

Crunch time for jobs

The UK's unemployment rate has remained lower than it was at the same stage in the recessions of the 80s and 90s. *Understanding Society* collected information throughout 2009, the peak of the recession, and will continue to collect information to enable researchers to look at how people's lives are being affected by the economic crisis.

Dr Mark Taylor has taken a first look at the information collected about the current jobs market. He found that around 70% of both men and women of working age are in work. More men than women are in full-time (rather than part-time) work and in self-employment. He also found that the construction, wholesale/retail and hospitality sectors have been hardest hit.

The research shows there is a particular group of young people who don't have a job nor are they in any form of education or training. 40% of people aged under 25 who were not in education were in this group indicating that a large proportion of young people may struggle to find long-lasting stable employment in the future especially if the economic situation does not improve soon.



From one generation to another

On average, around 4 out of 10 adults have a higher level of education than their parents. A similar proportion of adults have around the same level of education as their parents, whilst just 2 out of 10 have a lower level – although many of these are people who have not yet completed their education.

The proportion of people who have more educational qualifications than their parents decreases with age, reflecting the expansion of university-level education since the 1960s. Education makes a difference to employment as well. One third of people with no job have more qualifications than their parents compared with more than half of the people who do have a job.

Another area of life which is different between the generations is the practice of living together before marriage. Just over 7 in 10 of those aged 25-34 cohabited before they married. That figure decreases with age to just 13% of those aged 65 or older.

There is also a large difference between those in England, Scotland and Wales where around 40-45% live together before marriage and Northern Ireland, where the figure is around a quarter.

71%
25-34

66%
35-44

47%
45-54

26%
55-64

13%
65+

Keep in touch

Thanks again for taking part in *Understanding Society*. We hope you think these early findings from the survey are as interesting as we do. If you want to know more about the survey you've helped with or about these and other findings, take a look at the website at www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants where you can also update your details if they have changed.

We are always very pleased to hear from you. You can call the *Understanding Society* team on **0800 252 853**. Colette Lo and Sandra Jones will try to answer any questions you might have.

You can also email us at understandingsociety@essex.ac.uk

Or you can write to us at

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Understanding Society is an initiative by the Economic and Social Research Council, with scientific leadership by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, and survey delivery by the National Centre for Social Research.



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Participants' Update

Providing valuable new evidence about people's lives, behaviours and beliefs in the UK



Findings from Understanding Society

What you tell us matters! To thank you for taking the time to participate in this really valuable and important survey, we want you to be the first to know about what we have found out. If you want to know more, please take a look at the special website we have created for you and all the other people who are taking part at www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants. While you're on the website, why not log-on to check and update your details. If you have moved address and you tell us your new address details, we'll send you £5 as a thank you for keeping us up to date.

When we interviewed you recently, we asked you lots of different questions about your health, how you get on with members of your family and how much you spend on groceries. All your responses have been looked at by our specialist team of researchers at the University of Essex to see what they tell us about life in the UK today. Here are some of the things they have found so far that we thought you might find interesting.

For more details about any of the findings in this report, please go to www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants.

Getting on with the family

One of the special aspects of *Understanding Society* is that we talk to everyone in your household over the age of 10. This means we are able to look at relationships such as those between partners or parents and children. We can also look at what difference it makes when someone leaves home or comes to live with you – for example if someone dies or gets married.

Our research team has found that many of us grow less and less happy with our partner over time. Women are, on average, less happy in their relationships than men. People who are married are happier with their partner than those who are simply living together.

Childless couples tend to be happiest with their

relationships, and those with pre-school children are least happy – although levels of happiness rise as the youngest child grows older. This suggests that although having a child can put a strain on a relationship, this is temporary.

Children who don't quarrel with either parent more than once a week, and who discuss important matters with either parent at least occasionally tend to be happiest, as are children who eat an evening meal with their family.



Feeling ok?



The population of the UK is changing, increasing as well as getting older. *Understanding Society* allows researchers to follow you and others like you as you get older, as your health changes and as you experience different health issues.

Professor Amanda Sacker and Dr Cara Booker have analysed some of the health information on the survey. Around half of you rate your health as excellent or very good. There's no difference between men and women, but unsurprisingly the older we get the more likely we are to report suffering with our health.

Just over one in ten people of working age told us they had a long-term illness that had

troubled them for at least a year, and almost two in ten had a long-term illness that limited what they were able to do. However, people with a long-term illness were just as likely to be working than those without – around three quarters of each group were in work. Those with a long-term illness that limited their activity, though, were much less likely to be working – with just one half being in work.

With lots of discussion going on about increasing the age at which we can retire and claim our state pension, our team of health researchers took a look at people who were above the current retirement age but below the age of 70 and found that of those who were not working, 43% had a limiting long-term illness. This suggests that whilst the majority of you who are retired *could* be employed, there would still be a large minority of people unable to work.

Food and drink

In 2009 we asked you about how much your household spent on food eaten at home, food bought outside the home and alcohol. In 2010, we repeated this question. This is useful for researchers who are looking at how much income people receive as well as what they spend. Asking the same question again also helps researchers see how our spending habits have changed and judge what impact the recession is having.

We asked how much your household spent every month on food and groceries from food shops or markets. The average amount was £305 in 2010. Households in England spent a little more, on average, on food shopping (£311) and Scotland (£276) and Wales (£264) spent less than average. The 2010 figure was an increase of £26 from the average in 2009.

Looking at changes between 2009 and 2010, the biggest increase was in England, where households were spending £30 more than they had been one year earlier. In Scotland and Wales, households were spending around £13-14 more. Spending in Northern Ireland hardly changed over the year.

We asked about money spent on food outside the home, such as in

restaurants, cafes and takeaways. The UK average was £68 per month, but Welsh households tended to spend less, around £55 per month. Finally, we asked about spending on alcohol. The UK average was around £45 per month, down £5 from 2009. The figure for England was close to the average, with Welsh and Scottish households spending less (around £38) and households in Northern Ireland spending more (£52). All areas of the UK saw less spending on alcohol in 2010 than 2009, especially Scotland where households spent on average £11.50 less per month.

