

SAMPLING INSTRUCTIONS

2025 COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

Last updated: May 2025

# Contents

[About this document 4](#_Toc194674688)

[Adherence to the procedures outlined in this document 5](#_Toc194674689)

[Updates 5](#_Toc194674690)

[Section 1: General information 6](#_Toc194674691)

[1.1 Survey team 6](#_Toc194674692)

[1.2 Sampling months and dissent posters 6](#_Toc194674693)

[General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): 7](#_Toc194674694)

[**National Data Opt-out Programme** 7](#_Toc194674695)

[Section 2: Important information for 2025 survey 8](#_Toc194674696)

[2.1 Submission of boosted samples 8](#_Toc194674697)

[2.2 Sampling variables: changes for 2025 survey 8](#_Toc194674698)

[Section 3: Overview of the sample drawing process 9](#_Toc194674699)

[Section 4: Drawing the sample 10](#_Toc194674700)

[Step 1: Common sampling errors 10](#_Toc194674701)

[Step 2: Complete Section A of the Sample Declaration Form 11](#_Toc194674702)

[Step 3: Compile a full list of eligible service users 11](#_Toc194674703)

[Step 3.1: Which services should be included in the sample? 13](#_Toc194674705)

[Step 3.2: Which services should be excluded? 13](#_Toc194674706)

[Step 4: Sample variables to include in your sample 15](#_Toc194674707)

[Step 5: Check you have included the correct service users 18](#_Toc194674708)

[Step 6: Complete Section B of the Sample Declaration Form 19](#_Toc194674719)

[Step 7: Draw your random sample 20](#_Toc194674720)

[Step 8: Submitting your service users list to the Demographics Batch Service (DBS) 22](#_Toc194674721)

[Step 8.1: Create the trace request file 23](#_Toc194674722)

[Step 8.2: Submitting the trace request file 23](#_Toc194674723)

[Step 8.3: The response file from DBS 23](#_Toc194674724)

[Step 9: Remove service users following DBS checks 24](#_Toc194674725)

[Step 9.1: DBS and local checks during fieldwork 26](#_Toc194674726)

[Step 10: Complete sections C and D of the declaration form 27](#_Toc194674727)

[Step 11: Create the sample file by transferring the data into the sample construction spreadsheet 27](#_Toc194674728)

[Step 12: Check sample prior to submission 30](#_Toc194674731)

[Step 12.1: Checks done on the sample data by contractors and the SCC 30](#_Toc194674735)

[Step 13: Submit the sample declaration form only 31](#_Toc194674736)

[Step 14: Receiving permission to submit the sample 31](#_Toc194674737)

[Step 15: Submit the sample - for in-house Trusts and Trusts using a contractor 32](#_Toc194674739)

[Section 5: Questions? 34](#_Toc194674740)

Table of figures

[Table 1. Sample construction spreadsheet of service user details 2](#_Toc133502220)9

[Table 2. Example of a mailing file 3](#_Toc133502221)2

# About this document

1. This document details the processes involved in drawing the sample for the 2025 Community Mental Health Survey. The information contained in this document supersedes all previous versions.
2. These instructions are designed to be used by Trusts delivering the survey in partnership with an Approved Contractor and Trusts delivering the survey in-house.

Efforts have been made to ensure that the information provided is comprehensive. It is however necessary to supplement this document with a small number of complementary documents. These are:

* **The Survey Handbook**: Which contains detailed information about the processes for preparing for and running the survey.
* **The Sample Construction Spreadsheet**: Which is used by Trusts to construct the sample of service users.
* **The Sample Declaration Form**: Which is used to check the sample has been drawn correctly before it is submitted by the Trust.

1. The most recent versions of these documents can be downloaded from the [NHS Surveys website](https://nhssurveys.org/surveys/survey/05-community-mental-health/)
2. If you have any queries about the contents of these instructions, please contact your Approved Contractor in the first instance (where relevant), or the Survey Coordination Centre (SCC) at Picker at [mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com](mailto:mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com).

## Adherence to the procedures outlined in this document

It is extremely important to follow the instructions in this manual carefully.

**NHS Trusts must not send patient identifiable data, such as service user’s names and/or addresses to the Survey Coordination Centre (SCC)**.

The Section 251 approval for this project provides a legal basis for Trusts to share names, addresses and mobile numbers with approved contractors for the purpose of sending out questionnaires. Any breach of the conditions will be reported to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Confidentiality Advisory Group at the Health Research Authority (HRA). Please note however that service users’ postcodes are to be submitted with the sample and are excluded from the restriction for patient identifiable data as per Section 251 approval.

Any suspected breach of Section 251 approval by your Trust should be raised with your contractor, or the SCC, immediately. Breaches will need to be reviewed, and your Trust will need to decide whether the breach is to be reported through the Data Security and Protection Toolkit. CQC are obligated to inform the Confidentiality Advisory Group at the Health Research Authority of any breaches and the outcomes of incident reviews.

It is also not permissible to offer financial inducements or lottery prizes to respondents. Similarly, we do not recommend producing versions of the questionnaire translated into other languages. The terms of the ethical approval do not permit these types of alteration. If Trusts want to make any adjustments to the method or materials set out in this guidance, they will need to check with the SCC that the proposed alteration would not compromise data comparability and if they were permissible, would then need to be cleared with a local ethics board.

CQC use patient survey data for performance monitoring, and the data are also used by NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care for similar purposes. If the sampling guidance issued for the survey is not adhered to by a Trust, it may be necessary to exclude their results from the survey. Lack of patient experience data will be flagged within CQC’s performance monitoring tool.

We request that all Trust staff involved in drawing samples are made aware of the importance of checking previously written code and other historical arrangements, to minimise the risk of historic errors being repeated and the risk that your Trust’s survey results cannot be used.

## Updates

Before you start work on your survey, check that you have the **latest version** of this document (the date of the last update is on the front page). This document is available from the [NHS Surveys website](https://nhssurveys.org/surveys/survey/05-community-mental-health/).

# Section 1: General information

## Survey team

Sample Drawer

Sampling will need to be carried out by a member of staff at the NHS Trust – very often a colleague in the Trust’s Informatics Team. The sample will normally be drawn from the Patient Administration System (PAS).

Trusts need to allocate sufficient work time & resources to respond quickly to any sample queries raised by the SCC and approved contractors (if using one). All queries must be resolved before mailings can proceed.

Your sample may only be used for the purposes of distributing the 2025 Community Mental Health Survey (CMH25). This will include the following:

* Three letters with a URL and log in details for the online survey.
* Two SMS text messages with a unique link to the online survey.
* Two paper questionnaire mailings (included in the 2nd and 3rd postal mailings).

Any additional use of the sample is not covered by the project’s section 251 approval. For example, it would not be appropriate to send additional reminder letters to people in the sample. Additional communication could **only** be sent to those respondents who clearly state in the questionnaire that they agree to be recontacted for the purpose of receiving survey results and/or additional surveys relating to the CMH25.

Survey Lead

You will need to identify a survey lead(s) for the project and someone who will be responsible for drawing the sample at your Trust. The person drawing the sample will need to be available to answer any queries that arise after the sample has been checked by your contractor and then by the SCC.

Caldicott Guardian

Ensure that your Caldicott Guardian is aware of the process and timelines for signing off the sample declaration form. We will be including your Trust’s Caldicott Guardian in routine communications about the survey, but we strongly recommend that this is reiterated internally at a Trust. Samples cannot be processed and checked by the SCC and approved contractor (if applicable) unless the sample declaration has been signed by the Caldicott Guardian.

## Sampling months and dissent posters

The sample months for the 2025 Community Mental Health Survey are **April-May 2025**.

[Dissent posters](https://nhssurveys.org/surveys/survey/05-community-mental-health/) (opt-out posters) must be displayed during your sample months in order to maintain compliance with the Section 251 approval for this survey, to give service users the chance to opt-out of the survey. These have been made available in the twelve most commonly spoken languages in England: Kurdish Sorani, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Indian Punjabi, Spanish, Ukranian and Urdu. **If for any reason your Trust has not displayed dissent posters during the sampling period, please display these immediately and contact the SCC. You will need to inform your Caldicott Guardian and gain their approval to use the sample.**

A [16-17 year olds information leaflet](https://nhssurveys.org/surveys/survey/05-community-mental-health/) has also been produced, to make them aware of the survey and provides an opportunity for them to ask questions or give dissent if they wish to be excluded from taking part.

The information leaflet can be shared via any channels deemed appropriate for your Trust, this could include displaying on walls, TV screens, Trust website, social media platforms, apps, NHS patient portals or physically handing out copies to 16-17 year olds.



## General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):

## **National Data Opt-out Programme**

The NHS Patient Survey Programme (NPSP) has received exemption from the National Data Opt-out Programme. This means that the 2025 Community Mental Health Survey will continue to operate separate opt-out mechanisms.

Therefore, to be included in your sample, service users **do not** have to actively consent to the sharing of their data, and this is for the purpose of the 2025 Community Mental Health Survey only.

# Section 2: Important information for 2025 survey

## Submission of boosted samples

**The SCC will be accepting submission of a boosted sample**.

All Trusts must submit a minimum sample of 1,250 service users, however your Trust can choose to boost your sample to include additional records. We encourage Trusts to submit a boosted sample, as this will increase the possibility of reporting at a granular level, for example, this could include reporting by assessment service group and service or team type.

These additional sample records should be drawn as per the instructions below and submitted to your contractor (or the SCC if an inhouse Trust). The responses from this boosted sample will be shared with the SCC and included within CQC national and Trust level reporting outputs.

## 2.2 Sampling variables: changes for 2025 survey

For the 2025 survey, there will be no changes to the sampling variables.

The full information on sampling variables is provided in [section 3, step 3](#_Sample_variables_to).

# Section 3: Overview of the sample drawing process

The flowchart below shows the sequential steps that you must follow to draw your sample. The file should contain all eligible service users who had one or more contact during the sampling months April-May 2025, and had another contact either before, after or during the sampling month.

1. Before you start, read the drawing sample section below, where a summary on [common sampling errors](#_Step_1:_Common) is provided.
2. **Complete Section A of the** [sample declaration form](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20Declaration%20Form.xlsx).
3. Compile a list of eligible service users (see page 13). At this stage you will need to check your list for common sampling errors and undertake local deceased checks.
4. **Complete Section B of the sample declaration form.**
5. From the updated list, select a random sample of minimum 1,350 service users.
   * + - 1. If your Trust chooses to boost your sample, please add an additional 100 records to the desired sample size to allow for removals following deceased and sample checks.
6. Send the list to the Demographics Batch Service (DBS) to check for deceased service users.
   1. Remove deceased service users from your list.
   2. Conduct extra checks for deceased service users when the file is returned.
7. Create the sample file, reducing your sample to a minimum of 1,250 service users.
   1. At this stage, you should check your sample for any common errors or any errors that may have occurred when drawing your sample.
8. **Complete sections C & D of your sample declaration form**.
9. Submit your sample declaration form.
10. If you are using a contractor: When instructed, send the sample file (both mailing and sample data) to your contractor via a secure file transfer system. If your approved contractor uses an encrypted file transfer site, you do not need to password protect your sample.
11. If you are conducting the survey in-house: Separate the mailing data (names, mobile numbers, addresses) from the sample data (anonymous data including postcodes). When instructed, send the sample file **(sample data only)** [to the SCC](http://nhssurveys.org/Filestore/Generic_instructions/Generic_Submitting_sample_V6.pdf) via a secure file transfer system.
12. Respond to any queries from your contractor/the SCC.
13. Once the sample is approved, the mailings for your Trust can begin. You or your contractor will need to undertake deceased checks (local or DBS checks) throughout fieldwork. The next section in this instruction manual explains this in more detail

# Section 4: Drawing the sample

This section of the instructions takes you through step by step on how to draw your sample. It is important that you spend some time reading this next section in full before you make a start. If, once you’ve read this section, you have queries then do get in touch with the SCC team.

## Step 1: Common sampling errors

Below we have detailed the most common sampling errors to look out for:

* Failing to draw a random sample.
* Ordering the full list of service users prior to drawing the sample (e.g. by oldest to youngest).
* Leaving filters on columns before drawing the sample.
* Not applying the =Rand() formula and choosing the first required number of service users in the list.
* Incorrect last contact date.
  1. This should be the last date the service user had contact with NHS mental health services, this could be during or after the sampling period (April to May 2025). As the sample is drawn in July 2025, we would expect there to be a large proportion of service users with a last contact date between April and June 2025.
* Attendance criteria being incorrectly applied. Trusts must ensure they include service users who have:
  1. had at least one ‘face-to-face’ contact that is in person, via video conferencing or by telephone during the sampling period (this could include an initial assessment); **AND**
  2. had at least one other contact (face-to-face, video conference, telephone, or email) either before, during or after the sampling period.
     + All contact must have been in relation to an attendance/appointment where a service user would have received care, treatment, or assessment.
* Excluding an eligible service user group.
* Inserting an incorrect Sub-ICB code. Please check the codes inserted against the list provided in the sample declaration form.
* Incomplete address data:
  1. All records should have enough postal information to ensure the letter would be successfully delivered i.e. if there is no postcode, there should be a house number/name, street and town.
  2. Ensure valid correct postcodes are included when available.
* Incorrect mobile phone number.
  1. Check that no landline numbers are included; check there are 11 digits in each number.

## Step 2: Complete Section A of the Sample Declaration Form

**You need to access the** [sample declaration form](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20Declaration%20Form.xlsx).

Before applying the eligibility criteria to your full list of all service users, Section A of the sample declaration form should be completed. To do this:

* In (A) of section A: record the number of active and current service users, aged 16 and over, who are accessing mental health services at your Trust. The figure should be based on the number of active and current service users known to your Trust at the point of drawing your sample.
* In (B) of section A: state the total number of all service users who have dissented from the sharing of their details for any purpose other than their clinical care, or who have dissented from taking part in the survey specifically.
* In (C) of section A: enter the total number of 16- and 17-year-olds who have dissented from the sharing of their details for any purpose other than their clinical care, or who have dissented from taking part in the survey specifically.
* In (D) of section A: you do not need to enter a number as this will autofill by formula, taking the total number of service at your Trust aged 16 or above (A) minus the number of dissenters (B).

## Step 3: Compile a full list of eligible service users

The sample for this survey is a random sample of **minimum** 1,250 service users who:

* Are aged 16 years and above; **AND**
* Were seen by someone face-to-face at your Trust or via video conference (e.g. using Attend Anywhere, MS Teams, Zoom, etc.) or telephone call between 1st April and 31st May 2025 (the sampling period); **AND**
* Had at least one other contact (face-to-face, video conference, telephone, or email) either before, during or after the sampling period.

Service users should be included if both of these are true:

* Service user was seen at least once (in person, via video conference, or telephone) during the sampling period (this could include an initial assessment).
* Service user had at least one other contact (face-to-face, video conference, telephone, or email) either before, during or after the sampling period.
  + **As the sample is drawn in July 2025, we would expect there to be a large proportion of service users with a last contact date between April and June 2025.**

**Before you can select your random sample, you need to compile a full list of eligible service users who meet the above criteria**.

## Step 3.1: Which services should be included in the sample?

What do we mean by ‘seen by someone’?

These are people who:

1. Had at least one contact\* during the sampling period including a face-to-face meeting, video conference appointment, or telephone appointment (this could include an initial assessment)

**AND**

1. Had at least one other contact\* (face-to-face, video conference, phone, or email) either before, during or after the sampling period.

\*By contact, we mean an attendance/appointment where a service user would have received care, treatment, or assessment. For example, do not include service users who simply called the Trust to query details about forthcoming appointments.

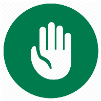
If you have any concerns about how to identify service users, or have any queries, **please contact the SCC team** (mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com) **for advice**.



Anyone who used any of the following services at your Trust should be **included**:

* Outpatients services
* Day therapies services
* Adult services
* Services for older people
* Crisis teams
* Complex needs services
* Assertive outreach teams
* Early intervention and short-term intervention teams
* Recovery teams.
* Home treatment teams.
* Rehabilitation support teams.
* Service users with dementia (this does not include service users primarily accessing memory clinics)
* Child and Young People’s Mental Health Services (CYPMHS). But only CYPMHS service users who are 16 years of age or over on the date the sample is drawn.

Include people who used these services between 1st April and 31st May 2025 **even if they have subsequently been discharged from these services.**



## Step 3.2: Which services should be excluded?

From your full list of service users, you should **remove** the following individuals:

* Anyone seen only once ever for an assessment (for example, those who were seen by a duty worker or a psychiatrist for a single assessment).
* Anyone seen for assessment only through a liaison service, even if they were seen more than once[[1]](#footnote-2).
* Service users who have only been in contact via email and have not been seen in person at all (or via video conferencing or telephone).
* Anyone primarily receiving care in the following mental health services:
  + Drug & alcohol
  + Learning disability
  + Specialist forensic
  + Psychological treatments from NHS Talking Therapies (formerly known as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT))
  + Chronic fatigue/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) services
  + Psychosexual medicine (sexual dysfunction)
  + Gender identity
  + Memory Clinics

Remember to also check the sample for service users who:

* Are under the age of 16 years old **at the time of drawing the sample.**
* Are known to have died.
* Are known to be current inpatients at the time of drawing the sample.
  + Note: any service user who is not a current inpatient but has previously been an inpatient at the Trust should be included.
* Do not have a known UK address.
* Remove a service user only if there is insufficient name or address information for the questionnaire to have a reasonable chance of being delivered. Do not exclude anyone simply because you do not have a postcode for them.
* Have asked that their details are not used for any purpose other than their clinical care, including requests made following sight of survey pre-publicity. However, as stated above, service users who have opted out specifically through the National Data Opt-Out Programme are still eligible.
* Any duplicate service users, or any alias names where the person’s real name is already included in the list.

**Safeguarding Concerns**

In general, service users with safeguarding concerns should be included in your list, unless they meet any of the other exclusion criteria above. Service users should only be removed from the full list of service users in extreme circumstances, where the delivery of the questionnaire itself is likely to increase the risk of harm to the individual.

We would expect only a very small number of service users to be removed, if any. If you expect to remove more than a handful, please contact us at [mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com](mailto:mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com).

## Step 4: Sample variables to include in your sample

There will be information that you will need to submit as part of your final sample which will come from Trust records. It will be easier to collect that information now, when running the initial data extraction and setting up your initial data extraction query. This will save you having to find this information at a later date.

These fields are detailed in the [sample construction spreadsheet](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20construction%20spreadsheet_for%20trust%20using%20approved%20contractor.xlsx).

The information you will need to include within your sample is:

* **Trust code** (sample and mailing data): This should be the three-character code of your organisation e.g. RTE.
* **Service User Record Number (SURN)** (sample and mailing data)**:** 
  + The unique serial number allocated to each service user by the Trust. This should include the survey code (MH25), followed by the Trust code (e.g. RYG), followed by a four-digit number (e.g. 0001, 0002, …). e.g. MH25RYG0001. Do not include any hyphens, spaces, underscores etc.
  + The SURN will be included on address labels and on questionnaires and will be the log-in username for the online survey. When questionnaires are returned (whether completed or not) or completed online, these numbers will be used to monitor which patients have taken part and to identify any non-responders, who will need to be sent reminders.
  + Please note: this number should be available in- and correctly referenced for every dataset for this survey (e.g. sample file, mailing file, final data). Please note that SURN is not a variable present in Trust databases, it is created only to allow the monitoring of patient response.
* **NHS Number:** (mailing data): The patient’s NHS number is required for contractors to conduct DBS checks.
* **Title (Mr, Mrs, Ms, etc.)** (mailing data).
* **First name** (mailing data).
* **Surname** (mailing data).
* **Address Fields** (mailing data): This should be held as separate fields (e.g. street, area, town and county). You must use the most current address on your system.
* **Postcode** (sample and mailing data).
* **Mobile phone number** (mailing data): This should be taken from the Trust records as provided by the service user for clinical correspondence. This should be the current mobile phone number listed on your system, either an 11-digit number starting with ‘07’ or a 12-digit number starting with ‘+44 7’. Do not include any home or landline phone numbers.
  + The Section 251 approval grants “the legal basis to allow access to the specified confidential service user information without consent.” This allows Trusts to provide details like service users’ postal addresses and mobile numbers. The only cases in which you should not provide this is if the service user has explicitly dissented to the use of their mobile number, or if there is a note specifying that the number belongs to someone other than the service user, such as a carer or family member.
  + Eligible service users should be included in the sample whether or not they have a mobile phone number. If you have any queries about this, please contact the SCC team.

**Should we include mobile number where we cannot determine if it is for the service user or not?**

If the mobile number listed on your system is specified as belonging to someone other than the service user, this should not be included. However, if the service user has provided a “work mobile” for their records this is fine to include, and if nothing is specified alongside the number it’s fine to assume this belongs to the service user.

**For service users where we have a mobile phone listed in the mobile telephone field, and a different mobile phone number listed in the telephone field, should we just pick one and include it?**

Please prioritise the ‘mobile’ column. If you have any records where the mobile field is blank, and the telephone number field is populated with a mobile number, please include this.

**What should we do if duplicate mobile numbers are present?**

If there are duplicate mobile numbers found across different service users, please remove one of the service users where the mobile number is duplicated and keep the service user who has the most recent contact.

* **Mobile phone indicator** (sample data):To create this variable you need to check whether a mobile phone number is recorded for a service user and assign one of the following codes to indicate mobile phone status: 0=No mobile phone held for service user; 1=Mobile phone held for service user.
* **Day of Birth** (mailing data):Should be included in the form N or NN
* **Month of Birth** (mailing data): Should be included in the form N or NN
* **Year of Birth** (sample and mailing data): Should be included in the form NNNN.
* **Gender** (sample data): Should be coded in numeric form: 0 = Not known; 1 = Male; 2 = Female; 8 = Not specified; 9 = Intermediate.
* **Ethnic Category** (sample data): This is required to evaluate non-response from different ethnic categories. The ethnicity of a person is specified by that person and should be coded using the [17 item alphabetical coding specified in the NHS Data Model and Dictionary.](https://datadictionary.nhs.uk/attributes/ethnic_category_code_2001.html)
* **Day of last contact** (sample data): (1 or 2 digits; e.g. 7 or 26)[[2]](#footnote-3)\*.
* **Month of last contact** (sample data): (1 or 2 digits; e.g. April = 4 or May = 5)\*.
  + As the sample is drawn in July 2025, we would expect there to be a large proportion of service users with a last contact date between April and June 2025.
* **Year of last contact** (sample data): (4 digits; e.g. 2025)\*.
  + The last contact date should be the last date the service user had contact with NHS mental health services, this could be before, during or after the sampling period (April to May 2025).
* **Sub-ICB code** (sample data)**:** This should be the billing Sub-ICB Location code. The current three- or five-character Sub-ICB Location codes should be used (previously CCG codes).
  + Please see the 'From July 2022' tab on this [ODS change summary document](https://digital.nhs.uk/binaries/content/assets/website-assets/services/ods/integrated-care-boards/ods-change-summary-icb-22-23---yr1-renaming) for the correct codes to use.
* **Mental Health Inpatient indicator** (sample data)**:** Indicator of whether the service user has had a Mental Health inpatient stay in the last 12 months (from the day the sample is drawn), that has lasted 7 or more days.
  + This includes service users who had a continuous stay of 7 days or more under the same referral. If service users had leave days while they were still under section, these days should be included within the 7 days (leave days is time a service user may spend outside the ward to prepare for discharge).
  + The Mental Health Inpatient Indicator should be coded as: 0 = service user has not had a mental health inpatient stay in the last 12 months or their stay lasted less than 7 days; 1 = service user had mental health inpatient stay in the last 12 months that lasted 7 or more days.
* **Service or Team type** (sample data): This should be the primary service that the service user has had the most contact with. By contact, we mean most frequent appointments (face-to-face, telephone, or video call). If the service user has used multiple services during the sampling period and does not have a primary service, then please include the most recent contact as the primary service. [Please see the full list of services and teams by clicking here.](https://www.datadictionary.nhs.uk/attributes/service_or_team_type_for_mental_health.html) Please insert the code of the service or team, e.g. A06.
  + If you do not have a service or team type for the service user, please leave blank and note this as correct in your sample declaration form.
* **Assessment Service Group** (sample data): Please indicate which service type was primarily used by the service user during the sampling period (April and May 2025). Please code according to the service of team the service user has had most contact with. **This should be coded by service users need, rather than by their age.** 
  + 1 = Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); 2 = Adult Mental Health Services; 3 = Older People’s Mental Health Services
  + If your Trust does not capture this information, please categorise by the following age categories. 1 = Child and Young People’s Mental Health Services (16-18 years old) (CYPMHS); 2 = Adult Mental Health Services (19-65 years old); 3 = Older People’s Mental Health Services (Over 65 years old).
* **Mode of contact** since 1st April 2025 (sample data): Please provide the most commonly used method in which care, treatment and assessment has been delivered since 1st April 2025. **Please note**: only include contacts where a service user received care, treatment or assessment. Do not include contacts where a service user was querying an appointment time for example.
  + To determine the most commonly used method of contact, please identify the mode of contact for each care, treatment or assessment interaction since April 2025 and then perform a simple count of each mode to determine which mode was most commonly used.
  + For example, if the service user has had 10 contacts since 1st April 2025, of which 3 were face-to-face, 1 was telephone and 6 were video conferencing, the most common mode of contact for this individual would be video conferencing.
  + For this variable, you will then need to assign one of the following codes to indicate the most commonly used mode of contact: 1 = face-to-face contact (i.e. in person); 2 = video conferencing; 3 = telephone; 4 = \*multiple modes of contact used; 5 = unsure.
  + \*This code should be used when there is no clear most common mode.
  + For example, when there have been three contacts and all of them were via a different mode (face-to-face, video conferencing and telephone) or when there is an even split between different modes of contact (e.g.: 10 contacts with five being telephone and five being face-to-face).
  + If you do not record this information, please code the service user as code 5 ‘unsure’.

## Step 5: Check you have included the correct service users

**Before you run your initial data extraction to create your full list of eligible service users**, double check the logic/coding using the above criteria, making sure you have removed all service users who are not eligible. This is fundamentally important and must happen before you create your final sample file.

Please note there are several checks you need to carry out on your list of eligible service users ***before*** you run your extraction:

### Duplications

* Check that the same service user has not been included more than once. Where possible, link any alias names so that only one name per service user appears in the list.

### Incomplete information

* Check for any records with incomplete information on key fields (such as surname, full address) and remove those service users. However, do not exclude anyone simply because you do not have a postcode or mobile phone number for them. Only remove service users if there is insufficient name or address information for the questionnaire to have a reasonable chance of being delivered. The more cases that are removed at this stage, the poorer the sample coverage and the greater the danger of bias.

### Postal addresses

* Exclude any addresses that are outside the UK. Service users whose address is in the British Islands (Isle of Man, the Channel Islands) are eligible. Equally, service users whose address is a military base, care home, or prison establishment are also eligible.

### Ages

* Check that all service users were aged 16 and over **on the date the sample was drawn**. Also check that your sampled service users’ ages cover the full range of expected ages (aged 16 and over).

### Current inpatients

* Check that none of the service users are known to be current inpatients in your Trust or elsewhere, if possible. This is because we want to avoid sending a questionnaire to a service user who is still in hospital. A service user who used to be an inpatient but has now been discharged should be included.

### Deceased service users

* Check that Trust records do not have a record of a service user’s death **and** submit your list for DBS (Demographic Batch Service) for checks. This is for any service users who may have died during or since being in contact with your services. [Steps 8 and 9](#_Step_8:_Submitting) provide details on how to check for deceased service users via DBS but you must also conduct local checks before the sample is sent to DBS. It is best to prioritise those local checks at this stage.

### Service user in sample period

* Check that all service users were seen in the sample period of 1st April and 31st May 2025 and fit the sampling criteria.

### Dissent

* Remove any service user known to have requested their details are not used for any purpose other than their clinical care, including requests made following sight of [pre-survey publicity](http://nhssurveys.org/Filestore/Generic_instructions/Generic_Publicising_survey_V8.pdf) (you must ensure that you remove these service users from your sample list at this stage). However, as stated above, service users who have opted out specifically through the National Data Opt-Out Programme are still eligible.

## Step 6: Complete Section B of the Sample Declaration Form

Once you have applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria to create your full eligible service user list, you will need to complete Section B of the [sample declaration form](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20Declaration%20Form.xlsx).

NOTE: It is likely that your initial list will include thousands of service users. Section B of the sample declaration form is based on this full initial list of eligible service users.

To complete section B:

* In (E) of section B: The total number of eligible service users who meet the eligibility criteria during 1st April – 31st May 2025 will be auto filled by formula, summing the figures provided in F and G of Section B.
* In (F) of section B: enter the total number of service users aged 16 to 17 years old.
* In (G) of section B: enter the total number of eligible users aged 18 and over.

## Step 7: Draw your random sample

From this list, you will take a random sample of 1,350 service users to send for DBS checks, however, your final sample should consist of minimum 1,250 service users. An additional 100 service users are sampled at this point to compensate for the removal of some people following checks (for example, deceased service users will need to be removed following DBS checks).

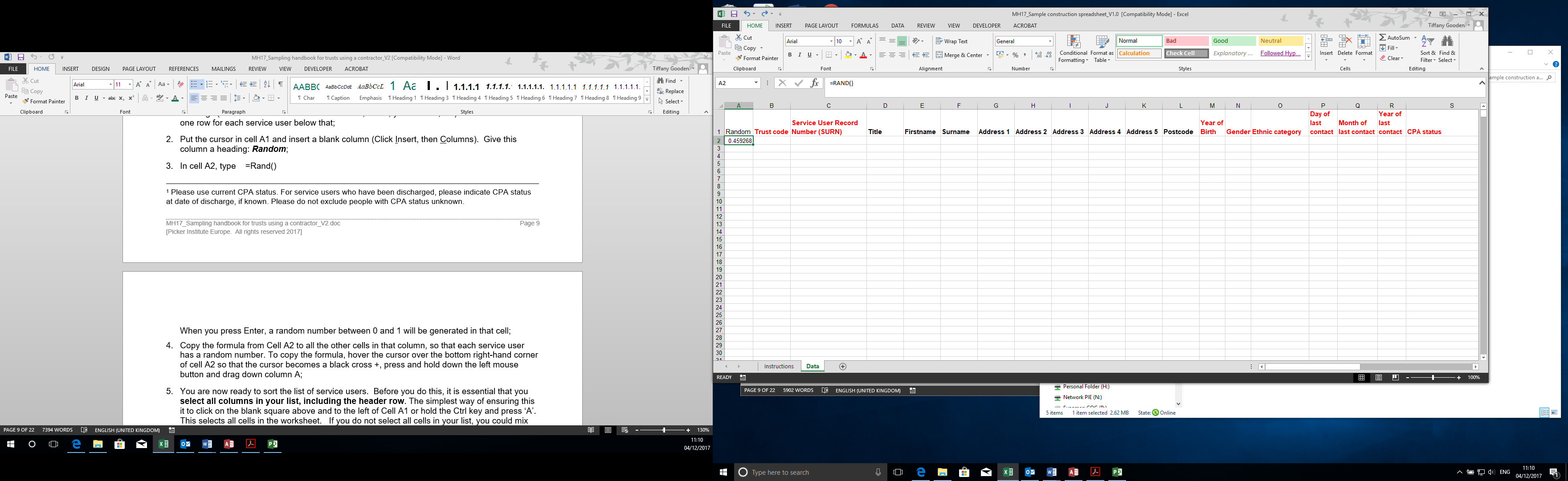
To randomly select **1,350 service users** from your initial list:

**Trusts are encouraged to submit a boosted sample**; this means submitting more than the minimum required number of service users (1,250 records is the minimum).

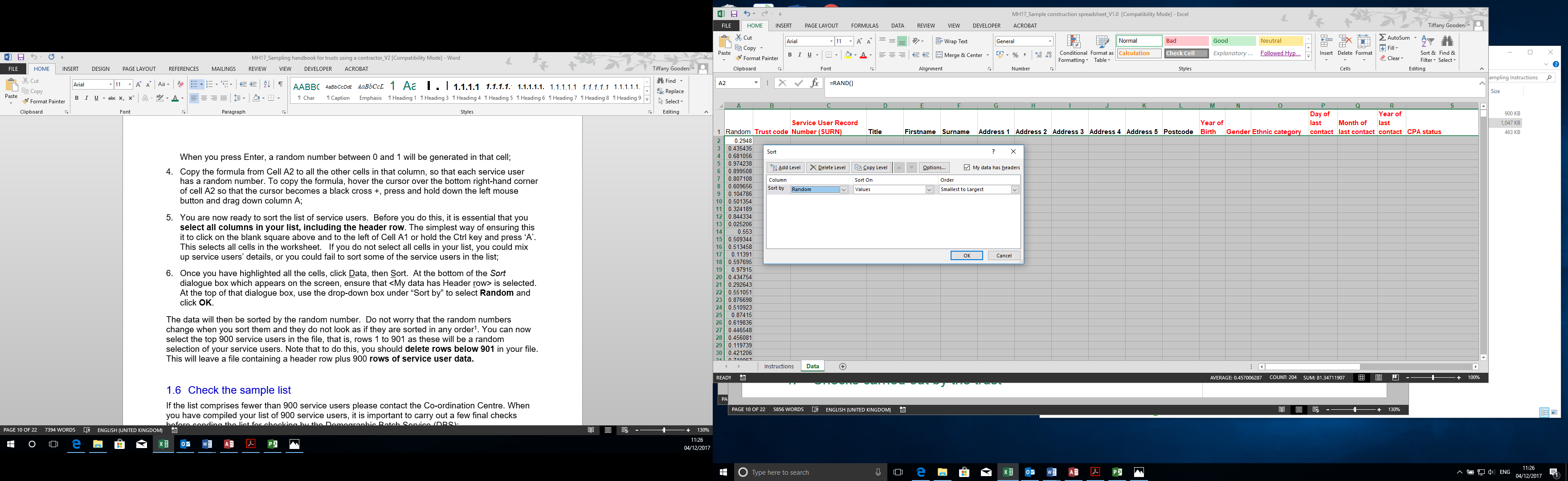
By submitting a higher number of service users in your sample, it means you will receive more data and will increase the possibility of granular reporting, this could include reporting by assessment service group and service or team type.

**Please note:** If you have chosen to boost your sample, please add 100 additional service users to your sample size to allow for removal of service users following checks. For example, if you wish to submit 1,500 records in your final sample, please initially draw a random sample of 1,600.

1. Put the list of service users into a Microsoft Excel file:
   1. The first row of this file will be headings (such as name, year of birth, etc).
   2. The rows below will be one row per service user in your initial list.
2. Put the cursor in cell A1 and insert a blank column (in the ‘Home’ tab, click ‘Insert’, and from the drop-down menu select ‘Insert sheet Columns’). Give this column a heading: ‘Random’.
3. In cell A2, type **=Rand()**
4. When you press Enter, a random number between 0 and 1 will be generated in that cell. As shown in the example image below, a number, such as 0.459268, will appear in cell A2.



1. Copy the formula **=Rand()** from cell A2 to all the other cells in that column, so that each service user has a random number. To copy the formula, hover the cursor over the bottom right-hand corner of cell A2 so that the cursor becomes a black cross +, press and hold down the left mouse button and drag down column A.
2. You are now ready to sort the list of service users:
3. Select all columns in your list, including the header row. The simplest way of ensuring this is to hold the ‘Ctrl’ key and press the key ‘A’ - this selects all cells in the worksheet.
4. Once you have highlighted all the cells, click ‘Sort & Filter’ on the ‘Home’ tab and select ‘Custom Sort’. Once the Sort dialogue box appears on the screen, ensure that <My data has Headers> is selected in the top right-hand corner. Use the drop-down box under ‘Sort by’ to select Random, select ‘Cell Values’ from the ‘Sort On’ drop-down box and select Smallest to Largest in the ‘Order’ drop-down box and then click OK. An example of how this should look is below.



**The random numbers will change** after you sort them and they will look as if they are not sorted in any order. This is because they are sorted by the previous random numbers.

1. Delete row 1352 and onwards from your file, so that you only keep the header row and rows 2 to 1351. This will leave a file containing a header row plus 1350 rows of service user data. 
   1. **Remember**, if you are submitting a boosted sample, please add 100 additional service users to your sample size to allow for removal of service users following checks.

**This final list of 1,350 service users will be the list you submit to DBS in the next stage of the process**.

## Step 8: Submitting your service users list to the Demographics Batch Service (DBS)

Local deceased checks should have been undertaken prior to reducing your total service user list to a minimum of 1,350 service users (see [step 5](#_Step_5:_Check)). If you have not undertaken local deceased checks yet, it would be advisable to do them at this stage before the list of minimum 1,350 service users is sent to DBS. Once you have done this and are happy that the list of minimum 1,350 service users include only eligible individuals, the list needs to be checked for any deaths by the DBS.

**This process is fundamentally important and must happen before you create the final sample file (a minimum of 1,250 service users).**

The DBS enables users to submit and receive an electronic file containing relevant service user records, using dedicated client software. The service user records in the file are matched against the NHS Spine Personal Demographics Service (PDS).

The PDS does not hold any clinical or sensitive data such as ethnicity or religion. In the flow chart below, the activities undertaken by Trusts are highlighted in blue.

Steps for checking for deceased service usersrs



## Step 8.1: Create the trace request file

Using your list of service users, you need to create a batch trace request file to send to DBS. You should take advice from your local trust PAS team on the correct format to submit files. For each service user you will need to include as a minimum:

* + NHS number and full date of birth (yyyymmdd) – this is the recommended approach.

**OR**

* + Surname, first name, sex, date of birth, postcode (can be wildcarded e.g. LS1\*). The postcode is not mandatory, but it will help avoid incorrect matches, but please do not include address lines.

Due to the way addresses are recorded throughout the NHS, it is very difficult to get an exact match on address lines. For this reason, **do not** include address lines in the trace request file.

## Step 8.2: Submitting the trace request file

DBS requires that request and response files are transferred using the dedicated DBS client software. The DBS client software should have already been installed on a server within your Trust and most Trusts use this on a routine basis. Please speak to a member of your IT department or Patient Administration System (PAS) team if you do not know how to access and use the application. If your IT department cannot help, please contact the DBS implementation team at **demographics@nhs.net**.

Once you have created the request file, it should be placed in the client inbox. The DBS client will then send the file to the Spine and, if you are registered, you will receive an email to say that the file was received. The DBS processes the file overnight and it should be ready the following morning. You will be notified by email when the file has been processed.

During periods of high demand for DBS service, it may take 48 hours for your file to be returned!



## Step 8.3: The response file from DBS

The DBS will return a file with:

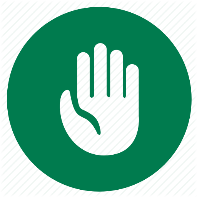
* + A header row.
  + A response body. This will be in two parts:
  + The response containing all the data supplied in the request record, together with a trace outcome indicator. The main record is returned in all cases.
  + An additional response column, which is returned only when there is a single unique match. It is in this additional response column that service users found to be deceased will be indicated (by a letter ‘D’).
  + A Trailer row.

Further information is provided on the[DBS website](https://digital.nhs.uk/developer/api-catalogue/demographics-batch-service).

**Tracing services are not infallible**: even after your service user list has been checked for deaths, some people may die in the period between running the check and the questionnaire being delivered.

So, you may find that some recently deceased service users remain in your sample. **You need to be prepared for this**.

Special sensitivity is required when dealing with telephone calls from bereaved relatives.



## Step 9: Remove service users following DBS checks

The trace response file returned from DBS can be used to identify any service users who have died and therefore need to be removed from the sample file (see below). This will reduce the numbers in your sample list slightly. Please do not exclude service users just because it was not possible for DBS to match them on their records. If you did this, you would bias the sample.

**I have more than 1,250 service users remaining on my list, what should I do?**

If your Trust has chosen to submit the minimum number of 1,250 records, then please follow the process below and then remove any additional contacts until you reach 1,250 records. You will need to randomly select your final sample from the file that has been DBS checked.

If your Trust has chosen to boost your sample, i.e. submit more than 1,250 records, then please follow the process below and only remove the number of records required before you achieve your desired sample size.

Randomly sort your DBS-checked list

1. Sort the list of service users

**I have fewer than 1,250 service users remaining on my list, what should I do?**

If your list has fewer than 1,250 service users after deceased service users have been removed, you need to contact mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com

## Step 9.1: DBS and local checks during fieldwork

It is also a requirement to run further checks prior to the second and third mailings to avoid sending reminders to patients who have died between mailings.

**Contractors running DBS Checks**

**on behalf of Trusts**

Some contractors have the capability of running DBS checks during fieldwork on the Trusts behalf. This removes the requirement for Trusts to run DBS checks (and local checks if preferred) ahead of mailing two and mailing three. **Trusts are still expected to run the initial DBS checks when drawing the initial sample.**

**Please contact your contractor to discuss this further**.

1. If you are using the services of an approved contractor, please notify them immediately if any service users in your sample died during the survey period and ensure they are removed from any reminder mailings.
2. Figure 1: Protocol for conducting DBS and local checks throughout fieldwork

## Step 10: Complete sections C and D of the declaration form

Now you need to complete **section C** (‘sample figures’ tab) **and section D** (‘checklist’ tab) of the sample declaration form. Once you have completed this, the person who drew the sample and the Caldicott Guardian sign the ‘Declaration Agreement’.

**You can then submit your sample declaration form** via email to your contractor and copy in your trusts Caldicott Guardian into the email. If you’re an inhouse Trust you should submit your sample declaration form to the SCC.

## Step 11: Create the sample file by transferring the data into the sample construction spreadsheet

Now you will enter all the information relating to your sample (those fields from step 4) in the template [sample construction spreadsheet](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20construction%20spreadsheet_for%20trust%20using%20approved%20contractor.xlsx) and save this file as **CMH25\_SampleFile\_XXX** with XXX being your three letter Trust code.

### Elements to be completed throughout the fieldwork period:

* + Day of questionnaire being received – This will only be completed if and when a questionnaire (online or via post) is returned.
  + Month of questionnaire being received – This will only be completed if and when a questionnaire (online or via post) is returned.
  + Year of questionnaire being received – This will only be completed if and when a questionnaire (online or via post) is returned.
  + Outcome code – This will be used to record which questionnaires are returned to the freepost address or completed online, or are returned undelivered, or which service users opt-out of the survey, etc. Please use the following codes:

1 = Returned completed (response received either online, by telephone or via post, this includes completed accessible versions; large print, braille, easy read questionnaires)

2 = Returned undelivered

3 = Service user deceased (identified after first mailing has gone out)

4 = Too ill or opted out/returned a blank questionnaire

5 = Ineligible

6 = Not returned – Unknown

7 = Service user deceased prior to fieldwork

The outcome column is left blank at first if a response has not been received.

* + Comments – In this column you can note any additional information that may be provided when someone calls the helpline – for example, to inform the trust that the respondent has died or is no longer living at this address.

**For Trusts using a contractor -** This file will be sent to your contractor with all mailing and sample data fields present.

**For in-house Trusts -** You will need to separate out the mailing data from the sample file before you send this to the SCC.

Table 1 on the next page shows an example of the spreadsheet. Please use the [sample construction spreadsheet](https://nhssurveys.org/wp-content/surveys/05-community-mental-health/03-instructions-guidance/2025/Sample%20construction%20spreadsheet_for%20trust%20using%20approved%20contractor.xlsx) provided.

Table 1. Sample construction spreadsheet of service user details

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SAMPLE AND MAILING | SAMPLE AND MAILING | MAILING | MAILING | MAILING | MAILING | MAILING | MAILING | SAMPLE AND MAILING | MAILING | SAMPLE | MAILING | MAILING | SAMPLE AND MAILING | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | SAMPLE | FIELDWORK | FIELDWORK | FIELDWORK | **FIELDWORK** | **FIELDWORK** |
| Trust Code | Service User Record Number | NHS Number | Title | First name(s) | Surname | Address1 | Address5 | Postcode | Mobile phone number | Mobile phone indicator | Day of birth | Month of birth | Year of Birth | Gender | Ethnic Category | Day of last contact | Month of last contact | Year of last contact | Sub-ICB Code | Mental Health Inpatient indicator | Service or Team Type | Assessment Service Group | Mode of contact | Day questionnaire being received | Month of questionnaire being received | Year of questionnaire being received | **Outcome** | **Comments** |
| RTV | MH25RTV0002 | 1234567890 | Mrs | Anna May | Abbott |  |  | AB1 1YZ | 07812345678 | 1 | 21 | 08 | 1971 | 2 | A | 2 | 04 | 2025 | 36L | 0 | A06 | 2 | 1 |  |  |  | 3 |  |
| RTV | MH25RTV0015 | 4505577104 | Mr | Edward Chris | Ahmed |  |  | AB2 6XZ | 07812345677 | 0 | 13 | 11 | 1958 | 1 | A | 14 | 05 | 2025 | 09D | 1 | A10 | 3 | 4 | 03 | 08 | 2025 | 1 |  |
| RTX | MH25RTX0745 | 3216789012 | Ms | Katy | Yoo |  |  | AB4 7MX | 07812345676 | 1 | 22 | 03 | 1987 | 2 | M | 21 | 06 | 2025 | 92A | 0 | A07 | 2 | 2 | 28 | 08 | 2025 | 1 |  |
| RTX | MH25RTX1250 | 9876543210 | Ms | Fiona | Young |  |  | AB9 5ZX | 07812345675 | 0 | 06 | 07 | 2006 | 0 | Z | 30 | 05 | 2025 | 06L | 1 | A12 | 1 | 9 |  |  |  | 2 |  |

**Mailing Columns:** these columns contain information on service users’ names, addresses, mobile phone number, and comments that may allow them to be identified.

**Sample Columns:** these columns should be completed during the sampling phase and will include data relating to service user’s demographic and clinical data, their unique record number, and your Trust code.

**Fieldwork Columns**: these columns will be completed throughout the fieldwork period and will include the date the questionnaire was returned or whether service users are deceased or have opted out.

## Step 12: Check sample prior to submission

Before you submit your sample, you are asked to carry out several checks on your sample. While previous checks were done at individual level to ensure service user eligibility, these high-level checks will help you identify potential errors in the way the sample was drawn, for example if certain groups of service users have been accidentally excluded.

### Checking the distribution of service user ages in your sample

You should check that service users of all ages are included in your sample. Ensure you have not excluded any eligible service users born in 2009 (16 year olds) or any service users over 75 years (born in or before 1949). We have found these age groups are the most likely to be excluded due to sampling errors. It is possible there may not be any service users of these ages in your sample, but this should be confirmed by checking your original list of attendances (before exclusion criteria were applied) and your sampling techniques.

### Checking the distribution of gender

Your sample should have similar proportions of males and females. You should check that both males and females are included and that you can explain it if the sample is skewed toward male or female patients (for instance, if there have been recent changes in the profile of service users seen by your Trust).

### Checking for common sampling errors

As mentioned at [step 1](#_Step_1:_Read), we recommend that you read the drawing sample section, where a summary on common sampling errors has been provided.

## Step 12.1: Checks done on the sample data by contractors and the SCC

After you have submitted your sample data, checks will be undertaken by contractors and the SCC. It is helpful if Trusts also complete these checks prior to submitting their sample, that way there are less likely to be errors, and any queries that come back to your Trust should be easy to answer quickly. The types of checks that your approved contractor and the SCC do are as follows:

* Is the age distribution of the sample similar to the total eligible population stated in the sample declaration form?
* Are all service users aged 16 or over at the time the sample was drawn?
* Are service users between 16 and 17 years old included in the sample?
* Were all service users last seen by the Trust during or after April – May 2025?
* Are all sample variables complete, no missing data?
* Are the sub-ICB codes correct, do they match the codes provided in the list within the sample declaration form?
* Are there any proportional changes of 5% or more in sampling variables? If so, what is the reason for the shift in proportion?

It is vital that if any queries are raised on your sample, you respond to these quickly. This will prevent any delays in the mailing of questionnaires for your Trust. If there are significant delays, there is a risk that your Trust is excluded from the survey altogether.

Please note that the SCC will work with you to resolve any queries that we have and to advise you if you have any issues.

## Step 13: Submit the sample declaration form only

**If you are using a contractor:**

* You will submit your Sample Declaration Form **to your contractor,** copying in your Caldicott Guardian.
* Once approved, your contractor will let you know how and when to submit your sample to them, and they will submit your sample to the SCC on your behalf.

**If you are conducting the survey in-house:**

* You will submit your Sample Declaration Form **to the Survey Coordination Centre,** copying in your Caldicott Guardian prior to submitting your anonymised sample file for checking.
* Once approved, the SCC will notify you when and how you can submit your data.

## Step 14: Receiving permission to submit the sample

Once you have completed your sample declaration form, you must send this to either your contractor (if your Trust is using a contractor) or directly to the Survey Coordination Centre if you are conducting the survey in-house, please cc the Caldicott Guardian into the email.

### For in-house Trusts only

If you are using a contractor, please

skip this section and go to the next section.



Once you have received permission to submit your sample, you should transfer the names, NHS number, address, postcode, day of birth, month of birth, and mobile number for each service user in the sample to a new file – your ‘mailing file’. Please note: service user’s postcode should also be included in the sample file.

The Service User Record Number (SURN) for each person in your sample must be copied to the new mailing file, so thatthe two datasets are connected using the unique record number. It is essential to ensure this number is correctly applied to the two datasets, so that you can link them when necessary. Your mailing file should resemble the table below (table 2).

Save this new file as **CMH25\_MailingData\_XXX** where XXX is your Trust code. **Do not submit this file to the SCC.**

You will use this file to:

1. Check for deceased service users prior to reminder mailings.
2. Cross-reference it with the sample file (**CMH25\_SampleFile\_XXX**) to identify service users who will need to be sent reminders[[3]](#footnote-4).

As this mailing file will only be used occasionally during the survey, we recommend you keep this file encrypted.

For service user confidentiality reasons, you are asked not to keep service users’ name, NHS number, mobile phone, day/month of birth, and address details in the same file as their survey response data. The mailing file should be destroyed when the survey is complete, along with all other files created for the survey (aside from the survey response file).

**Do not send the mailing file to the Survey Coordination Centre.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Trust code** | **SURN** | **NHS Number** | **Title** | **First name(s)** | **Surname** | **Address1** | **Address2** | **Address3** | **Address4** | **Address5** | **Postcode** | **Mobile phone number** | **Day of birth** | **Month of birth** | **Year of birth** |
| RX1 | MH25RX10001 | 1234567890 | Mrs | Anna May | Abbot | 14 Station Road | London |  |  |  | AB1 1YZ | 07712345678 | 21 | 08 | 1991 |
| RX1 | MH25RX10002 | 4505577104 | Mr | Edward Chris | Ahmed | Flat 7 | Short Street | Oxford |  |  | AB2 6XZ | 07712345677 | 13 | 11 | 2006 |
| RX1 | MH25RX11249 | 3216789012 | Ms | Katy | Yoo | The Maltings | Birch Road | Little Abington | Cambridge | Cambs | AB4 7MX | 07712345676 | 22 | 03 | 1960 |
| RX1 | MH25RX11250 | 9876543210 | Ms | Fiona | Young | 634 Tyne Road | Newcastle-Upon-Tyne | Tyne and Wear |  |  | AB9 5ZX | 07712345675 | 06 | 07 | 1999 |

Table 2. Example of a mailing file

## Step 15: Submit the sample - for in-house Trusts and Trusts using a contractor

After submitting your sample declaration form and once receiving confirmation from the SCC (for in-house Trusts) or the approved contractor (for Trusts using an approved contractor) you will be able to submit the sample, following the process described in the chart below.

# Section 5: Questions?

For any questions, please contact the Survey Coordination Centre based at Picker at [mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com](mailto:mentalhealth@surveycoordination.com).

1. Some Trusts operate liaison services for assessing the mental health needs of inpatients receiving care for physical health issues. As details of these services may vary from Trust to Trust, please **contact the SCC team** if you are unsure whether some of your service users fall into this category. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. \*Date fields must be supplied in separate columns (day, month, and year). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The ‘outcome’ field in the sample file is used to record which questionnaires are returned completed, or are returned undelivered, or which service users opt out etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)