Men's Shed User Survey

Results

In order to provide a basic quantitative assessment of the Westhill Men's Shed, I conducted a short survey amongst the main participants (n=34) over a three week period, from Monday 18th August 2014 to Friday 5th September 2014 (by 'main participants', I refer to those who attended the Men's Shed during this time period; whilst there were a couple of notable omissions, it is unlikely that any of the core group would not attend for three weeks in a row, and therefore it is reasonable to state that the vast majority were granted the opportunity to take the survey). The survey was anonymous, and began by asking for basic demographic information about the respondent, before moving onto their attendance level and purpose for coming to the Men's Shed, and then utilised a seven-level Likert response format (the kind in which answers available are 'strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree') to assess the means by which their attendance had impacted upon their lives, as well as what they think about certain aspects of the Men's Shed. Finally, the survey enquired as to how the Men's Shed could be improved. Scattered throughout were written-answer questions designed to elicit additional thoughts on certain survey items, though unfortunately these were not well answered. It should be noted that I am not, by training or compulsion, a quantitative researcher, and I am not particularly skilled in the conduct of survey-based research; the survey conducted therefore provides only basic findings, though taken at face value, they can be considered to reflect very positively on the Men's Shed, and therefore could be of some use in future funding applications, both for the Westhill Men's Shed and for the wider Scottish movement. For the most part, based on both previous research and what I have observed at the Men's Shed, I would say that responses were as expected, though there were a few slight surprises that could form the basis for action going forward.

Demographics

According to information provided in the survey, the Men's Shed has been attended almost exclusively by men between the ages of 60 and 79 (82%). All respondents had been married at some point in their lives, and the majority (82%) remained so, and likewise, the majority (82%) were fully retired. What can be said from this is that the majority of participants at the Men's Shed are retired men in late-middle to early-older age who live with their wives. Only 53% reported living within 0 to 2 miles of the Men's Shed however, whilst 47% lived 2 or more miles away; whilst this does suggest a degree of dedication on the part of those who have to travel to the Men's Shed, respondent 24 did note that "I wish there were more Sheds so I wouldn't have to travel so far to the Shed or have the option of using various Sheds and the uniqueness of what they could offer", suggesting that attendance at the Westhill site may decline somewhat as other Men's Shed open around Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.

Attendance and Reasons for Attendance

Visitor numbers to the Men's Shed have been impressive over the course of the opening period, as the following graph detailing monthly (4-weekly) visitor numbers
demonstrates; note the consistent upward trend over the first 18 months, and the levelling out thereafter.

At the end of the 22nd month of opening, the average monthly visitor number stood at 222 (55.6 per week, or 18.5 per day [Monday average = 15.5, Wednesday average = 14.9, Friday average = 25.3]), and the Men's Shed welcomed its 5000th 'official' visitor in terms of overall footfall (in terms of unique visitors, n=500); each of these figures are likely to be slightly higher in real life, as although signing in has improved greatly, there remains some who forget. Regarding respondent's attendance, the largest group (56%) reported attending the Men's Shed on average once per week, 36% reported attending twice a week or more, and 9% reported once fortnightly or less. Regarding the average length of time spent per session, 50% reported 1 to 3 hours, 44% reported more than 3 hours, and 6% reported staying less than an hour. Taking the total attendance at the Men's Shed over the entirety of the opening period (for convenience, the slightly conservative figure of 5000), and assuming the 6% who stayed for less than an hour stayed for 30 minutes, the 50% who stayed between 1 and 3 hours stayed for 2 hours, and the 44% who stayed for over three hours stayed for 4 hours, it can thus be stated that the Men's Shed has provided 13950 hours of social interaction and focused recreational activity for participants since opening (this is of course a rough estimate, though even if the lowest possible figures are used, the calculations still yield a total of over 10000 hours, still an impressive figure). Regarding the amount of time respondents had participated at the Men's Shed, 59% reported 13 months or more, 32% reported 7 to 12 months, and 9% reported 0 to 6 months. Whilst this does suggest a high degree of 'loyalty' on the part of participants, it is perhaps slightly worrying, in terms of attracting new participants, that so few respondents are relative newcomers.

Regarding the reasons participants attended the Men's Shed, 65% reported socialising as one of their three given options. The next highest categories, both of which received 29%, were to use tools not available at home, and to work on personal projects, and the third highest, at 21% was the games and hobbies.
category (although the anonymity of the survey prevents certainty, this was very likely to have been members of the bridge club).

On this question, respondents were ‘forced’ to select only the three answers they felt most aligned with their reasons for attending the Men's Shed; for example, it can be seen that 22 out of the 34 respondents gave 'socialising' as one of their three reasons. It may be noted that the overall number of responses to this question number only 90, when they should number 102 (34 x 3 = 102); unfortunately, 4 respondents gave more than 3 answers, and their responses had to be discounted, as there was no way to tell which, if any, would have been their top 3 (though it can be said that 3 of these respondents noted socialising as one of their reasons, which would raise the total figure to 25, or 74%). The fact that socialising received more than double the next most frequent response suggests that the social function of the Men's Shed, allowing participants to make new friends they are comfortable to spend time with, is extremely important; as respondent 24 put it, "I have seen new friendships formed, skills shared, lots of laughter and banter... I have heard amazing stories of men's lives and look forward to going to the Shed". Finally, 94% of respondents stated that they had either spoken about or recommended the Men's Shed to other men, and this is encouraging, given that word of mouth is important in establishing the membership of a Men's Shed.

**Benefits of the Men's Shed**

The Likert response format questions, in which statements regarding the participant and the Men's Shed were presented and the degree of agreement or disagreement was sought, were mainly designed to assess, in the simplest terms, the benefits of the Men's Shed as perceived by participants, with questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8 focusing on this issue. The Likert response format was utilised as it is easy to understand, being quite familiar to most people, and because the answers can be easily interpreted. It generates ordinal level data, meaning that it can be ranked, though the distance between each ranking is not known (for example, the distance between 'agree' and 'strongly agree' is not known). Note that each statement regarding the benefits experienced by participants makes reference to the respondents presence at the Men's Shed specifically, therefore they only enquire as
to the effect of the Men's Shed (as in statement 1, 'I have learned new skills at the Men's Shed', not 'I have learned new skills, potentially outwith the Men's Shed, during the time I have been a participant'), which is the independent variable, on the dependent variable (for example, learning new skills, making friends, feeling respected). Also note that these questions mainly concern elements external to the individual, as opposed to their internal feelings. It is assumed, quite validly I believe, that, for example, making new friends or learning new skills is a positive thing for a man to do; one need only consult prior, and more in-depth, research to find a convincing case that this is so. Results were as follows;

**Statement 1: I have learned new skills at the Men's Shed**

![Pilot Study Results - Statement 1](image1.png)

**Statement 2: I have learned about my health at the Men's Shed**

![Pilot Study Results - Statement 2](image2.png)

**Statement 3: I have made new friends at the Men's Shed**

![Pilot Study Results - Statement 3](image3.png)
Statement 5: The Men's Shed gives me a chance to use my skills to help others

Statement 6: I feel respected at the Men's Shed

Statement 8: The Men's Shed has improved my life
As can be seen from these results, it appears that in the vast majority of cases, the Men's Shed has generated tangible benefits for participants; 68% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 1, whilst 83% agreed at least somewhat. 56% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 2, whilst 65% agreed at least somewhat. 94% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 3, whilst 100% agreed at least somewhat. 82% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 4, whilst 88% agreed at least somewhat. 83% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 5, whilst 92% agreed at least somewhat. 62% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statement 6, whilst 77% agreed at least somewhat. The modal response (most frequently occurring response) to each statement was 'agree'. The primary benefit appears to be the establishment of new friendships (statement 3), with every respondent at least somewhat agreeing that they had made new friends at the Men's Shed, which is in line with the finding above that 65% of participants noted socialising as one of their reasons for attending; as respondent 2 put it, "all the members appear [to be] helpful and friendly, all are willing to share experiences and knowledge, and all seem to enjoy a chat...just to chat and communicate with like-minded people is good". For respondent 13, the Men's Shed provided a "good environment in which to relax", whilst for respondent 29, "the happy atmosphere says it all". There was also significant agreement with statements 1 and 5; as respondent 15 put it, "men [are] delighted to use their skills again and pass on/train others", highlighting the environment of informal teaching and learning that exists at the Men's Shed. The least agreed upon statement was number 2, focusing on the bolstering of health knowledge at the Men's Shed. Although the majority at least somewhat agreed (as respondent 24 typically put it, "I have learnt more about my physical health (prostate) and about strokes"), there is also a greater skew towards disagreement, with a significant minority (36%) not agreeing. This could be down to the small sample size, for example, the bridge club, from which 7 participants conducted the survey, amounted to 21% of respondents, and it is unlikely that they have learned about their health at the Men's Shed, given that they have not sought to expand upon their attendance other than playing bridge. However, this finding, as well as others, for example, that 24% neither agreed nor disagreed with statement 8 concerning whether the Men's Shed had improved their lives, does suggest an honesty to the responses that challenges any accusation of social desirability bias (see below).
Regarding those statements that focused on perceptions of the Men's Shed itself, rather than on what the individual was gaining from their participation, there was again a high degree of satisfaction expressed. Statement 4, 'I am happy with the variety of projects available at the Men's Shed' enquired as to participant's satisfaction with the choice of workshop projects they could engage in; 91% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed, with no disagreements. Respondents also particularly stated the satisfaction gained through community projects, with respondent 32 noting that "helping the community (especially charities) makes me feel good about myself", whilst respondent 24 had "seen the pride in the men when they have handed over their community projects". Statement 7, 'the Men's Shed is managed in an open and democratic fashion', focused on participant's perceptions of the management of the Men's Shed; 85% either agreed or strongly agreed, again with no disagreements, though respondent 16, reflecting on this point, did note that "whilst we do not wish for bosses, we do need authorised people for various projects. It's nice to do what you want but that cannot always be achieved. We must work together to work in harmony". Respondent 7 also noted that "communication seems lacking, therefore men come to the Shed to on their projects not really knowing what else is happening". Whilst a lack of communication and organisation was a consistent complaint amongst certain participants in the early stages of opening, particularly contact between the board and participants, I have observed improvements in this area as more formal procedures have gradually been implemented, though clearly there is still an issue in certain respondent's minds; as I have suggested in previous reports though, a degree of crossed wires is somewhat of an inevitability in an organisation such as the Men's Shed.

When utilising Likert response items, the accusation of social desirability bias can be made; this refers to respondents answering questions in a manner they perceive to be socially desirable, for example, those responding to a survey may answer according to what they perceive to be the questioner's desired response, or to avoid 'incriminating' themselves. Of relevance to the current survey is the first instance, for example, considering statement 8, 'the Men's Shed has improved my life', participants may have felt as though answering in the affirmative was the desired response, given their consideration of the purpose of the survey. At the beginning of the survey, it was stated that "the results will also help us justify future funding applications to keep the Shed going", and this may have influenced participants to over-exaggerate their experience of the benefits of the Men's Shed, if they felt that doing so could potentially contribute to the generation of extra funding. Whilst it is impossible to tell for certain the degree to which this bias is present in the responses, I would state that the results obtained appear to align quite closely with my own observations over the past 20 months; the fact of the matter is that participants have made new friends at the Men's Shed, they have learned new skills, they have shared their skills with others, and they have discussed how the Men's Shed has improved their lives; I have seen this with my own eyes, and heard it many times. Likewise, I have seen and heard from men who merely utilise the Men's Shed as an enjoyable pastime, rather than seeking anything more from it, and this is reflected in the findings. I would thus state that the results presented here validate my own observations, and my own observations validate the results presented here. Other forms of potential bias present in survey research include central tendency bias, a tendency to respond down the middle, in this case, the neutral category, 'neither agree nor disagree', though this does not appear to be an issue here, and the
extreme response bias, whereby extreme responses (either strongly disagree or strongly agree in the current survey) are preferred, though again, this does not appear to be an issue here.

**Looking Forward**

On improvements that could be made at the Men's Shed, the largest group (47%) expressed a preference for more formal teaching sessions. The second largest group (26%) stated that no improvements that could be made, whilst the third largest (24%) expressed a preference for a wider variety of social events. Smaller groups also supported a wider variety of projects (9%, in line with the strong agreement with statement question 4 above, 'I am happy with the variety of projects available at the Men's Shed') and a wider variety of tools (12%), which suggests that what is currently on offer at the Men's Shed, in terms of available tools and projects, is acceptable to the majority of participants. However, that just under half of respondents expressed a preference for more formal teaching sessions was somewhat of a surprise on my part, as it was not something that I had heard being talked about much at the Men's Shed, though bearing in mind the small sample size, it should be noted that 47% of respondents only amounts to 16 men, and no indication of the content of the desired formal classes is given. Nevertheless, this is an interesting finding that could be followed up upon. On the issue of longer opening hours, the largest group (35%) felt that no additional opening hours were necessary. The second largest group (32%) noted Wednesday daytime as a possible extension, and there was smaller support for Tuesday (21%), Monday evening (12%), and Thursday (12%). Wednesday daytime thus appears to be the obvious choice as far as extended opening hours goes. On both of these potential improvements though, as respondent 16 put it, "you have to have personnel to carry all these things through", and it has to be worked out whether it would actually be worthwhile, given the relatively small numbers of men indicating that they sought any particular improvements.

On the point of charging participants to use the Men's Shed, a majority of respondents (85%) stated that they would still be interested in attending the Men's Shed if a fee were charged for entry, either on a per session or per year basis. On the former, a price range between £1.00 and £2.00 was suggested by all respondents (mean = £1.60), whilst on the latter, the range of suggested fees went from £15.00 to £50.00 (mean = £31.50). This suggests that the majority of participants would continue to attend should a fee system be implemented, and therefore it would be a viable option if, in what is currently an unlikely scenario given the continual financial success of the Men's Shed, it were required. However, whilst there was a vast majority in favour of fees, those who disagreed took the time to express their disagreements in writing, for example, respondent 23 stated "I would not be in favour of a fee basis", whilst respondent 32 believed "the Shed should be free and as available to as many people as possible". Respondent 29 was in favour of a per session fee, but questioned whether a one-off yearly payment might be too much to ask from participants. The fact that those individuals who were against a fee system took the time to not only tick the box, but also express their concerns in writing, suggests that its implementation would greatly upset, and likely stop the attendance of, a small minority. There are of course arguments on both side of this debate that I will not go into here, but the survey result does suggest that a fee
system, priced correctly, would not adversely reduce participation to any significant degree, at least amongst respondents to the survey.

**Conclusion**

This survey, though very basic, does set out in an easily understandable fashion what I think everyone involved with the Men's Shed already knows; that is, the Men's Shed provides a welcoming and invigorating space in which mainly older and retired men are afforded the opportunity to make new friends with like-minded others, to learn from their experiences and share their own, and should they wish to, learn about their health as well, all of which ultimately contribute to living a healthy and fulfilling retirement. On possible changes to the Westhill Men's Shed, this survey can only act to indicate the mood of participants, and it appears that the vast majority of participants are quite happy with what is currently on offer, in terms of the variety of activities available and the tools to carry them out, though the support expressed for more formal teaching sessions does suggest an area which could be improved upon. There was not overwhelming support for additional opening hours, with the most supported potential addition being Wednesday daytime; as has been suggested to me, the Men's Shed has been open for a substantial period of time, and it may be the case that participants have come to structure their week around the standard opening times, and opening on Wednesday daytime may not impact as much upon this as other days would. The finding that the vast majority would be happy to pay an entry fee both underlines the satisfaction respondents expressed throughout the survey, and suggests that this could be a viable option in the future if it were ever required. As it stands though, participants are largely happy with what is on offer at the Men's Shed, and understand their involvement as benefitting their lives, confirming the successful achievement of the goals of the organisation so far. In terms of applying for future funding at the Westhill Men's Shed, the results of this basic survey may be useful, both because they strongly suggest that participant's are gaining these tangible benefits from their involvement, and because the conduct of the survey demonstrates a degree of initiative on the part of the organisation, making it clear that the management team are concerned to assess and further progress what they and participants have created.