unable to take part due to practical constraints:

"We're normally quite happy to participate. We do a lot of surveys ourselves... and it's valuable that students do have a voice, whether it is to a national or local level survey" (non-participating secondary school).

The other main reason for participation was the availability of results at school level. This gave schools feedback about pupils' views that they could act on, and provided information that could feed into the school's self-evaluation form (SEF) or other planning documents.

"If there are things we need to respond to that we didn't know about via our students, it's really powerful feedback. That would be the reason why we went ahead"
(participating secondary school)

Many local authorities also recognised the importance of providing schools with their own data, with one respondent saying that:

"It would have died this year unless we could promise schools their own data, so that was absolutely pivotal. Without that we couldn't have promoted it as much ourselves." (local authority)

Some schools said that the content of Tellus4 was important in their decision to participate, in covering issues that were relevant or important to pupils, and in its link to the curriculum (PHSE or Citizenship). Non-participating schools also mentioned this as a positive aspect of the survey.

"It may have slipped through the net [as it is] the type of thing we are interested in"
(non-participating primary school)

Some other reasons given by individual schools for their participation, included: the option for schools to add their own questions, the SEND versions, the reputation of the Tellus survey, the chance to be involved in new or national initiatives (which was seen as projecting a positive image of the school), and the fact that the survey was on-line.

The experience from previous Tellus surveys can also be important. Some schools felt that they had done it before, and would happily do so again. Some local authority respondents felt that peer encouragement could also play a positive role in this respect, but also acknowledged that negative experiences too can have an impact on future participation.

"If schools find it a useful exercise, then other schools will join,[but] if schools say 'we did this but it was a bit of an effort and we didn't get anything from it' then they're going to drop out and other schools will drop out." (local authority)

3.6 Reasons for schools' non-participation and perceived disadvantages

It is important to bear in mind that non-participating schools contributing to the evaluation may not be typical of all non-participating schools, as they may be slightly more open to considering the survey, simply by virtue of the fact that they were prepared to take part in the evaluation.

Among non-participating schools, memory was somewhat patchy around the decision-making process and influential factors, indicating that the decision was probably not a major issue for the school at the time. The main reasons these schools gave for not participating in Tellus4 generally related to the time and burden of participating in the survey. These issues were mostly not specific to Tellus4, but were factors that would affect their participation in any external survey.

Specifically, respondents from non-participating schools mentioned lack of time, the staffing and resource implications, and the perceived burden on teachers. These respondents referred to specific issues in their schools, for example in one case a lot of new teachers were just starting at the school, in another an Ofsted inspection was taking place at the same time; in another, the school had just converted to an academy, and this brought a lot of extra work (including a number of other surveys). These issues meant that staff resources were already stretched and the survey represented an additional burden.

“As it was a new initiative, we would need teachers that were familiar with the school to do it... new teachers needed time to settle in” (non-participating primary school)

“[it would be] time-consuming and yet another new thing that no one was aware of, on top of other things that the staff had to do” (non-participating primary school)

“I know when staff looked at it... having said ‘yes we'd do it’, they then looked at it and realised it was going to create an awful lot of work which couldn't be easily done within what we were already doing, that's when it became a no-no” (non-participating special school)

Some respondents from non-participating schools commented on the volume of external surveys that they were asked to take part in. This had led a number of headteachers in one local authority to make a general, collective decision to only take part in one external survey per year. The respondent from a non-participating school in this local authority simply accepted the first request the school received at the start of the school year, and then rejected all other requests. Another respondent felt that some of the external surveys they were asked to do covered very similar issues, giving the school the feeling that they were duplicating their efforts. This respondent wondered whether DCSF or another organisation could do anything to try to co-ordinate the various surveys more efficiently.

“One of the problems is we are continuously bombarded with people wanting us to do surveys for various things...we had a joint area review in [county] recently and we had to do two or three surveys for them. It got to the stage where the kids were never in the lessons, they were constantly doing surveys.” (non-participating secondary school)

“We had a very strong feeling that all of these groups were looking for the same information all the time, one was for the local authority, one for Ofsted. We felt very strongly that you've got to get together and get access to each other's data bank, as it's not fair to continuously ask kids the same questions” (non-participating secondary school)

There were occasional comments from non-participating schools that were specific to Tellus. One special school felt that the survey was not appropriate for their pupils, because of their differing needs, and that some aspects of Tellus4 would suit some pupils but not others (for example, this respondent said that the symbol version would suit some pupils, but other pupils would *“feel belittled”* by symbols). This respondent also felt that, in general, the survey was too long and would have been *“too much”* for the pupils.

“It was a very long and complicated thing for our students to do, it wasn't appropriate” (non-participating special school)

A respondent also felt that there was too much paperwork in Tellus4, and this gave the impression that a lot of work would be involved.

“When all the paperwork came through it was so ridiculously long-winded there was no way we'd have time to do all that” (non-participating special school)

Overall, the concerns expressed by non-participating schools were very similar to the perceived negative features mentioned by participating schools (throughout the report), suggesting that there is no great difference in attitude, resources or circumstances, between participating and non-participating schools.

3.7 Local authority views on schools' non-participation

In addition to the reasons for non-participation outlined above, local authority respondents put forward a number of reasons why schools may not have participated in Tellus4, often despite the authority's best efforts to encourage them.

Although the timing of the survey was generally viewed very positively, some local authority respondents felt that the long lead-in time was a factor, because it meant that some schools had forgotten about the survey, or that a change of staff at that school during the survey period had led to non-participation. As one authority said:

"The downside of the timing was keeping the flame under schools who said they would take part" (local authority)

Non-participation by schools was also put down to the fact that some of them did not recognise the importance of Tellus and saw it as 'just another survey'. Because traditionally the data has been used primarily by the local authority, one respondent believed that:

"They [the schools] don't see the relevance of it to them. I think they see Tellus as something more for the local authority than for them." (local authority)

There was also a perceived difference between the willingness of primary and secondary schools to participate. One respondent felt that:

"Most primary schools will do what they're told – they won't worry too much, they'll just do it. In secondary schools, it is very much down to individuals, non-participation was down to specific, individual issues relating to the schools, rather than issues relating to Tellus. A specific problem is that secondary schools have been doing another pupil survey, which 'apparently is much more useful to schools', so they were reluctant to do Tellus as well." (local authority)

3.8 Sharing views on Tellus4

Few respondents included in the survey had discussed Tellus4 with staff from other schools. In the small number of cases where this had happened, the survey was only discussed at a general level: one respondent reported a 'general view' that the survey had improved, especially in relation to timing; another said the survey had no strong reputation, positive or negative.

"They don't have any form of opinion whatsoever... I've not heard anyone say anything bad" (participating secondary school)

Other respondents said that they had discussed the availability of school-level results with staff from other schools: one respondent said that this was seen as an important feature of the survey, and another said that schools were keen to receive their results.

One respondent (a headteacher) from a non-participating school had since spoken to headteachers in other schools, and had received positive feedback on Tellus. This had increased the likelihood of his school taking part in the future.

There was a suggestion from one participating school respondent to instigate a 'buddy' system, so that schools with experience of Tellus can support schools that are new to it. This would require local authorities to identify 'advocate schools' that could support and train neighbouring schools. This approach could increase the level of communication between schools about the survey, and also alleviate some of the concerns that schools may have before agreeing to take part (given that a number of non-participating schools were concerned about the burden of the survey, and that some participating schools were initially intimidated by the perceived size of the task but were ultimately re-assured once they had done it).

3.9 Factors influencing future participation

Most participating schools said that they thought they would take part in Tellus again, although some said this would depend on the quality and usefulness of the school-level results. According to some participating schools, decisions about future participation would depend on their own assessment of the usefulness of the results in comparison with the effort required.

"The ultimate decision [to take part in the future] will be when we look at our school's results – it will be very dependent on whether or not it will be beneficial to the school to complete it, because it's taking up curriculum time and taking up staffing."
(participating middle school)

"If the feedback is useful we'll do it again but, if not, obviously there is a lot of other stuff that comes through the school that ICT is used for that they have to prioritise, so if it was not helpful at all there's no point in us doing it" (participating secondary school)

A small number of respondents also felt that the effective use of the results by the government or their local authority (to inform local or national policies) was important to their future participation. This was also an issue mentioned by some of the non-participating schools.

"My issue is what's going to happen with the information now it's been gathered. Is it just going to make a glossy report or is something going to happen with it?"
(participating secondary school)

"Heads would be much more sympathetic doing it if they knew it was something that led to change and had an impact, rather than was just information gathering for its own sake. I think that's how a lot of people feel" (non-participating secondary school)

3.10 Summary

In most schools, the decision to take part in Tellus4 was taken by the headteacher, either alone or in consultation with another senior teacher. The most common reasons for participation were the availability of school-level results and ability to allow the 'pupil voice' to be heard.

In some cases, local authorities were active in encouraging schools to take part, and this could be a crucial factor in schools' participation. All local authorities saw the data that they would obtain from Tellus4 as the main benefit of their involvement in the survey, in particular because of the relevance of the survey to 'Every Child Matters' outcomes.

The reasons given by non-participating schools for not conducting the survey mostly related to practical constraints: lack of time, the staffing and resource implications, and the perceived burden on teachers, with several schools commenting on the number of external surveys they are asked to complete.

4 Communication and support

This chapter examines the communication and support received by schools and local authorities from NFER and DCSF. This covers general communication, support provided by the NFER helpdesk, the stakeholder workshops conducted before the survey took place, and the management information tool for local authorities. The materials produced by NFER (support materials and curriculum materials) are examined later in the report in the discussion of set-up and delivery of the survey (chapters 6 and 7).

4.1 NFER support

Most participating schools said that the communication and support they had received from NFER was good.

“The communication from NFER – I couldn’t fault it” (participating PRU)

Some respondents pointed out that there had been very little contact, but this hadn’t been needed as everything was straightforward. Although not many respondents had used the helpdesk, those that had made contact were generally positive, finding the service helpful and efficient, with a prompt response to queries. One of the respondents noted that the communication they had from the local authority was not clear as to NFER’s role; this meant they contacted the local authority with a query when they would have been better contacting NFER. This suggests that some local authorities may benefit from clear guidance on what they should say to schools in any correspondence.

As noted in the previous chapter, local authority respondents often contacted schools to encourage them to take part. Some local authority respondents also kept in contact with schools to prompt them to stay on schedule with the set up of the survey. One respondent stressed the view that local authorities still needed to be closely involved with schools, and that they could not always rely on schools to follow the guidance from NFER. This ties in with the findings reported in chapter 6 (‘Delivery models used in schools’), indicating that information is not always passed on within schools.

“Heads are being advised that you just need to go onto the website, but they just don’t do it” (local authority)

The authorities we interviewed could not recall being asked for advice by their schools, and in fact one respondent felt that there was now no role for the local authority in the running of the survey. One local authority had used their bulletin board to give advice to their schools, one had answered a few minor queries and one had simply given schools the NFER website address.

In terms of the support given to local authorities themselves, the general feeling amongst local authority respondents was that the communication (mainly through the Tellus portal) had worked well and that the local authority had got what they needed. The feelings of many were summed up well by one respondent:

“NFER – always very helpful...the people I spoke to there” (local authority)

One respondent was satisfied with the telephone support from NFER, but advised against relying too much on email communication, on the basis that emails were “easy to miss”.

4.2 Stakeholder consultation workshops

Around half of the local authority respondents had attended a stakeholder workshop and some of these had taken a colleague with them. Some had not attended themselves but sent a colleague and only one respondent had been unaware of the workshops. The majority of those who had attended a workshop were very positive about them.

“Just the kind of event that emphasises the difference between DCSF’s approach and Ofsted’s approach; the fact that they had that kind of briefing event. They listened to what people had to say, there was much more engagement.” (local authority)

“NFER sold it well... presented it well as something that was better than what had happened before and I left there feeling quite happy with the process” (local authority)

While seeing the workshop as useful, most respondents did not feel that their attendance at the workshop had influenced their decision over their authority’s involvement in the survey. However, some did feel that it had given them more confidence in the process which made them more able to persuade schools to take part.

More frequently, however, local authorities saw the workshop as an important part of the consultation process:

“A chance for the local authority’s views to be taken into account” (local authority)

One respondent, whilst positive about the workshop, expressed a plea that DCSF would *“stay in listening mode”*, and hoped that workshops would continue to be part of the survey process in future years.

There was an occasional negative comment about the workshops. One respondent had argued for the retention of a question in the core questionnaire, and was disappointed that their view had not been accommodated. Another respondent expressed disappointment, as he felt his concerns about statistical validity had not been addressed.

4.3 Use of management information tool by local authorities

Most local authorities had used the management information tool to monitor response and to chase up non-responding schools. All those who had used it felt that it was useful and helpful. As noted in the chapter on overall satisfaction, the management information tool was one of the most positive features of the survey in the eyes of local authority respondents. As one respondent said:

“Being able to log into the website, knowing what’s happening when and getting progress reports, have been very useful from this side.” (local authority)

4.4 Summary

The communication and support provided by NFER was viewed positively by both participating schools and local authorities. Local authorities were also positive towards the stakeholder workshops, which they saw as an important part of the consultation process, and the management information tool, which allowed them to monitor their schools' progress efficiently.

5 Survey timing and pupil coverage

This chapter looks at two of the main changes made to the survey for Tellus4: the timing of the survey, and the option to include whole year groups in the survey, rather than individual classes.

5.1 Survey timing

The Tellus4 survey was delivered in schools in October and November 2009. This was a change from previous Tellus surveys, which took place in the summer term.

Local authorities

Amongst the majority of local authorities, respondents were positive about the new timing of the survey and thought that the autumn was more appropriate. It was seen as more practical from a school perspective and it worked well for the local authorities because it provided them with the figures they needed towards the end of the financial year. A specific positive comment was that the new timing of the survey did not clash with the Audit Commission Survey. However, because the process had to start so early one respondent felt that:

“Survey set-up started in May-June. [This meant] an extended period when schools had to think about it, (it became) a protracted process.” (local authority)

Schools

Most participating schools thought that the timing of Tellus4 was appropriate, with some noting that the autumn is a less busy time of year for schools without exam commitments. A number of those with experience of previous Tellus surveys said that the timing of Tellus4 was an improvement.

“For year 10 it fits in well. October is a good time as it happens before they are sitting their exams so it's not a distraction.” (participating secondary school)

Non-participating schools were also generally positive towards the timing of the survey, and one said this could potentially influence their participation in the future.

However, the timing of the survey was an issue for PRUs, because they tend to have small numbers of pupils in the autumn term (because of the pattern of school exclusions). This meant that very few pupils completed the survey and this prevented the schools from getting school-level results. Respondents at PRUs felt that either the spring or summer term would be preferable.

A couple of respondents had reservations about the timing of Tellus4, either because they saw the autumn as a busy time for the school, or because pupils and classes were *“more settled”* after Christmas; one local authority respondent agreed that it would be preferable to run the survey later in the school year, as pupils would have settled in better.

However, there was no agreement from these respondents as to a preferable time, some preferring the spring term (as pupils were more settled but exams had not started), others the summer (in one primary school, the survey was felt to fit in better with transitional activities for year 6 pupils who were about to start secondary school).

5.2 Inclusion of whole years

In previous Tellus surveys, participation in each school was restricted to just one year 6 class and to two classes from each of years 8 and 10. In Tellus4, schools had the option of either doing the same, or alternatively they could include all of their pupils in the relevant year groups.

In general, smaller schools were more likely to include the whole year group. Larger schools often had logistical difficulties in allowing a large number of pupils to take part in the survey, and in some cases therefore selected some pupils only in the relevant year groups. A respondent from a non-participating school also felt that, in a large school, completing the survey on a whole year basis would be problematic. This view was also held by some of the local authority respondents.

Specifically, PRUs included all pupils in the year group, as there were only a very small number of pupils at the school at the time of the survey. Primary schools were also more likely than not to include the whole year. In secondary schools, there was evidence of both approaches, while special schools tended to select certain pupils only, as it was felt that some pupils did not have the cognitive ability or ICT capability to take part.

Where the whole year did take part, this was often seen as a better or fairer representation of the year group or the school as a whole. Some respondents felt that it allowed more pupils to have their say, and others found it simpler to organise it this way (as this avoided decisions as to which pupils or classes should be excluded).

Where not all pupils in the year were included, this was most commonly because of limited computer availability, or (as noted above) in special schools where pupils were felt unable to complete the survey. One respondent was positive towards the fact that schools could choose whether to include all pupils or just certain classes; this gave them the flexibility to take part without straining resources.

Where the whole year was not included, schools did not always follow the guidance to select one or two classes. In fact, pupils were selected in various ways. In some special schools, it was restricted to those who were felt able to complete the survey. Other approaches included: selecting a 'representative' range of pupils from the year; choosing classes whose timetable fitted in with ICT availability and/or were doing ICT at GCSE; and choosing the most "*challenging*" class to "*reflect the area*". This suggests that where schools are selecting a sub-sample of the year group, this is being done in different ways and is somewhat arbitrary.

Local authorities liked the idea that all students in the selected years could participate in the survey and many were keen that they had done so. However, many did not know if their schools had taken up this option.

5.3 Summary

Overall, there was a clear consensus that the timing of Tellus4 was appropriate and was an improvement over previous Tellus surveys, although this can be problematic for a minority of schools, particularly PRUs.

Smaller schools were more likely than larger schools to include the whole year group in the survey, and schools often saw it as easier or fairer to include all pupils rather than to select some classes only. However, limited access to computers meant that some schools were not able to include the whole year group.

6 Delivery models used in schools

This chapter looks at how the survey was actually administered in schools: how it was staffed, whether the whole class completed the survey at the same time, and how pupils were briefed. It also examines the extent to which the survey was incorporated into the PHSE or Citizenship timetable and the use of curriculum materials.

6.1 Staff responsibilities in schools and local authorities

Local authorities

Whilst all of the local authority respondents were linked to their authority's performance team, the make-up of their Tellus teams varied. The respondent was invariably the main contact with NFER, their own director and sometimes the schools. However, s/he was not always responsible for the analysis of survey data, with some relying on colleagues within the team to provide analytical support. Some local authorities included school heads in their Tellus working group.

Schools

In most cases, the school had a dedicated co-ordinator for the Tellus4 survey. In terms of seniority, a wide range of people fulfilled the co-ordinator role, from deputy head to teaching assistants. The co-ordinator was sometimes involved from the outset, but in other cases the task of co-ordinating the survey was delegated by the headteacher after the decision to participate.

In some cases (generally where only a small number of pupils were involved, such as in PRUs), the co-ordinator did all of the tasks required for the set-up and delivery of the survey. Elsewhere, the co-ordinator worked with class teachers who administered the survey with relevant class groups. In these cases, the class teachers and/or pupils were usually briefed by the co-ordinator, who was also sometimes present in the lessons as well.

In some schools, there was no clear co-ordinator role. With this approach, the headteacher or deputy head typically delegated the administration of the survey to individual class teachers. In some cases, the task was not delegated until the time of the survey fieldwork, and teachers therefore knew nothing about the survey until they needed to administer it; in fact, there was an example of a teacher only being given a day's notice to carry out the survey. This had implications for the delivery of the survey (e.g. in teachers' ability to incorporate curriculum materials and use the SEND versions), which are discussed further below.

The level of ICT support varied. In some cases, the co-ordinator or class teacher was able to set up the survey on their own, but other schools relied on ICT staff, to set up the survey and/or administer it in the ICT suite.

6.2 Mode of completion of the survey

Most respondents in participating schools said they did the survey with the whole class in one session. A small number of respondents said they did the survey in stages with smaller groups, generally because of limited availability of ICT access. Some respondents from PRUs said that the pupils had their own laptops, which allowed greater flexibility; in fact, one PRU allowed pupils to do the survey when they liked in their own time. In some special schools, pupils were taken out of other classes individually to do the survey accompanied by a teacher.

6.3 Pupil briefing

Most respondents from participating schools said that pupils were briefed about the survey in advance, often from NFER materials (sections 9 and 10 of the Tellus school support pack). These materials worked well for most respondents, although in some cases the teacher adapted it. One respondent said they would have preferred a simplified version of the briefing materials, but another requested a more thorough briefing for pupils, for example to encourage honest answers. Overall, therefore the briefing materials appear to be appropriate for use in schools. It is not clear whether staff actually gave the pupil information from the school support pack sheet to pupils or just used the materials to brief them.

Occasionally, schools gave a more detailed briefing, for example using the hard copy of the questionnaire to take pupils through the survey in advance. However, a minority of schools gave pupils little or no advance notice or preparation.

6.4 Integration into curriculum subjects

For the first time, Tellus4 included citizenship curriculum materials, which were sent to schools in the hope that they would be used in PHSE and Citizenship lessons before, during and after the survey. In this section, we examine the extent to which the survey was incorporated into PHSE or Citizenship lessons; the next section focuses on the curriculum materials specifically.

Very few schools integrated the survey into PHSE or Citizenship lessons, or planned lessons around the survey. However, one secondary school respondent said that they did plan lessons around the survey (before and after), specifically in relation to classes on the importance of expressing an opinion and taking part in surveys. Another primary school respondent found that it fitted in well with PHSE:

“We did a lot of work on anti bullying, safeguarding... transitional activities which just link perfectly with the survey... it just runs into PHSE” (participating primary school)

While not being used directly as part of PHSE, one respondent felt that the survey did have a wider benefit, as it allowed an opportunity to raise and discuss topical issues about how pupils felt about their school and their lives, which is not always possible as part of the curriculum.

Another respondent (in a school where the survey was not integrated into PHSE) wondered whether it would have helped if they had done so, so that pupils could think about their answers more in the context of the subject, rather than *“just filling it in without thinking about it”*.

However, these examples were very much the exception. In most schools, the survey was seen primarily as an administrative task, and was delivered in a way that was seen as most efficient and that fitted in best with practical constraints, such as matching IT facilities to the right classes within the constraints of the timetable and staff resources, and without damaging core subject time. As a result, staff tended to consider the practical elements of the survey rather than how its subject suited curriculum subjects.

As a result, pupils often completed the survey in an ICT class, as this was where the class had access to computers. Some respondents noted that this can be a source of dissatisfaction for ICT teachers, whose lessons can be ‘hijacked’ for on-line surveys or other activities needing ICT access. A number of respondents felt they relied on the goodwill of ICT teachers to accommodate the survey.

“It’s really difficult because a lot of [ICT] teachers don’t like it being used in their subjects... so it might be next year that they might just have so many other things they’re doing we might not be able to do the survey” (participating secondary school)

Some schools experienced logistical difficulties in fitting the survey into the timetable, and therefore tended to fit it in where they could. Examples were given of the survey being *“squeezed into careers lessons”*, *“slotted in where possible”*, or done during lunch-break.

“[it’s a question of] how can we do it with the least amount of swapping rooms” (participating secondary school)

Overall, therefore, the survey was seen very much as an additional task for schools rather than something that could replace existing PHSE or Citizenship work. In addition, some respondents felt that the survey could not be accommodated into PHSE or Citizenship lessons. This was partly because the PHSE/Citizenship lesson plans had already been established by the time the survey was set up.

“It would have been good to do the scheme of work but in Citizenship everything is structured, it’s all six weeks blocks that go within the term, so there are proper schemes of work already going through the year” (participating secondary school)

Some special schools did not think the content of the survey was compatible with their own curriculum. Other respondents thought the time required for the survey did not match a single PHSE/Citizenship lesson. One primary teacher said that PHSE lessons lasted 30 minutes and were therefore too short for the survey; while a secondary teacher felt that the curriculum materials did not fit neatly into individual lessons.

“Some of them (curriculum materials) were quite good. I didn’t think they made whole lessons though - some of them were not a lesson’s work. They [pupils] would have been done after 15 minutes, which would have meant I’d have added a lot extra afterwards” (participating secondary school)

6.5 Use of new guidance materials and curriculum materials

As noted above, Tellus4 was generally not incorporated into PHSE or Citizenship lessons, and the curriculum materials were rarely used. Only two respondents in the sample of participating schools used them (one special school and one PRU), and some respondents were not aware of them (although some respondents were staff who had been delegated to administer the survey, sometimes at short notice, so it may not be surprising that these individuals were not aware of the materials).

When the materials were used, they were used to complement teachers' existing lesson plans. These respondents found the materials "user-friendly", useful and well designed, making the survey "more comprehensive" and allowing better planning and preparation of pupils.

However, some respondents said they would consider using the materials in the future and could see a potential benefit of doing so; in fact one said they definitely would use them next time having seen them this year and seen how they could help. This suggests that while the materials may not have been considered in time for this year's lesson plans, they may be used more widely from next year.

One local authority respondent was very positive towards the curriculum materials:

"The curriculum pack you sent out was excellent, they gave some incentive for schools to take part ... so often schools are asked to deliver without anything for them to have. Something that they can deliver as part of PSHE was a real incentive."
(local authority)

However, the local authority respondents had very little knowledge of how schools had used the curriculum materials. A couple of authorities had pointed them out and advised their schools to use them but generally local authorities did not know whether their schools had done so.

6.6 Summary

Most schools in the evaluation had a dedicated Tellus4 co-ordinator, but in some schools there was no clear co-ordinator role, and typically the headteacher or deputy head would delegate the administration of the survey to individual class teachers, sometimes shortly before the survey had to be conducted; this could impact on teachers' ability to incorporate curriculum materials and use the SEND versions.

Nearly all schools viewed the survey primarily as an administrative task, and therefore delivered it in the most efficient, practical way. Only a few of the schools interviewed integrated the survey into PHSE or Citizenship lessons, or planned lessons around the survey. These respondents found the materials "user-friendly", useful and well designed. However, some respondents said they would consider using the materials in the future and could see a potential benefit of doing so.

7 Survey set up, administration and supporting material

This chapter covers the perceived burden of the survey on schools and local authorities, and also examines the set up and practical administration of the survey in schools, including the use of support materials. The chapter also looks at issues of confidentiality for pupils completing the survey.

7.1 Overall level of burden

Schools

In almost all participating schools, the survey was seen as additional to existing work (i.e. it did not replace existing PHSE or Citizenship work). The survey was also seen very much as an additional task amongst non-participating schools.

Most respondents in participating schools said that the survey was straightforward to administer and therefore the burden was small. A few noted that it did take some of their own or other staff's time – or pupils' time - but this was generally not seen as a major problem. One respondent from a special school said that Tellus4 did take up a lot of their time as it was the first time they had done the survey, but they expected it to be much less time-consuming next time.

However, a small number of respondents did feel the survey was burdensome.

“I think it was a bit of a cumbersome task from the feedback I got from the teachers”
(participating primary school)

Specifically, some respondents experienced logistical difficulties in co-ordinating the school's IT resources within the time available. Others pointed out that, even if the survey was relatively straightforward, it still required staff resources to plan and carry it out.

As noted in the chapter on participation, the perceived burden was also a reason for non-participation, and there were specific comments from non-participating schools, as follows. One respondent said that an additional teaching resource would be needed if the survey was included in PHSE, since in this school PHSE was taken by a teaching assistant or supply teacher. The respondent felt that the inclusion of the survey would mean that a permanent teacher would need to be involved. One respondent said that their school has a mixed year 5/6 class, so the survey would cause logistical problems in separating the year 6 pupils.

Local authorities

Local authorities commented positively on NFER's role in managing the survey and liaising with schools, and authorities received virtually no queries from schools. As a result, the administrative burden on local authorities was considerably lower than in previous Tellus surveys, and this was one of the most positive aspects of Tellus4 for local authorities (as noted in chapter on overall satisfaction).

“The administrative burden was taken away from me, and NFER did it for us. In previous years it was quite time consuming” (local authority)

“The main thing is that NFER took on so much more of the administration work in terms of dealing direct with schools – that was a major bonus” (local authority)

7.2 Survey set up and administration

Tellus4 was generally seen as very easy to set up, with no major problems reported. As noted in the chapter on overall satisfaction, this was the main reason for the positive views that most respondents had of the survey.

“It [the site] was very easy to use for the kids; they didn't have any difficulty in navigating the site which is good. Obviously that's always a worry when you use ICT” (participating primary school)

“The administration from Tellus - that was good in terms of user names, passwords, and getting on-line and doing it. That ran really smoothly” (participating secondary school)

A small number of schools reported problems in setting the survey up. The main concern was the log-in process, which some respondents found time-consuming or awkward. However, these were generally minor in the overall context of the survey running smoothly.

“The only awkward thing really was the logging in and having to have a log in code and what-have-you to access the questionnaire itself” (participating primary school)

“With the amount of work I have to do in other areas... it would be nice to have some simple generic school password or something I can put in rather than a strange combination of numbers and letters” (participating primary school)

Where respondents had been involved in previous Tellus surveys, they generally said the set up was very similar to previous experiences. Some schools that were new to the survey said it was easier to set up than they'd expected. In fact, one respondent said it would be worth telling schools in the guidance that the set up is straightforward and can be done by any member of staff, as this would help them with resourcing.

“It fared better than I expected. The programme was quite easy to navigate through, the children picked it up quickly” (participating special school)

'It may be useful for schools to be aware this can be delivered by non teaching staff and that will make it more attractive as well... support staff have the time to sort it out' (participating secondary school)

7.3 Information technology (IT) support

Most participating school respondents said they had no technical issues when running the survey, and one respondent commented that this had a positive impact on confidentiality, as teachers did not have to look at pupils' screens. A small number of problems were raised, as follows:

- Problems with log-ins or passwords;
- Trouble getting on to system/not all pupils could get on;
- Internet slow; pupils could not all log on at the same time;
- Computers freezing or crashing.

It is difficult to know the extent to which these problems related to the school's IT system, or whether they were related to Tellus4 specifically. However, teachers are often wary of IT problems, and this was mentioned by one respondent from a non-participating school:

"Logging everybody in is as much an issue as actually completing the survey. A couple of glitches with IT can cause issues" (non-participating secondary school)

7.4 Use of support materials

Most respondents from participating schools used the Tellus school support pack, and found it useful and easy to use.

"[The hard copy] did prove very useful. It explained what the survey was about, put it into context and was really quite straightforward" (participating secondary school)

A couple of respondents said that the hard copy of the support pack initially looked quite intimidating, as it contained a lot of information. This meant that one respondent nearly missed the deadline for the survey as they kept putting it off, thinking they didn't have time to devote to it.

"I think initially I just glanced at the instructions and password and thought 'what on earth have I got to cope with here' and shelved it" (participating secondary school)

"It just had so much information and all these dates - I was a bit worried about completing it" (participating secondary school)

In the event, both of these respondents revised their opinion having actually used the pack, finding it clear and straightforward. However, another respondent felt that *"the paperwork had grown over the years"* and would like to see it decrease in the future, while one of the non-participating schools included in the evaluation mentioned the amount of paperwork as part of their reason for not taking part in Tellus4. Another respondent from a participating school expressed a preference for a shorter, summary sheet giving a simple step-by-step guide, with a link to more detailed guidance. Given that some respondents initially found the information pack intimidating, this could be a useful option for the future. In part, this desire for simplicity also reflects the fact that many schools are just doing the minimum they need to do to complete the survey.

Some respondents said that they did not really use the materials, as they didn't need to (this was mainly in schools that had done Tellus in previous years). Also, as noted above, in some schools the administration of Tellus4 was delegated to classroom staff, sometimes only shortly before the survey had to be completed, so teachers did not have time to read the materials in any detail. A further internal issue in schools was that the hard copy materials were sometimes not passed on to the relevant teacher(s) as part of the delegation process. In some cases, respondents regretted that they had not seen the hard copy materials.

Most local authority respondents had read the NFER guidance but had not needed to use it as their schools had dealt directly with NFER.

7.5 Parental and pupil consent

Schools did not report any problems with regard to parental consent forms, at most receiving a single opt-out.

There were no problems reported with consent from pupils themselves. It was often not clear to what extent schools gave pupils the option to decline, but when pupils were given the option they generally all agreed.

7.6 Confidentiality of participating pupils

Participating schools

The majority of participating school respondents did not feel there were any issues of confidentiality for their pupils, and this view was particularly prevalent in secondary schools. Some respondents pointed out how they avoided issues of confidentiality. For example, some staff made sure that while they were available to answer questions, they could not see any of the pupils' computer screens. Another respondent (in a special school) sat with pupils to support them, but told them that they could ask him to move away at any time, and one pupil did this. One respondent made it clear at the start that the survey was private, and that pupils must not look at each other's work. This respondent also separated friends and specific children who s/he thought may want to look at each other's work.

However, some respondents acknowledged that:

- Staff were sitting next to pupils, and this could potentially lead the pupil to change their answer, particularly as pupils naturally think there is a 'right or wrong answer'.
- Pupils could have been 'looking over their shoulder' at another pupil's answers.
- Some pupils had to ask for help with factual questions (so staff had to give them the answer), which could be problematic if there was sensitivity involved (e.g. whether the pupil had SEN).

In addition, general doubts were expressed as to whether pupils understood that teachers wouldn't see the answers or whether they believed that it actually would be confidential. A small number of respondents explicitly stated that pupils may not have been honest in their answers.

"You say it's in complete confidence, but do the kids actually believe that? Possibly not, they may think we're going to go straight on-line and strip out the answers"
(participating PRU)

"Two of them ended up having a big argument about the fact they had not been honest on it" (participating PRU)

"Even though they know it's confidential they still feel someone may be judging them at the end of the survey" (participating secondary school)

Pupils

Pupils liked completing the survey on-line and felt that it was easier than paper. As one pupil said:

“It’s easier filling it out on-line than on paper as it’s neater and it’s quicker to do” (year 8 pupil)

Several groups of pupils felt that an on-line survey was more confidential than filling in a paper questionnaire, because in an on-line survey the data was “*sent straight off*”. A paper questionnaire could be left where others might see it and someone might even recognise the handwriting.

“It’s more anonymous, instead of writing on paper and having other people see it, it’s on the computer” (year 8 pupil)

Another pupil liked the idea that s/he could respond anonymously to the survey:

“Because it was private you could put what you wanted. If you talk in class, sometimes you feel you can’t say exactly what you think as people may laugh or may not think you’re right, but because it was private you could put what you want and not have to change your answer” (year 6 pupil)

However, confidentiality was a concern for a number of the pupils, leaving them to either feel awkward or to feel they could not answer all the questions honestly. Some pupils assumed the teacher would see their responses, and there was a feeling in one group in particular that you could not be honest in the survey as teachers or other adults may see it. Others voiced the same suspicions with specific regard to the alcohol and smoking questions:

“There were questions about drinking and smoking, but you wouldn’t tell anyone that on a survey if you didn’t want people to know” (year 10 pupil)

The special school class working on a one to one basis with a teaching assistant expressed some concern about answering the sex, drugs and alcohol questions and found them awkward and embarrassing. The close proximity of their computers was also a concern expressed by some pupils:

“It was private as you didn’t have to write your name which was good ... the computers are really close together though, so someone could look at what you’re writing” (year 8 pupil)

7.6 Summary

Most respondents in participating schools felt that the burden on their schools was relatively light, with no major administrative or technical problems reported.

Most participating schools used the Tellus school support pack, and found it useful and easy to use. A small number of respondents said that the hard copy of the support pack initially looked quite intimidating, while in some schools the hard copy materials were not always passed on to the relevant teacher(s) as part of the delegation process.

The majority of participating school respondents did not feel there were any issues of

confidentiality for their pupils, but some doubted whether pupils understood that teachers wouldn't see the answers, and therefore felt that some pupils may not have been completely honest with their responses. Some pupils expressed the same concerns, and as a result they felt awkward when completing the survey or felt that they could not answer all the questions honestly.

8 Survey questionnaire

This chapter examines the questionnaire used in Tellus4 from the perspective of teachers, pupils and local authorities. It looks at the perceived relevance of the questions, how appropriate it was for pupils, and how easy it was for them to complete.

8.1 Relevance of the questionnaire

Local authorities

Local authorities felt that Tellus had provided them with the data they needed for performance indicators and that:

“There are certain questions that Tellus asks that you can’t get from other places and these impact on your performance indicators” (local authority)

The ability to benchmark against other authorities and the national aspects of the survey were also felt to be a very important aspect of the Tellus4 survey. As one local authority respondent said:

“The fact that it is national, which allows you to compare how you are doing, because some of these things are difficult to benchmark” (local authority)

However, there were concerns expressed that some questions had been changed, which could affect trends. Other respondents felt that while the survey questions were useful at a local authority or national level, they were pitched at too general a level to be of use to schools. As a result, the view was expressed that schools would need another survey (“asking the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions”) to get all the information they needed on these issues.

Participating schools

Nearly all respondents in participating schools said that the questionnaire content was relevant to pupils and to the school as a whole. There were just a small number of comments that certain questions were less relevant to pupils in the respondent’s school; for example, questions about local facilities, parks and transport could be seen as less relevant in certain areas. However, respondents generally acknowledged that as Tellus is a national survey, some of the questions would inevitably be less relevant to their specific circumstances.

8.2 Pupils’ understanding of the purpose of the survey

Around half of the pupil groups either did not really understand why they had taken part in the survey or, in some cases, the issue was not discussed because the teacher felt that the question was inappropriate. Most of the rest were rather vague about the purpose of the survey, but some hoped that it might improve their local area or their school.

8.3 Suitability of questionnaire topics to different ages, abilities and needs

Most participating school respondents said that questions were suitable and appropriate for pupils, noting in some cases that pupils were familiar with the issues because they had been covered in PHSE or Citizenship lessons. Other respondents acknowledged that the questionnaire may be more difficult for certain pupils, but pointed out that support was available from staff if pupils did have any queries.

“They take part in lessons on drug and alcohol awareness anyway so it wasn’t something they’ve never come across” (participating primary school)

Another respondent said that some of the questions were less appropriate for year 6 pupils, but had pre-empted this issue by explaining to pupils at the start that some questions may be more relevant to older pupils. However, one primary school teacher, while understanding that questions on smoking and alcohol needed to be included for older pupils, said that year 6 pupils could be upset or shocked by some of the questions.

“Some of the things it asks our children are completely foreign to them such as smoking, and they get very upset and shocked about it” (participating primary school).

Some secondary school respondents felt that year 8 pupils found the survey more difficult than year 10 pupils, partly because of the language and terminology (see below), but also because of the topics covered; one secondary school respondent questioned the maturity of year 8 pupils to be able to answer the questions properly.

8.4 Feedback on questionnaire format

While some participating schools were happy with the design of the questionnaire, there were a number of comments about the questionnaire: general comments about length, structure and terminology, as well as comments on individual questions.

Some respondents felt that the questionnaire as a whole was too long, or that individual questions were long, with lengthy wording and/or long lists of response codes. The long lists of response codes could be problematic for two reasons: one relates to navigation of the questionnaire as it appears on screen (with the need to scroll down to see the full list of responses); the other applies to children with lower cognitive ability, because they find long lists complex, and tend to operate better with questions in simpler formats (e.g. ‘yes/no’, ‘happy/unhappy’ type of responses). In some cases, this led to pupils losing concentration, and teachers had to work hard to *“keep them on track”*. This was most likely to be seen as a problem in primary, special schools and PRUs, where the concentration and/or cognitive ability of pupils could be relatively low.

“Some of the questions are quite lengthy and there were a lot of questions. For some kids it was quite difficult ... to make a choice based on actually thinking about it as opposed to getting bored and just saying ‘that one’.” (participating PRU)

Although most pupils included in the evaluation said that they had found the survey easy to complete, some pupils had found it a bit long, and felt that they had been asked a lot of questions:

"I thought some questions were quite long, and they had one question about it, then the next question was about it as well, they could have put them into one question."
(year 6 pupil)

Some participating school respondents felt that the survey contained difficult words or phrases. This was seen mainly as an issue in primary and special schools, where pupils could lose interest or confidence in their ability to do the survey. Pupils with lower literacy levels in particular were felt to struggle with some language and concepts.

"They were unsure of the language in some of the questions which affected their confidence" (participating primary school)

Some respondents felt that the questionnaire could be adapted to make it "more-child friendly"; one secondary school respondent felt that an easier version (in terms of words/language) was needed for year 8 pupils than for year 10 pupils, while two special school respondents wanted a simplified version with shorter questions and answers.

"I think an obvious thing that came up from talking to the kids...was perhaps a slightly easier [version] with pictures for year 8 - that would be good. Year 10 can get on with it, but year 8 are still children. Something more exciting or animated"
(participating secondary school)

As the above comment illustrates, some respondents felt that there could be an alternative version of the questionnaire that could be used for younger pupils and those with lower cognitive ability – not adapted to the same extent as the SEND versions, but with easier language and graphics to help respondents (e.g. including smiley/sad faces for positive/negative views). A similar view was expressed by a pupil:

"A little bit more colour... and pictures so you can see what they mean" (year 8 pupil)

Teaching staff took various approaches to dealing with the issue of difficult words or phrases. In one year 6 PRU class, the teacher projected the survey onto a whiteboard and the class worked through it together, with the teacher explaining some of the questions. In this class they all progressed from one question to the next at the same pace, and this way of working resulted in a great deal of class discussion. Another teacher said that he wrote up difficult words on the board and discussed what they meant with the class. Pupils in one special school had completed the survey in groups of six, again with the teacher reading out the questions. At this school the teacher sometimes offered pupils an alternative question wording to make it easier to understand. Another respondent also said that she re-phrased questions so they were easier to understand. This respondent (in a special school) requested that the Tellus school support pack could include a section giving an explanation of phrases and words, with examples of what they could mean - this would avoid teachers having to interpret the questions themselves individually.

Pupils confirmed that they sometimes needed help to understand what the questions meant, and to identify appropriate answers. As one pupil said:

"Because there were some big words we didn't understand, so they were written on the board and they told us what they meant" (year 8 pupil)

However, another pupil found the survey very straightforward:

"I thought it was very child friendly. It was very simple. You just had to find one (answer) and click 'enter'" (year 6 pupil)

8.5 Comments on individual questions

Respondents often had difficulty recalling individual questions, but in some cases were able to make comments. The issues raised by participating school respondents were as follows.

One respondent felt that pupils had difficulty with questions on frequency, where the response lists were not clearly defined. For example, questions A5 and A6 (using options such as ‘often’) were seen as more difficult than questions like A7 (which uses more concrete options such as ‘every day’).

The question asking about the pupils’ religion was seen as difficult in some cases, as there were a lot of options.

One respondent commented on the opening statement: “If you want to talk to someone about anything you are worried about or if you feel unsafe you can telephone ChildLine...”. This was seen as setting a negative tone that could worry pupils – the respondent felt this suggests to pupils that they would be worried or feel unsafe, and would prefer it to be included only at the end of the questionnaire.

A special school respondent felt that questions referring to ‘seeing’, ‘walking’ and ‘hearing’ could exclude some pupils.

A specific point was raised about the SEN question. In one school, some pupils were not sure what to answer, so they had to ask the teacher, which could be embarrassing for pupils. This respondent also pointed out potential confusion between the school’s SEN definition and the appropriate answer for this survey.

“Some students wouldn't want to be seen as having SEN. I have a boy with visual impairment but he wouldn't say he has SEN, he wouldn't see he has it himself. You should rephrase the question so it's less confusing for them and less embarrassing for them having to ask”. (participating secondary school)

Finally, one respondent pointed out that questions on children’s well-being are extremely important, but can be asked in different ways in different surveys. This respondent would like to see some standardisation in question wording, and felt that Tellus could set the standard for this.

“If they want us to have a set standard for well-being, give us a standard to use. It would be quite good to know that Tellus does support this [approach] or it doesn't” (participating secondary school)

8.6 Pupils’ views on the survey questions

Overall, pupils’ memories of the survey were far from detailed, but when pupils were asked, the topics they remembered included sex, alcohol, smoking and drugs; safety at school; parks and their local area; personal safety both at school and outside; school in general; free school meals and out of school activities.

In general, it was the questions around alcohol, drugs and smoking that were not only those most likely to be recalled but which also invoked the most negative reaction from pupils. Some pupils felt that these questions were too personal, grown-up or even inappropriate:

“I didn’t really like that question ‘cos I don’t think people our age should be drinking alcohol” (year 6 pupil)

“There were some personal questions. Like have you ever drunk alcohol? I didn't really like that sort of question... I just don't like being asked about grown up stuff, I like to be a child” (year 6 pupil)

However, another pupil in the same class said:

“I think the question about alcohol was good ‘cos then you can find out how much alcohol people have been having and you can do something about it” (year 6 pupil)

Some of the pupils remembered what they felt were personal questions that they were not always comfortable with. For example, one of the interviewed pupils commented:

“I thought it was a little bit personal, as some I didn’t want to answer, like ‘which religion’. Sometimes people don’t belong to a religion” (year 6 pupil)

Another remembered the ethnicity question as one they were not quite happy with:

“There were some questions about what colour skin you were and I wasn’t really comfortable answering that” (year 6 pupil)

Several groups had found that the questionnaire did not always provide the answers they wanted and that sometimes they had wanted to say more. On this same topic, another group suggested open ended questions might have been appropriate for occasions when they had wanted to explain their point in more detail or answer somewhat differently. For example, for the ‘what made them worry’ question, one pupil felt that the response boxes restricted their response and that:

“If you wanted (to ask) that I'd have a typing box where you type it in because there's loads of different answers you could put” (year 6 pupil)

Although the recall of specific questions was fairly low, we were interested to know about pupils’ reaction to the topics included in the survey. Therefore, interviewers asked pupils what sort of questions and issues they would have included in some of the main topics within the survey.

A number of themes were suggested for questions about the local area. These included whether their local area was clean and tidy, whether there were drug problems in the area, and what club and leisure facilities were available to young people locally. Pupils also discussed the concept of safety and feeling safe in their area and this issue sometimes caused much discussion within the group. The concept of local area was queried by some pupils: did it mean their street, their home or their town?

One group of pupils felt that this section should include questions about whether they felt that their area was nice and calm, or “rough” with “lots of fights”. Some thought the quality of their neighbours and whether they were ‘nice’ should be included in this section.

In the discussion about what questions the pupils would have included on how they spent their free time, a wide range of activities were covered. One pupil felt s/he understood why these questions were asked:

“Asking about free time shows you what kind of person they are and what area they live in” (year 8 pupil)

Pupils saw free time as encompassing not only their daily activities, but also about hobbies and interests. This was, in their opinion, a wide topic, including sports activities, as well as places to go and even restaurants and shops they could visit. One group felt that weekend activities should also be included. At one school it was surmised that being asked this type of question indicated that the local authority would be improving their local park. As well as the activities themselves, one class thought that the survey should also ask whether their parents could afford to pay for their hobbies. Some pupils suggested inclusion of sports such as boxing, and even spectator sports like watching television and football matches.

There was quite a lot of discussion within the groups about what people worried about. Many felt that this should be an open question, as this was seen as a wide-ranging subject that would not fit within a tick-box structure. As one said:

“Maybe a question like ‘what are you worried about.’ You’d fill it in yourself ‘cos people can be worried about family problems or their own problems” (year 8 pupil)

Worry was equated by the pupils with issues such as bullying, home and family life and treatment by others, both friends and parents. They also included being bothered by ‘bad people’ in this category. We asked the pupils what they worried or cared about and some of them understood ‘care’ to mean caring for someone at home, for example a parent or a pet, rather than what they were concerned about. Worry and care was seen by some as a large issue, which related to confidence. Again, as with worry, many felt that there was a need for an open question about ‘care’.

When we discussed with pupils what they felt should be covered within a school and learning section they thought this should encompass a broad range of issues. These included lessons, extra curricular activities, how they thought they were getting on academically, bullying, support for those being bullied and the facilities at the school. They also felt it should cover the support they got from their teachers, and also what they judged to be the quality of both their teachers and their supply teachers.

All pupils were asked what they felt a section about their future plans should include. Some thought these should only be academic plans, whilst others saw them as more general life plans; for example how successful they felt they would be, or their mid-life plans for marriage and children. Others thought they could be designed to elicit whether pupils thought they worked hard at school.

The pupils covered a very broad range of issues when discussing what they thought a healthy living section should look like. Many of them mentioned ‘five a day’ but none expanded on what they meant by it so it is not clear if they understood what it meant. Some pupils suggested the section should include the consumption of fast food and the number of takeaway meals consumed. One respondent felt that it was good to ask this type of question because:

“In the world there’s a lot of people who are unhealthy and it’s good to raise awareness to help them” (year 6 pupil)

Many saw exercise, team sports and playing outside as part of a ‘being healthy’ section. One group thought behaviours such as smoking, drinking and taking drugs also fell within this section.

8.7 Personalising the Tellus4 questionnaire

All local authorities interviewed in the evaluation had taken up the option to add their own questions and most felt that this was an important feature. However, some had been disappointed with the scope of the questions offered and one authority had wanted the opportunity to ask more than two extra questions; this view was echoed by a couple of school respondents. There were also some authorities who would have liked the opportunity to add their own questions, rather than choose from a Question bank.

The participating schools included in the evaluation were split between those that added their own questions and those that didn't. Where schools did add their own questions, most respondents said this was a useful and important feature, specifically in allowing them to reflect the school's own/current agenda, and being able to personalise it for their pupils. This was a particular attraction to one special school respondent, who was able to select questions that were most relevant to their pupils.

"The head really wanted to include the questions about health and wellbeing because it is currently on the school agenda and the feedback will be very useful in that it can add to what we are already doing" (participating secondary school)

"I think it was quite helpful because obviously you can choose for the needs of your school. We chose [questions on] emotional health and wellbeing as that's a target that fits in with some of the things we're doing in school" (participating primary school)

"That was good for a special school, because sometimes if you just do the questions that mainstream schools are doing, it doesn't relate to our pupils; so I was able to go on there and choose questions I knew our pupils could relate to and answer" (participating special school)

Where schools didn't add questions, this was most commonly because of time constraints or because it was additional work, although some of these respondents supported the principle of being able to do so.

"Yes - it's important, but it's one other thing that teachers have to try and organize, as well as teaching the curriculum, so it's just having the time to do that - it's the practicalities of sitting down and doing it in addition to the normal school day" (participating primary school)

8.8 Topics suggested for inclusion in future Tellus surveys

Most local authority respondents did not have any views on issues that should be addressed in future surveys, although one suggested that it should be made *"more useful to schools"*. One respondent also pleaded for continued consultation with local authorities over the questionnaire content and felt that this was very important.

Similarly, most participating school respondents thought that there were no obvious omissions from the questionnaire, and did not have any suggestions for additional questions that could be added in the future. Specific suggestions for additional questions were quite diverse:

- Questions on pupils' perceptions of their rights and responsibilities;
- Drug education;
- Whether pupils have ever been excluded from school;
- More 'local' questions;
- Happiness at home and at school;
- General wellbeing;
- More questions on transport;
- Support available in the community (for pupils in special schools).

8.8 Summary

Local authorities saw the questionnaire as highly relevant to them, as it gave them the data they needed for performance indicators. Nearly all respondents in participating schools said that the questionnaire content was relevant to pupils, although there were comments from schools and pupils that some questions (e.g. on smoking and alcohol) were less appropriate for younger pupils.

While some participating schools were happy with the design of the questionnaire, there were a number of comments about the questionnaire being too long or containing long questions. Some pupils confirmed that they sometimes needed help to understand the questions.

All local authorities included in the evaluation had taken the option to add their own questions and most felt that this was an important feature. The participating schools included in the evaluation were split between those that added their own questions and those that didn't. Some local authorities and schools who added two extra questions said they would have liked to have added more than two.

9 SEND versions

This chapter focuses on the SEND versions that were introduced within the survey as part of Tellus4, specifically the awareness and use of these features, and the experience of schools where the SEND versions were used.

9.1 Awareness and use

Local authorities

The majority of the local authorities interviewed were aware of the SEND versions but did not know whether their schools had used them. A very positive comment about the SEND versions was put forward by one respondent who said:

“Another big plus from my side was the fact that the survey was being made available in other formats” (local authority)

Another respondent also thought that the SEND versions would be useful (but did not know the level of take-up by schools). However, another respondent thought they would be of limited benefit, as not many special schools in the authority took part in the survey.

Schools

The SEND versions were generally not used much in mainstream schools and PRUs. Those that did use them, however, reported no problems. There was no evidence of SEND versions being ‘tried out’ by pupils who were able to access the questionnaire in standard format.

A couple of other respondents (in secondary schools) said that although the SEND versions were not required for the pupils who completed the survey this year, they did have pupils in other years that would have benefitted from the SEND versions. These respondents were very positive towards the availability of these formats.

“The fact it [BSL] was offered was brilliant... it was a definite benefit as we do have a fair number of deaf children [in other years] - it would be a fantastic benefit for them” (participating secondary school)

There were mixed views from other schools on the SEND versions, with some being aware of them but not needing to use them, and others not aware that they were available. Another respondent said that, having done the survey without the SEND versions, s/he felt that these formats could in fact have been helpful to some pupils. However, there was also a sense that some schools that had done the survey before just did it the same way as they had done previously, and therefore didn’t really consider the SEND formats.

This evaluation only takes into account the views of six special schools, which we recognise is a relatively small number of schools to enable a representative assessment of the use of SEND versions³. However, their feedback has provided useful insight into how these versions worked in practice. The experience of these schools was as follows.

³ For example, analysis of the Tellus4 survey data gives reliable information on the number of pupils using the three SEND versions, and this indicates that the audio version was the most frequently used. In the schools included in this evaluation, the symbol version was used most frequently.

A couple of these special schools did not use any of the SEND formats. The general view in these schools was that there wasn't enough time to look into the alternative formats, and that using them would be another hurdle to getting the survey started, and would increase their overall workload. Also, in some cases, the alternative formats were not felt to be necessary, as pupils had one-to-one support, and the SEND versions were not seen as adding to this level of support.

A few schools used the symbol version for between four and 15 pupils. In some cases, the whole class used the symbol version, while in others some pupils used it and others used the standard version. In one of these schools, the teacher also read out the question and answer options to the class as they went through. The respondent felt that the combination of the two approaches (symbol version and teacher reading out the questions) allowed different pupils to take part in the survey *"at different levels"*.

In another special school, most pupils used the standard version, while a couple used the BSL version. The respondent felt that the symbol version was too basic for the pupils that took part.

Those that used the symbol and BSL versions, did not experience any difficulties in setting up or running these versions. They were seen as straightforward to set up and *"worked fine"*.

9.2 Impact of SEND formats in enabling participation

In one of the special schools interviewed, the symbol version was seen as crucial to pupils' participation:

"If there hadn't been symbols, it would have been a complete no-no...Had it just been written it would have been completely meaningless to them....It was nice to see it done that way to make it more suitable" (participating special school)

A few other special schools also felt that it improved access to the survey for some pupils. One pointed out that the symbol version helped pupils because they used symbols a lot in the school, so pupils were familiar with them. Another said that the BSL version improved access for the one pupil that used it. However, this respondent was unconvinced of the overall benefit of the SEND formats, as pupils still needed one-to-one support to help them understand the questions and answer options, and so the SEND formats did not really address issues of cognitive capacity. This was also reiterated by other special schools who said that pupils had problems with cognitive capacity (as noted in Chapter 8 - 'Survey questionnaire', a number of schools felt that pupils had difficulty understanding the questions).

"Their level of understanding is such that some of the questions were difficult to answer" (participating special school)

However, another special school pointed out that cognitive capacity was not a major issue, as the school had selected pupils who they thought would be able to cope with the survey.

Most of the special schools gave pupils one-to-one support when they were completing the survey. One-to-one support was normal practice in these schools, and this was felt to be necessary to enable pupils to complete the survey.

9.3 Keeping the survey open for longer

Some special schools completed the survey within one lesson or session, but others kept it open for a number of sessions as this was necessary for pupils to be able to complete it. In fact, one special school respondent felt that the survey should be kept open for more than one day (preferably several days).

“Have it open for two days, because if they are having a bad day we'd have the option to leave it for that day and come back to it, that would be good” (participating special school)

This view was echoed by another primary school respondent, who thought it would help if the survey was kept open for *“some time”*. This was because some of the pupils *“pondered on the questions for a very long time”*. Because they had to complete it within a single session, this could mean that they ended up having to rush some of the answers, or would *“get bored”* with it. Breaking the survey up into a number of sessions would help with this problem.

9.4 Summary

The SEND versions were generally not used much in mainstream schools and in the PRUs interviewed, although some respondents welcomed their inclusion.

Of the six special schools included in the evaluation, a couple did not use the alternative formats, because they either did not have time to look into the suitability of the different formats, or because the SEND formats were not seen as adding to the level of support already available. The others used either the symbol or BSL versions and they were seen as straightforward to set up.

The symbol version was seen as crucial to pupils' participation in one special school, and a couple of other special schools felt that it improved access to the survey for some pupils. However, some of the special schools felt that their pupils had problems with cognitive capacity, and the SEND formats did not really address this issue. Most of the special schools gave pupils one-to-one support when they were completing the survey, irrespective of the version used.

10 Feedback on survey results and analysis

This chapter examines issues relating to the feedback and analysis of results. School-level analysis was made available to schools for the first time as part of Tellus4 via the web-based analysis tool. This feature was also available to local authorities for analysis at the local authority level, together with summary results published at the local authority level.

10.1 Importance of feedback and analysis

Schools

Most respondents at participating schools said that the school-level feedback was important to them, and in a couple of schools this was crucial to their participation in Tellus4.

“You get asked to do questionnaires all the time and we could spend the whole day doing them.... but this is a really powerful one where we can actually act upon that information at a school level” (participating secondary school)

Equally, in schools where pupil numbers were too small to allow school-level feedback (generally limited to certain PRUs and special schools), respondents were frustrated that they could not get any school-level analysis. One respondent questioned whether there was any way round this problem, for example whether it was feasible for their school’s results to be combined with another school. This respondent also felt that if the school was not able to receive school-level feedback, the relevance of the survey was then extremely important, and suggested that some additional support could be given to these schools to help them integrate the survey into the curriculum or school activities, and thereby increase the benefit to the school for doing the survey.

Local authorities

The majority of local authorities interviewed said that they would use the analysis tool and one authority said they would encourage their schools to use it too. Most authorities found the idea of an analysis tool appealing but had not been able to test its usefulness. Respondents also recognised the importance of the analysis tool for schools:

“There were two big pluses from the schools side: one was the way NFER pointed them towards using the exercise as a learning experience rather than just data capture, through the production of those materials, and the second was that the school was able to get the data at a school level as well.” (local authority)

10.2 Use of the survey results

Schools

Participating schools were most likely to say that the results would be used to provide input into planning documents such as action plans, the Self Evaluation Form (SEF), their healthy schools programme and their school improvement plan.

'It would probably go into the School Improvement Plan and you could use it with the School Council... and a project we're doing on 'Every Child Matters' " (participating primary school)

Other schools felt the survey gave the school information on current issues that need to be addressed; allowed them to monitor progress and differences between different pupils; provided input into next year's PHSE lessons and/or school theme days (e.g. healthy eating); and linked with other sources of information/other surveys.

However, a couple of schools said that Tellus was less useful than their own survey, which covered the whole school and was designed for their own issues. This reflects the view expressed by some local authorities as well (see Chapter 3, 'Participation in Tellus4') that Tellus is limited in its coverage of pupils, particularly in primary schools, where just one year group is included.

One respondent raised a note of caution for the future of the survey if the school-level results are to be used for assessment purposes (including self-assessment). The respondent noted that, if schools were performing badly on the relevant measures, their response might be to either not to take part in the survey at all, or manipulate the answers in some way (either through class/pupil selection or briefing of pupils on how to answer the questions). This point was reiterated by another local authority respondent.

Local authorities

For all local authorities, the relevance of the survey to 'Every Child Matters' outcomes and national indicators was an important factor in their involvement. Authorities also used the information provided by the survey to inform their Children and Young People's Plan and to provide a benchmark from a pupil perspective. Part of the importance of the information-gathering process to local authorities was the collection of trend data that could be compared at a national level, as well as a sufficiently robust sample, that would ensure that the local authority got their own results (although, as noted earlier in this report, there was a desire from some local authorities for a larger sample size).

10.3 Interpretation of results

One participating school respondent questioned the reliability of trend comparisons between Tellus4 and previous Tellus surveys; this respondent wondered whether pupils' answers would be different on some questions in autumn rather than in summer. A similar comment was made by a local authority respondent, specifically in relation to questions on bullying: he felt that year 6 pupils would be more worried about bullying in the summer term (in anticipation of starting secondary school) than in the autumn term, and that this would affect trend comparisons between Tellus4 and previous Tellus surveys.

10.4 Timing of feedback

The evaluation fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2010, and at that point schools had not received school-level analysis for the survey. This was a source of frustration for some respondents, who felt that the gap between the fieldwork and school-level results was too long. This was a particular issue where schools wanted to use results to respond to current issues, with some respondents pointing out that things can change quickly, so results could quickly become out of date. The time lag was also seen as problematic where schools wanted to involve pupils in the feedback, as respondents felt that

they will have forgotten the survey by that time. In addition, one respondent was disappointed that they had not been kept informed as to when results would be available.

“What was really of value to me was the fact we were supposed to be getting feedback and I looked forward to getting that feedback. It [the survey] came under our SLT School Improvement Plan. If you promise feedback, let's have it. How long can it take?” (participating secondary school)

“The timescale from doing the survey to getting feedback is probably the only thing that disappoints me. I understand it can't be done the next day but our pupils won't even remember doing the survey now, so if I feed back to them they're not going to know what I'm talking about” (participating special school)

“There's been quite a big delay in the time they [pupils] took part and the feedback. I think maybe next time, if they could get the feedback to us relatively quickly that would be better... because now I'll have to go and remind the children of the questionnaire” (participating primary school)

Local authority interviews were also conducted before authority-level data became available. One of the key messages that some authorities wanted to feed back was that the lack of results was causing problems, as they needed the information to feed into their end-of-year reports. One said that they were:

“.. absolutely champing at the bit (for the results) as it will drive the Children and Young People's Plan.” (local authority)

10.5 Format of results

Respondents in participating schools were not always clear about the format in which they would receive results. Some were aware that they would get results via the web-based analysis tool, and were very enthusiastic towards this approach:

“It's absolutely fabulous” (participating secondary school)

In many cases, however, respondents had not given much thought to the precise format of the results, since (at the time of the fieldwork) they had not yet received them. These respondents found it hard to comment on how useful the results would be or exactly how they would be used.

Some respondents thought they would receive their own written report, and in a small number of cases were reluctant to do their own analysis because of time constraints, or because they preferred someone else to do this for them.

“With time constraints I don't think that would be feasible” (participating special school)

“No, I don't want to do any more analysis. I have enough analysis to do of my own data here” (participating primary school)

10.6 Summary

Overall, the availability of school-level data was an important feature of the survey for local authorities and schools. Participating schools were most likely to say that the results would be used to provide input into planning documents, or to allow them to address current issues in the schools. Most authorities found the idea of an analysis tool appealing but had not been able to test its usefulness.

The evaluation fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2010, and at this point local authorities and schools had not received authority/school-level analysis for the survey. This was a source of frustration for some respondents, who felt that the gap between the fieldwork and school-level results was too long.

11 Conclusions and Recommendations for future Tellus surveys

This final chapter draws together the key findings from the evaluation, with some conclusions and recommendations for future delivery of the Tellus survey.

Overall satisfaction with Tellus4

The findings of this evaluation show that overall, schools and local authorities were positive towards the delivery of Tellus4. Participating schools found it easy to set up and said that it ran smoothly; this meant that the overall burden on schools was relatively light and that there was minimal disruption to the school's timetable. Local authorities were also very positive towards Tellus4, and felt more satisfied with the management of the survey and their own role than in previous years (with local authorities now playing a less active role, but still feeling involved through stakeholder workshops and the management information tool).

Participation

The number of schools and pupils participating in the survey increased in Tellus4, but there is still scope to increase participation – around one in three schools sampled in Tellus4 took part, and local authorities were often keen for more schools and more pupils to participate. It is clear that local authorities can play an important part in increasing the level of response by actively encouraging schools to participate.

Recommendations

- In order to encourage schools' participation, the benefits of the survey could be highlighted and promoted, such as by stressing that it is a useful vehicle for enabling 'pupil voice'; the data from the survey can be invaluable for school planning and for the SEF, etc; and the survey can be used by schools, not only to deliver the PHSE/Citizenship curriculum, but also the IT curriculum and other wider school activities/initiatives.
- Participating schools could be encouraged to share their experience of delivering the survey as an example of good practice. Some suggestions from schools include:
 - Sharing case studies of schools that have used the results successfully, outlining the process involved and the ways they used the data to help the school.
 - Sharing videos outlining the purpose of the survey and its benefits for schools or even use of pupil-friendly videos to encourage pupils' participation (e.g. similar to the video produced by the Carbon Trust) to encourage and support other schools.
 - Putting in place a 'buddy' system to support other schools that are new to the survey, to alleviate their concerns.
- Local authorities could be encouraged to take a more proactive role in promoting the survey and encouraging more of their schools to participate, as well as help in promoting new features, such as the curriculum materials and SEND versions.

Communication and support

Local authorities and schools were positive towards the communication and support they had received in Tellus4, and were keen for this to continue in the future, with a plea for DCSF to stay in 'listening mode'.

The evaluation highlighted that delivery of the survey could be affected by lack of internal communication within schools, with teachers only being informed about the survey at a late stage, and support materials not being passed on.

Recommendation

- In order to ensure schools do not get overwhelmed with too much information in one go, and so that relevant information is filtered down to the key contacts delivering the survey, it might be useful to tailor early information for the headteacher (geared around positive reasons to participate and delivery options), and then to direct information specific to implementation to the co-ordinator or nominated teachers later in the process (assuming that the co-ordinator or other staff responsible for delivering the survey can be identified).

Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire was seen as relevant and generally appropriate for pupils, but there were some comments that it was too long, with long questions. There was also a general concern over the cognitive capacity of younger pupils and those with special educational needs to understand the questions fully.

Recommendations

Some suggestions to address the concerns around questionnaire content and format include the following:

- Reduce the length of the core questionnaire and allow more optional questions (this would also address the concerns of local authorities and schools who wanted more than two of their own questions).
- Include an alternative version of the questionnaire that could be used for younger pupils and those with lower cognitive ability – not adapted to the same extent as the SEND versions, but with easier language and graphics to help respondents (e.g. including smiley/sad faces for positive/negative views).
- At present, teachers are sometimes using their own judgement over how to interpret some questions to enable pupils to understand them better. The support materials could usefully include some guidance as to what certain words mean or how teachers should explain them, so that there is more consistency.

Confidentiality issues

Some concerns were raised from teachers and pupils over confidentiality (although many respondents did not see this as a problem).

Recommendations

Examples of good practice implemented in schools to preserve respondents' confidentiality could be communicated to schools, such as:

- Teachers informing pupils that they are available to answer questions, but making sure that they do not see any of the pupils' computer screens.

- Supporting pupils in special schools on a one to one, but letting them know that they could move away at any time, whenever the pupil wanted, to maintain the privacy of their answers.
- Emphasising at the start that the survey is private, and that pupils must not look at each others' work. Teachers can separate friends and specific children who they think may want to look at each other's work.

Improvements made in Tellus4 to increase the accessibility of the survey

Both local authorities and schools were mostly very positive towards the change to the timing of Tellus4 from summer to the autumn term, although the autumn term was found to be less suitable for PRUs.

The SEND versions were used in special schools, but appeared to be used less in mainstream schools. The evaluation confirmed that the SEND features did allow pupils to participate in the survey that might otherwise not have done so. However, teachers in special schools were not convinced that the SEND features overcame issues of cognitive capacity, and felt that one-to-one support was still required (with or without the SEND features being used).

The option of personalising the questionnaire by selecting two additional questions from the Question bank was taken up by all of the local authorities included in the evaluation, and by many schools, and this feature was viewed positively. Some schools and authorities wanted to add more than two questions, however.

Local authorities were keen to include more pupils in the survey, and schools often took up the opportunity to include the whole year group where this was practical. However, where schools did not include the whole year group, it was noted that the selection of pupils and classes varied and could be quite arbitrary.

Recommendation

- The evaluation findings suggest that greater emphasis might need to be placed on the importance of selecting classes as instructed, with clear guidance on how to select classes.

Effectiveness of the supporting material and guidance provided to support a consistent mode of delivery in class

The supporting material including the Citizenship curriculum were viewed positively by schools where they were used, but the majority of schools did not use them, and did not integrate the survey into the PHSE or Citizenship curriculum. Schools typically saw the survey as an administrative task rather than as something they could integrate into the timetable. The support pack was found to be lengthy and intimidating by some teachers, but was generally seen as useful.

It was noted that some schools who had taken part in Tellus before carried out the survey without spending too much time on the support materials, and this may have meant that they missed some of the new features of Tellus4 (such as the availability of the SEND versions).

Recommendation

- Schools may find a shorter, summary sheet giving a simple step-by-step guide, with a link to more detailed guidance, more useful and less intimidating. This could also be used to highlight the changes from previous surveys.

Feedback of results and analysis

The availability of feedback and data to schools and local authorities via a web-based analytical tool to enable analysis of their own data was seen as a very positive feature of the survey, and was one of the main reasons given by schools for taking part. Because of the timing of the evaluation, local authorities and schools had not yet received the web-based analysis tool, and this was often seen as a source of frustration.

Recommendation

- Case study examples of how schools have used the web-based analysis tool could help other schools to make the most of the analysis and may encourage participation in the future.

12 References

Chamberlain T, George N, Golden S, Walker F, Benton T, NFER; *Tellus4 National Report*, DCSF Research Report RR218, March 2010

Appendix: Fieldwork materials

Advance letter to local authorities



Department for Children, Schools
and Families
Children & Families Directorate
Analysis & Research Division
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Contact name
School name
School address

Date

Dear XXXX

Re: Evaluation of Tellus4 survey

Thank you for taking part in the Tellus4 survey during autumn 2009. We are committed to improving the delivery and effectiveness of the survey for pupils, schools and local authorities, and have therefore commissioned an independent research organisation 'Word of Mouth' to carry out an evaluation of Tellus4 survey on our behalf.

We have selected a representative sample of local authorities and schools for this evaluation and your area has been chosen as part of this. The evaluation will involve taking up 30 minutes of your time for a telephone conversation on your views on the Tellus4 survey and satisfaction with the way it was delivered in schools in your local authority. This information will be very useful to us in delivering the next Tellus survey.

You do not need to undertake any special preparations for this interview, and all information provided will be treated in strict confidence, and reported anonymously, as one of several local authorities contributing to the evaluation.

In the course of the next two weeks you will be contacted by Word of Mouth via telephone and invited to take part. They will seek to make an appointment for a short interview, at a time convenient to you.

Your participation in this evaluation study is entirely voluntary but we would very much appreciate your support by sharing your views with us to help us improve the Tellus survey further.

If you have any concerns or queries about the evaluation, please contact Graham@womresearch.org.uk. Otherwise you will be contacted via telephone within the next two weeks with a request for your participation.

Yours sincerely

Prity Sharma

Advance letter to participating schools



Department for Children, Schools
and Families
Children & Families Directorate
Analysis & Research Division
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Contact name
School name
School address

Date

Dear XXXX

Re: Evaluation of Tellus4 survey

Thank you for taking part in the Tellus4 survey during autumn 2009. We are committed to improving the delivery and effectiveness of the survey for pupils, schools and local authorities, and have therefore commissioned an independent research organisation 'Word of Mouth' to carry out an evaluation of Tellus4 survey on our behalf.

We have selected a representative sample of schools for this evaluation and your school has been chosen as part of this. The evaluation will involve taking up 30 minutes of your time and where possible a 30 minute session with a class of pupils who participated in autumn 2009, in order to find out your school's views on the Tellus4 survey and satisfaction with the way it was delivered. This information will be very useful to us in delivering the next Tellus survey.

You do not need to undertake any special preparations for the visit, and all information provided will be treated in strict confidence, and reported anonymously, as one of several dozen schools contributing to the evaluation.

In the course of the next two weeks you will be contacted by Word of Mouth via telephone and invited to take part. They will seek permission for a researcher to visit you at school, and conduct a short interview with you. They would also like to hear the opinions of pupils who undertook the Tellus4 survey in October/November 2009, preferably by meeting a relevant class and holding a discussion with them.

Your participation in this evaluation study is entirely voluntary but we would very much appreciate your support by sharing your views with us to help us improve the Tellus survey further.

If you have any concerns or queries about the evaluation, please contact Graham@womresearch.org.uk. Otherwise you will be contacted via telephone within the next two weeks with a request for your participation.

Yours sincerely

Prity Sharma

Advance letter to non-participating schools



Department for Children, Schools
and Families
Children & Families Directorate
Analysis & Research Division
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Contact name
School name
School address

Date

Dear XXXX

Re: Evaluation of Tellus4 survey

You may recall being invited to participate in the Tellus4 survey that took place during autumn 2009. We understand that your school decided not to participate in this survey. As part of our commitment to improving the Tellus survey for schools, pupils and local authorities, we have commissioned an independent research organisation "Word of Mouth" to carry out an evaluation on our behalf.

As part of the evaluation, we are carrying out brief telephone interviews with a number of schools that that did not undertake the survey in order to understand the reasons for their non-participation, with a view to helping us address any concerns schools may have about the survey, and make it more appealing in the future.

We have selected a representative sample of schools for this evaluation and your school has been chosen as part of this. The evaluation will involve a telephone conversation, taking up only around 15 minutes of your time. You do not need to undertake any special preparations for this interview, and all information provided will be treated in strict confidence, and reported anonymously, as one of several dozen schools contributing to the evaluation.

In the course of the next two weeks you will be contacted by Word of Mouth via telephone and invited to take part. They will seek to make an appointment for a short interview, at a time convenient to you.

Your participation in this evaluation study is entirely voluntary but we would very much appreciate your support by sharing your views with us to help us improve the Tellus survey further.

If you have any concerns or queries about the evaluation, please contact Graham@womresearch.org.uk. Otherwise you will be contacted via telephone within the next two weeks with a request for your participation.

Yours sincerely

Prity Sharma

Topic guide: Local Authority Participants

Local Authority interviews (participants)

- Clarify respondent role/position
- How long have you/the LA been involved in Tellus? Since Tellus 1...?
 - probe consistency/staff turnover over the years
 - if involved in Tellus prior to survey 4, what were the key differences this time (spontaneous)?
 - positives and negatives
- Clarify other LA staff involved in Tellus, e.g.
 - Director of Education/Children's Services?
 - level of admin & IT support available to help you at LA?
 - if multiple people, how does "team" work, roles/responsibilities?
 - Did you, or anybody else from this local authority attend the stakeholder workshops/events held in the period October 2008-January 2009?
 - If attended: how useful was the workshop/event?
 - If attended: how influential was the workshop/event in helping to decide whether or not to participate?
- Thinking back to the LA's initial decision whether to take part in Tellus4
 - who was involved -Director of Education/Children Services, other senior managers?
 - did you consult your schools on whether to take part?
 - who were main decision-makers?
 - what were the perceived positives and negatives/concerns?
 - how were these assessed
 - The Tellus survey is used to measure progress across the five Every Child Matters outcomes - was this fact important to you in deciding whether or not to participate?
 - ultimately, what were the key factors in the decision to participate?
- Thinking about how individual schools decided whether to participate
 - Were you happy with the way the schools were sampled and approached for their participation in Tellus4?
 - probe for any concerns, probe for any positives
 - did schools tend to approach you for advice (on their own participation decision)?
 - did you actively persuade them (on participation decision)?
 - are schools generally positive, negative, neutral towards Tellus
- Thinking of getting the survey set up
 - did you get "hands-on" in helping schools set up, or did you encourage them to deal directly with NFER?
 - compared to previous Tellus surveys, to what extent did the process change for Tellus4/to what extent "same as before"?
 - to what extent did you use the guidance and instructions that came with a letter from NFER?
 - overall, how easy or difficult was it for your schools to set the survey up?
 - identify any key issues (positive or negative) about set up process
- Management information tool (to help LA monitor the progress of its schools)

- did you use the management information tool for local authorities?
- if yes, how useful was this?
 - probe for most useful and less useful features
- The new features of the survey
 - Timing of the survey is now October/November... opinion on suitability
 - All pupils in years 6, 8 and 10 can complete the questionnaire... to what extent is it beneficial for the whole year group to participate?
 - Probe on whether their schools included the whole year, or did less (e.g. previous minimum of one Year 6 class, or two classes from Years 8 & 10)
 - Adding your own questions from the question bank...
 - did LA add its own questions?
 - how important/appealing was this option?
 - do you know if your schools added their own questions?
 - how important/appealing was this for your schools?
 - You can do your own analysis using new web-based analysis tool... how important/appealing is this option?
 - How are you intending on using the survey results? do you intend to conduct the analysis when available?
 - Is the range of statistics adequate/appropriate?
 - Are you happy with the way the results are to be presented?
- The new curriculum materials
 - to what extent have your schools used the curriculum materials?
 - probe for particularly useful aspects
 - probe for less useful aspects
- SEND/alternative format features
 - To what extent did your schools use the following?
 - BSL
 - Audio
 - Symbol (Widgit)
 - For each used
 - How easy did your schools find it to set this up?
 - among those for whom alternative formats were useful, were any problems encountered in terms of cognitive capacity to complete the questionnaire?
- Delivery model - how was the questionnaire completed?
 - do you think lessons have been planned around it... before, after, both?
 - to what extent was it integrated into PSHE/CCW, etc?
 - did you have any involvement with your schools on how to deliver the survey - did you encourage them to deliver the survey as part of PSHE lesson, using the PSHE materials?
- Questionnaire content
 - did it cover the relevant/important issues for you, your schools and your pupils?
 - probe for any issues would like covered in future
- Overall level of satisfaction

- if experience pre-Tellus4... how did this time compare (better, worse, same)?
- if no experience pre-Tellus4... how did this time compare with what you expected (better, worse, same)?
- what are your overall views on the Tellus4 survey including its use and benefits
- what are your schools' (teachers/school staff) views on this survey?
- probe on administrative burden, time required
- overall, how would you rate communication from DCSF/NFER/LA?
- overall, how would you rate support available from NFER?
- what worked really well?
- what was disappointing/problematic?
- intention to participate next time - identify factors that would make you more likely, or less likely to participate next time
- Finally...
 - any relevant issues we have not covered
 - key messages for DCSF/NFER/LA (e.g. things to improve, things to consolidate, things that worked or didn't work, etc)

Topic guide: Participating schools

Teacher interviews (participants)

- Clarify respondent role/position in school
- Clarify others involved in Tellus4, e.g.
 - level of admin & IT support available in school
 - other teacher involvement
 - senior leadership team (SLT) involvement
 - involvement of governors
 - local authority involvement
 - if multiple people, how does "team" work, roles/responsibilities?
- How long have you/the team been involved in organising Tellus4?
 - probe consistency/staff turnover over the years
 - if involved in Tellus prior to survey 4, what were the key differences this time (spontaneous)
 - positives and negatives
- Thinking back to the initial decision whether to take part in Tellus4
 - who was involved - Head, SLT, SEND team, local authority, governors?
 - who were main decision-makers?
 - what were the perceived positives and negatives/concerns?
 - how were these assessed - probe for use of support materials?
 - ultimately, what were the key factors in the decision (yes or no)?
- Thinking of getting the survey set up
 - to what extent "same as before"
 - to what extent it used hard copy support materials, online support materials, helpdesk
 - parental consent and pupil consent... any problems or concerns? Did they send opt-out letters to parents & if not, why? If they did, what was the opt-out rate?
 - overall, how easy or difficult was it to get set up?
 - probe on IT... was accommodated/difficult, or easy to manage
 - identify any key issues (positive or negative) about set up process
- The new features of the survey
 - Timing of the survey is now October/November... opinion on suitability
 - All pupils in years 6, 8 and 10 can complete the questionnaire... to what extent is it beneficial for the whole year group to participate?
 - Probe on whether they included the whole year, or did less (e.g. previous minimum of one Year 6 class, or two classes from Years 8 & 10)
 - Adding your own questions from the question bank... did you do this, how important/appealing was this option?
 - You will receive feedback on your school's results... how important/appealing is this feedback?
 - You can do your own analysis... how important/appealing is this option, and do you intend to conduct the analysis when available?
- The new curriculum materials
 - to what extent did you use the curriculum materials?

- overall rating... how useful were the materials?
 - probe for particularly useful aspects
 - probe for less useful aspects
 - what did you find most useful, and least useful?
- if previous experience of Tellus, did these materials change the way you delivered the survey in 2009
- SEND/alternative format features
 - To what extent did you use the following?
 - BSL
 - Audio
 - Symbol (Widgit)
 - For each used
 - How easy was it to set this up?
 - Roughly how many pupils used each?
 - To extent did it increase accessibility, i.e. make questionnaire available to pupils who would otherwise have been excluded?
 - To what extent were these alternative formats used by students able to access the questionnaire in standard format?
 - was it useful to leave the questionnaire open for long periods (up to seven hours) for pupils to do in 2+ sessions?
 - among those for whom alternative formats were useful, were any problems encountered in terms of cognitive capacity to complete the questionnaire?
- Delivery model - how was the questionnaire completed?
 - Did you plan lessons around it... before, after, both?
 - How did the school handle/deliver the survey on the day? How were the pupils briefed about it?
 - to what extent was it integrated into PSHE/CCW, etc?
 - was it completed on a whole class basis... or in sub-class groups?
 - were pupils able to complete confidentially, particularly on sensitive questions such as bullying?
 - probe particularly for SEND pupils, especially those using alternative formats
 - how much support was given to pupils as they went through the questionnaire – who gave this support?
- Questionnaire content
 - did it cover the relevant/important issues to your pupils?
 - probe for any issues would like covered in future
 - what are your views on the suitability of the questions for pupils of different ages and different abilities, esp. children with particular needs?
- Overall level of satisfaction
 - if experience pre-Tellus4... how did this time compare (better, worse, same)?
 - if no experience pre-Tellus4... how did this time compare with what you expected (better, worse, same)?
 - have you spoken about Tellus4 with teachers/staff from other schools?
 - What is your impression of the survey's reputation among other teachers/school staff?

- probe on administrative burden, time required
- probe to what extent time spent on Tellus4 simply replaced all the work needed for PHSE/CCW
- overall, how would you rate communication from DCSF/NFER/LA?
- overall, how would you rate support available from NFER?
- what worked really well?
- what was disappointing/problematic?
- intention to participate next time - identify factors that would make you more likely, or less likely to participate next time
- Finally...
 - any relevant issues we have not covered
 - key messages for DCSF/NFER/LA (e.g. things to improve, things to consolidate, things that worked or didn't work, etc)

Topic guide: non-participant schools

Introduction: explain that we need to ask about a range of different things. We fully understand that, as non-participants, some of these things may not be relevant and/or they may not have a great deal to say on all aspects. That is absolutely fine. We seem to want to go through the checklist to make sure nothing is missed out. We will skip over anything that they feel is not relevant, e.g. they know nothing about it, did not use it, etc

- Clarify respondent role/position in school
- Did the school participate in Tellus 1-3?
 - If yes, probe for any changes in circumstances,
 - changes in personnel
 - previous experiences with survey (positive, negative, neutral)
- Who was involved in deciding whether to participate Tellus4, e.g.
 - administrative staff
 - IT staff
 - other teacher involvement
 - SEND staff
 - senior leadership team (SLT) involvement
 - involvement of governors
 - local authority involvement
 - if multiple people, how does "team" work, roles/responsibilities?
 - was it a consensus decision among the group?
 - identify most important decision-making individuals
- What were the factors did you consider in deciding whether to participate in 2009
 - previous experiences with Tellus 1-3
 - resource issues (time, staff, admin, IT)
 - changes in personnel, management etc
 - local authority influence
 - set up requirements
 - support available (from Tellus/NFER)
 - any other factors
 - Benefits to your school – (Did you as a school see any benefit in the data being collected from pupils in your school via the survey on ECM outcomes and on pupil perception ? (i.e. in the purpose of the survey?))
- Did you communicate with anyone outside the school before deciding not to participate?
 - local authority
 - NFER/Tellus4 support
 - for each used, ask how helpful and whether influenced decision
- What were the main positive factors, in favour of participation?
 - probe as above
 - if multiple positive factors, try to rank most/least influential
- What were the main negative factors, against participation?
 - probe as above
 - if multiple negative factors, try to rank most/least influential

- If not already mentioned
 - did you see the survey as extra work, or did you see it as contributing to PHSE/CCW curriculum delivery?

I'd now like to mention some of the new features introduced in 2009, on the Tellus4 survey.

- The timing of the survey has been moved to the autumn term (October/November)
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - how suitable do you think the autumn term is for such a survey?
- All pupils in years 6, 8 and 10 can complete the questionnaire
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - probe for whether they realised that this was optional (schools were allowed to do the minimum, i.e. 1 class at year 6, 2 classes at years 8 & 10)
 - how appropriate/manageable do you think it is to conduct a survey with a whole year group?
 - probe for whether this would present problems
- Adding your own questions from the question bank
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - probe for whether they realised that this was optional
- Feedback on your school's results
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - how appealing would this feedback be to you/your school?
- You can do your own analysis on your own results
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - how appealing would this be to you/your school?
- The new curriculum materials, enabling you to build the survey into the PHSE/CCW curriculum
 - were you aware of this?
 - did this influence your own decision on participation?
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - how appealing would this be to you/your school?
 - how much time was spent looking at/considering the curriculum materials?
 - did they believe these materials were useful and would save them time/replace other work, or did they see them as requiring extra work?
- SEND/alternative format features (BSL, audio, symbol/widgit)

- were you aware of this?
- did this influence your own decision on participation
 - positive, negative, neutral
 - probe for confidence in using them, support available, work involved, etc
- how appealing would these SEND features be to you/your school/pupils?
- Have you spoken about Tellus4 with teachers/staff from other schools?
 - What views do the other teachers/school staff hold about the survey?
 - overall, how would you rate communication from DCSF/NFER/LA?
 - overall, how would you rate support available from NFER?
- Intention to participate next time - identify factors that would make you more likely, or less likely to participate next time
- Finally...
 - any relevant issues we have not covered
 - key messages for DCSF/NFER/LA (e.g. things to improve, things to consolidate, etc)

Topic guide: school visit session with pupils

Use the aide memoir appropriately, showing screenshots to remind pupils of the survey

Introduction

Some of you might remember doing a survey/questionnaire, online, using school computers, last term. It was called the Tellus4 survey ([show logo & first screenshot](#))

Who remembers this survey? (Teacher may help by reminding them about the room they used or other local details)

- What do you remember about the survey?
 - Elicit spontaneous response, main impressions etc
 - anything else?
 - What was it like to do the survey?
 - Was it fun, boring, interesting, easy or difficult?

Spontaneous recall of the survey: overall impressions

- Do you remember what the questions were about?
 - Elicit spontaneous response
 - Did you understand why you were doing the survey? Why it was important?
- Was it difficult to complete the questionnaire?
 - probe on understanding of questions
 - probe on answers being appropriate
 - probe on technology being easy/difficult to use
 - probe on privacy/did you feel it was private, or could the people see your answers?
 - anything else?
 - Did you require a lot of support from the teacher to complete the survey?

Questionnaire content

- Let me remind you about some of the things the questionnaire asked about
 - It asked about the **local area** where you live
 - What sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to find out about the area where somebody lived?
 - What else?
 - It also asked about what you do in your **free time**
 - what sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to know what young people do in their free time?
 - What else?
 - Then it asked about your feelings - things that you **care about** and things that you **worry about**
 - what sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to know about what someone cared about or worried about?

- what else?
- Then it asked about **school and learning** - how you get to school, what you like and don't like about school, teachers, friends, bullying etc. what sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to know what someone thought about their school?
- what else?
- Then it asked about what you got **your future plans** - what you want to do after you are 16/after year 11
 - what sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to know what someone wants to do in the future?
 - what else?
- Then it asked about **being healthy**
 - what sort of questions would you ask if you wanted to what people thought about being healthy?
 - what else?

SEND (Before interview check with teacher whether there will be SEND pupils in the group you are meeting, and specifically whether they used SEND features. If appropriate, arrange to see these pupils separately from the main group).

- Did you/any of you use the audio questionnaire? That means that you listened to the questions, rather than reading them from the screen
 - if yes, ask how easy or difficult it was to do the questionnaire in that way
 - could you have done the questionnaire without the audio?
 - probe for benefits with the audio
 - probe for what they liked/didn't like about the audio
- Did you/any of you use the British Sign Language questionnaire?
 - if yes, ask how easy or difficult it was to do the questionnaire in that way
 - could you have done the questionnaire without the BSL?
 - probe for benefits with the BSL
 - probe for what they liked/didn't like about the BSL version
- Did you/any of you use the symbol/widget questionnaire?
 - if yes, ask how easy or difficult it was to do the questionnaire in that way
 - were the widget symbols easy to understand?
 - could you have done the questionnaire without the symbol/Widgit ?
 - probe for benefits with the symbol/Widgit
 - probe for what they liked/didn't like about the symbol/Widgit questionnaire

Summary/round-up

We are nearly finished now. Just a couple of easy questions to finish with

- What were the best things about the Tellus survey?
- And what things did you not like so much about the Tellus survey?
- If given a chance, do you think you would do it again next year?
- Are there any other areas that are important to you that you would like to see in the survey?

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