



## Surveys

### What are surveys?

Surveys are designed to obtain information. This may be on a particular topic, eg car parking facilities, or a set of more general information such as the Census form.

Surveys are designed to get information from a particular group of people. The UK census was sent out to every household in Britain to try to get information about the whole population of the UK. Surveys on local issues such as whether to build a new supermarket would just be targeted at the local population.

**Questionnaires** can be sent through the post, such as the Census form, or may be done through an interview, eg on a street corner, or even by telephone.

### Samples

When data is collected in a questionnaire or interview, it is important to think carefully about who you have asked. The collection of people you ask is called the **sample**.

For example, suppose you want to write a report about the opinions of a canteen in a workplace and you decide to ask people questions rather than send out a questionnaire.

If you ask people within the canteen then you will not get a full picture of staff opinion because you will miss the people who do not use the canteen. We would say that there is **bias** in the sample. Or that it is not a **fair** sample.



It may be better to question people at the entrance to the workplace. You may need to be careful of what time you stand and ask the questions depending on when people start (or finish) work.

A sample that considers all possible groups is called **representative**.

There is no perfect choice of who to include. Even when you have thought carefully about when and where to ask your questions you may have missed something. You might ask the questions on a day when one group of staff are on a training day. When this happens, you should make sure that you make this clear when you write your report.

