

Asset Maintenance Research Discussion Guide: January 2021

Research objectives

- Explore customers' approach to proactive/ reactive maintenance with the associated balance of risk and cost
- Assess at what cost point attitudes to proactive maintenance start to change
- Understand whether there is any consistent pattern to customer attitudes to maintaining different types of assets

Research timings

Stage	Timings
Kick off meeting	Friday 22 nd January
Agree sample spec	Monday 25 th January
Sign off recruitment questionnaire	Tuesday 26 th January
Development of research materials	Monday 25 th January onwards
Launch recruitment	Thursday 28 th January (AM)
Agree research materials	Tuesday 2 nd February
Online discussion groups	Wednesday 3 rd – Wednesday 10 th February
Analysis and reporting	Monday 1 st February onwards
Draft report complete	Wednesday 17 th February
Final report available and debrief ready	Friday 19 th February
Quant stage	Additional three weeks

Group timings

- Weds 3rd Feb – time and group tbc
- Friday 5th Feb – time and group tbc
- Monday 8th Feb – time and group tbc
- Monday 8th Feb – time and group tbc

Welcome and introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome, introduction to Verve and interviewer
- Outline MRS code of conduct and anonymity
- Audio and video recording of session, anonymised footage to be used internally by Verve and United Utilities only, footage will never be shown publicly
- Why we're doing this research:
 - We're here today to talk about assets
 - As you'll have seen in the pre-task, by 'assets' we mean items that you're responsible for, like your car or the boiler you heat your home with
 - Today we'll be discussing the way you think about and make decisions about maintaining/ replacing these things, and then moving on to United Utilities' assets, and the way it might make the same kinds of decisions
- The session will last up to 90 minutes, and should be fast paced and interactive



- Because we're using Zoom I want to make sure that only one person talks at once, so I'll ask people by name to speak, and if you have a point you would like to make, please put your hand up
- If we are going off topic or repeating the same points over – I will interrupt you – please don't be offended – we have a lot to get through
- Moderator using two screens
- Any questions?



About you (5 minutes)

- I'd just like to go around and get everybody to introduce themselves – please keep your introduction to about 30 seconds each as there is lots to talk about
- Please tell us:
 - Your first name
 - What area you live in
 - A little bit about your family and your home (e.g. who's at home)
 - 30 seconds!

Personal asset scenarios (30 minutes)

For the first group, you might want to keep this to 20 minutes and pick just 2-3 items to discuss, to allow more time to cover all 4 of the scenarios

So, you all took a look at the task we sent through. We asked you to think about a few different items that typically need to be maintained and sometimes replaced.

- How did you feel, when you saw those questions? How about when you answered them? Feel free to throw out quick words for those feelings
 - *Acknowledge emotions named and ask opinions of the wider group*
 - *Draw up list of emotions on screen*
 - Did anyone learn anything about themselves, from their answers?

We're going to work through those four different items that we asked you to think about. Let's start with the mobile phone.

- What does 'maintaining' mean in the context of this item?
 - Have you done maintenance on this before? How do you 'maintain' this item?
- What sort of condition are you happy with?
 - Does it need to be in perfect working order, pristine, or are you content to use it for a while with some functions not working? What functions can you live without?
 - *Adjust language according to asset – e.g. boiler – efficient etc*
- We've noted a few things you might do, as part of maintaining your mobile phone. How often do you do these things?
 - When was the last time you did any maintenance? What prompted it?
 - *Probe: Regularly? Once in a long while? When it becomes unreliable? When it's stopped working in the way you want to? When it's completely stopped working?*
- And let's talk about the different things that might affect how often you carry out maintenance to your mobile phone
 - What are the factors that come to mind for you?
 - *Probe if not mentioned on: cost of item when it was bought, cost of a replacement, how much money respondent has available at the time, the time of year*
- Would you sum up the way you maintain your mobile phone as more proactive, or more reactive?

Every once in a while, most people will replace their mobile phone.

- Let's talk about the sort of situation in which you'd envisage replacing your mobile
 - *Probe: As soon as you'd had it for a certain amount of time, as soon as there was anything at all wrong, or when you absolutely had to?*

- How many times would you anticipate getting this item repaired, before you replaced it?
- Have you replaced your phone recently? What prompted that?
- How does the way you feel about replacing it, differ from the feeling you had about maintaining it? Tell me a bit about that
- What would you do with the old one?
 - *Probe: Scrap, give away, sell on, recycle?*
- And let's talk about the different things that might affect whether you go ahead and replace your mobile phone, or wait a bit longer
 - What are the factors that come to mind for you?
 - *Probe if not mentioned on: cost of item when it was bought, cost of a replacement, how much money respondent has available at the time, the time of year*
- Would you describe yourself as more proactive, or more reactive, when it comes to replacing your phone?
 - What does this say about you as an individual?

Moderator works through other items, rotating order across the 4 focus groups

Let's sum up this part of the discussion by lining these 4 different items up together and comparing them.

Moderator shares Ppt stimulus with images of the 4 items and 4 scales running left to right – most important to least important

Group works together to order the items from most to least importance when it comes to:

- Keeping it in good condition as a priority
- Making financial sacrifices to get it repaired
- Replacing it when it's starting to let you down

The United Utilities asset base (10 mins)

As well as the grid of questions, we gave you some material to read in the pre-task, about the sorts of assets that United Utilities owns and needs to maintain.

- *Read out relevant text from pre-task*
- What's your reaction to the information I've just read out?
 - Had you thought about this before we sent you the pre-task?
 - Were you surprised to hear that United Utilities is responsible for any of these assets?
 - Were you surprised about the scale of the assets?
- When we discussed items like your car, your boiler, your mobile phone and so on, we came to the conclusion that you're more proactive about keeping some of them in great condition, and more reactive with others – you only repair or replace them when you really need to
- Obviously the items in question are very different from your car or your roof! But broadly speaking, do you feel like United Utilities needs to make similar choices, or is its situation and the things that influence them quite different?
- Among those different assets I described, what do you think United Utilities prioritises?
 - What does prioritising them mean, in practice?
 - Why do you think it prioritises them?

- What do you think the main factors that United Utilities has to take into consideration are, when it weighs up how to use money on maintenance?
 - *Probe: cost of asset maintenance/ replacement, original purchase cost of asset, amount of budget available at that point in time, general role/ importance of asset in infrastructure, number of people affected by decision, potential negative consequences of not maintaining/ replacing*

Exploring the scenarios (25 mins)

Scenarios to cover in each group.

Following this model, there will always be one scenario that's covered in all 4 groups – worth asking the client if there is one scenario they're especially keen to get feedback on

Group	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
1	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	
3		X	X	X
4	X		X	X

Need to explain here that we've got several different scenarios to show them – we'll take a look at each and then discuss together how we'd use resources to address some of the problems

Moderator read out scenario and give participants a few moments to absorb – present scenario on screen

- Imagine you live in the area described in the scenario. How do you feel about the situation described here?
- What do you see as the potential consequences of the scenario?
- How important do you think it is that the situation is addressed?
- For you, what are the most important considerations, among those we've outlined on the screen?
- Very broadly, does this feel to you like a case where the assets need to be maintained, or replaced?
- I'll give you all 30 seconds, then I'll go round each of you in turn

- It's absolutely fine if you don't reach a consensus on these next questions! I'm interested in hearing how similar or differently you think, and what's behind your thinking

- Imagining you only had 75% of the budget that you'd need, to pay for the most expensive option, which solution(s) would you choose?

- What's behind that recommendation?
 - *If not mentioned, probe on: cost of maintenance/ replacement, original purchase cost of asset, amount of budget available at that point in time, general role/ importance of asset in infrastructure, number of people affected by decision, potential negative consequences of not maintaining/ replacing*
- What could United Utilities do, to access more money and pay for more of the options? Should it do that here?



Move onto next scenario until all are covered

Recap and impact on costs (10 mins)

Moderator lines up all scenarios on screen to remind participants what they are

Probably some more reassurance here that they're all hypothetical scenarios and there are no right or wrong answers – nobody will judge you for thinking that one's less important than another

- Which is the most important scenario to rectify?
- Which one should United Utilities be prepared to spend the most money on? Why is that?
- We could build in an exercise here where you give the group enough budget to pay for 6 or 7 pound signs across the scenarios they've seen. How do they spend them? Nail 1 or 2 bigger problems or make sure some steps are taken to address every scenario?
 - Though they may not be mutually exclusive, but it may help to understand what types of maintenance they would prefer you focus on
- Willingness to pay for different approaches to asset management
 - Can we check in on £ per bill once you've had chance to review
- Overall views on bill impact

Wrap-up and thanks (5 mins)

Thanks again for giving up your time to take part in the research!

Moderator checks for client questions

Any final comments or things you'd like United Utilities to bear in mind, as it makes decisions about maintaining its asset base?

THANK AND CLOSE

