



Conducting Research to Assess Need for a New Childcare Facility or to Extend an Existing Childcare Service

Researching the needs of children and parents

The first thing to do is to identify exactly what the childcare needs of the whole community are by gathering information in a systematic way. You will need to carry out a survey.

You may very well have developed a strong sense of what is needed already – for example, through informal chats with Parents, through telephone enquires from prospective users or simply by observing the gaps that exist in current provision in your area.

What to Do

Don't make unnecessary work

You should always check to find out if the information you require is already available from another, such as:

- The most recent Childcare Audit.
- Local library (community information or reference section) and
- Economic development unit/research and information unit of your local authority.

Choose your method

A carefully planned questionnaire can provide valuable information. There are various options.

It can be completed:

- During face to face interviews
- Over the telephone and/or
- Through the post

It can ask for simple “yes” or “no” answers or can be multi-choice.

It can be structured – with questions asked in a certain order every time – or it can be unstructured, with the order changing depending on the answers given.

You should decide how you want to ask the questions. The way you ask them can make a difference to the kind of information you get back.

You might use one or more of the following approaches:

Area survey	Can be done informally by asking people questions and recording their response, using a questionnaire, notes of a checklist. Greater flexibility and control – opportunity to clarify misunderstandings. Can ask supplementary questions. High response rate. Can watch body language as well as verbal responses. Time consuming. Expensive. Respondents have little time to think. May need to get permission from local council to approach people in the street.
Telephone survey	More flexibility and higher response than post. Reaches people who will not give personal interview. Fast interviews must be fairly short. Respondents have little time to think. May give inaccurate responses.
Door to door survey	Timing of the visit is very important – avoid meal times, children’s bath times, peak viewing times, Sundays
Postal survey	Cheap. Respondents have time to think. Respondents may express true feelings. Useful when respondent is difficult to contact. Low response. No opportunity to clarify answers. Limited information obtained.
Open public meeting	Good opportunity for raising awareness and discussion.

Ten steps for a successful questionnaire:

1. Be clear about what you want to find out.
2. Keep the questions simple and in a logical order, with the easy questions first, more difficult last
3. Ask no more than ten questions – the fewer the questions, the higher the response rate.
4. Use list and tick boxes for ease e.g.

How likely is it that you would use a breakfast club?

very likely quite likely not likely

5. Give a return date, and include a stamped addressed envelope for postal responses.
6. Accept that a ten per cent response rate is considered good for postal questionnaires.
7. Use local organisations for assistance in translating your questionnaire into two different languages.
8. As well as mailing to parents direct, consider distributing written questionnaires through doctors’ and dental surgeries, through the library, through health visitors, through school and through Parent and Toddler Groups.
9. Accompany your survey with publicity such as an article in the parish magazine or the local newspaper, or a poster on community notice boards.
10. Before committing yourself to full-scale exercise, test out your questionnaire on a sample selection of people from your target respondents. It will soon become clear which questions are ambiguous or too difficult!

Which questions?

An open question prompts respondents to answer freely, giving opinions and comments. It invites much information, but this may be hard to analyse or interpret.

e.g. "What do you think of children provision for the under-fives in your area?"

A closed question prompts respondents to answer *yes/no/don't know*. It is very easy to summarise the results of a closed question.

e.g. "Are you satisfied with Childcare provision for the under-fives in your area?"

A multiple-choice question presents respondents with a series of answers, and the respondent chooses one. They are easy to summarise, but it can be hard to design these questions to include all possible answers.

e.g. "How satisfied are you with Childcare provision for the under-fives in your area?"

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Quite satisfied
Not at all satisfied

Helping respondents through the questionnaire

Make filling in the questionnaire as easy as possible by directing people through it. The following phrases may be useful:

"Please tick one box only"

"Please tick more than one box if necessary"

"If you have answered YES to question x please go to question y", which can direct respondents away from/towards a particular question.

Reaching out to new users

You should try to contact as wide a selection of relevant people as possible. Avoid surveying only those parents who currently use your service. Try to target those parents who, so far, have not used pre-school service. Would your local school mind distributing your questionnaire to all its parents? Community groups may be able to help you in getting in touch with parents. Advertise your plans in community centres, though Parent and Toddler Groups and at your local supermarket. Why not hold an open meeting? This is a good opportunity to show current and prospective parents what you are doing now, and to raise awareness about and discuss your plans for the future.

But is it scientific...?

No it isn't – but for your purposes it doesn't need to be. You don't need to approach a balanced representative sample of people – you will be targeting current and potential users of your provision. Your aim is to get data that will lend a "steer" to what you are planning to do with your service. You can use the data to demonstrate clearly to potential funders that your extended provision will be meeting an obvious need. You will be able to draw general conclusions from the results, rather than producing a precise analysis.

sample 1

Questionnaire
(Extension of existing Childcare Service)
This can be conducted by post, face to face, or by telephone

Dear Parent,

I am considering offering a _____ (type of service) in the local area/or _____ Pre-school which at present is open for xx mornings and xx days a week, is considering extending its services. We would like to know what you would find most useful. Please could you help us by completing the form below? Any information you give us will be used to guide our plans but will not allow any individual Parent or Child to be identified.

Please give the townland for the area you live in.....

Please give the ages of all your children between 0 and 5:.....

How likely would you be to use NEW provisions at this pre-school?

Very likely quite likely not likely

If you have ticked "not likely" could you briefly explain why and then return the form in the pre-paid envelope? Thank you.

If you have ticked "very likely" or "quite likely" please tick ✓ the box(es) for the provision you would find most useful:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Afternoon sessions between 12 and 4 (with lunch)
<input type="checkbox"/>	After school sessions between 4 and 7 (with tea)
<input type="checkbox"/>	A lunch club, providing facilities for children to eat a packed meal
<input type="checkbox"/>	A breakfast club, offering breakfast for children before pre-school/school starts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A holiday club, offering play facilities outside term time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent and Toddler group (for under 3s with the parents/carers)

Please tell us how this additional provision would help you ticking ✓ at all the boxes you agree with.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I will be able to carry on working and/or work longer
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will be able to look for a job
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will be able to undertake training
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will have more time to care for my family
<input type="checkbox"/>	I will know that my child is happy in a secure and educational environment

Would you be interested in attending an "open evening" at the pre-school in September to find out more about these issues?

Yes maybe no

If you would like to be advised if/when these services start please supply your name and address below:

Name :

Address :

Please return this form in the pre-paid envelope by... (specify date)

**Survey of Childcare Needs
(For a new Childcare Service)**

Would you be interested in any of the following childcare services: (Please tick)

Crèche/Nursery	Now	<input type="checkbox"/>	In Future	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playgroup	Now	<input type="checkbox"/>	In Future	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
After School /Homework club	Now	<input type="checkbox"/>	In Future	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer Scheme	Now	<input type="checkbox"/>	In Future	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please complete the section below for each service you would be interested in:

a) Crèche/Nursery 3months to 2 years 10 mths (please tick)

Number of Children Age(s)

Days per week

	Preferred start times	Preferred close time(s)	
	7:30 a.m.	5:00p.m.	
	8:00 a.m.	6:00p.m.	
	8:30 am	6:30p.m.	
	9:00a.m.		
	9:30a.m.		
	Other (please specify)	Other (please specify)	

Each day or Part-time? (please circle): Part-time / Full-time

If Part-time: Which Days (please circle): Mon/ Tue/ Wed/ Thur/ Fri

Would transport to and from centre be a problem? Yes No

sample 2

Age Profile

How many children do you have aged?

0 – 1 years _____ 3 – 4 years _____ 9 – 12 years _____
 1 – 2 years _____ 4 – 5 years _____ over 12 years _____
 2 – 3 years _____ 6 – 9 years _____

1. Services:

Please state the childcare service(s) you now use.

1. _____ 3. _____
 2. _____ 4. _____

2. Please tick the services you would use if available to you in your area: -

<input type="checkbox"/>	Playgroup Sessional	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent & Toddler Group
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Care Full Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	After School Care
<input type="checkbox"/>	Part Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Summer Camp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Childminding	<input type="checkbox"/>	Youth Club
<input type="checkbox"/>	Drop in centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	Home work club
<input type="checkbox"/>	Breakfast club	<input type="checkbox"/>	Homebased Development Programme e.g. Lifestart

Other, please specify : _____

How often do you think you would use the service? _____

Are you willing to take part in further Research into needs of Parents?

Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, please state:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel No. _____

Thank you

What do I do once I have completed the survey/collected the questionnaires?

Analysing/interpreting your data.

Keep it simple. Focus on how many people said a particular thing and compile numbers to support the preference for a particular type of service. The example below demonstrates how you can extract information from your survey/questionnaire and present it as findings to support your argument for the development of a childcare service in your area.

A. Sample Survey

Playgroup	2yrs 10 mths to School Age	
Number of Children:	<input type="text"/>	Ages _____
Number of days per week:	<input type="text"/>	Days
Morning or Afternoon? (Circle Preference)	Morning / Afternoon	
Each Day or Part-time? (Circle)	Part-time / Full Time	
If Part-time: Which Days (Circle)	Mon / Tue / Wed / Thur / Fri	
Would transport to and from centre be a problem?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

B. Sample Analysis of Survey

Total number of children requiring pre-school service	30	
Age Range	2 yrs 10mts to 4 yrs	12
	4-6 yrs	18
Prefer morning session	25	
Prefer afternoon session	5	
Part time	10	
Full time	20	
Transport required	yes	6
	no	24

From the information you have collected, you can now compile the following analysis of your findings:

- ❑ The **number** of children in the area who require a pre-school service (30)
- ❑ The **age range** of children – by dividing the age range in two, you can calculate how many children need the service immediately and how many could access the service in the coming year (18 immediately, 12 have option of following year)
- ❑ How many parents would **prefer a morning session** (25) and how many would **prefer an afternoon session** (5)– this will help determine the specific needs of parents and consequently enable you to provide an accessible service
- ❑ The **number of parents who prefer part time pre-school service** (10) and the **number of parents who require a full time service** (10). This will help you to estimate how many children in total you can enrol in your service
- ❑ **How many children require transport** to the childcare service (6). Transport is an important issue as many parents may state that they require a childcare service; however if they have no means of transport, they may be unable to access it. This consideration should also be made in relation to **cost** and how much parents can realistically **afford to pay**.