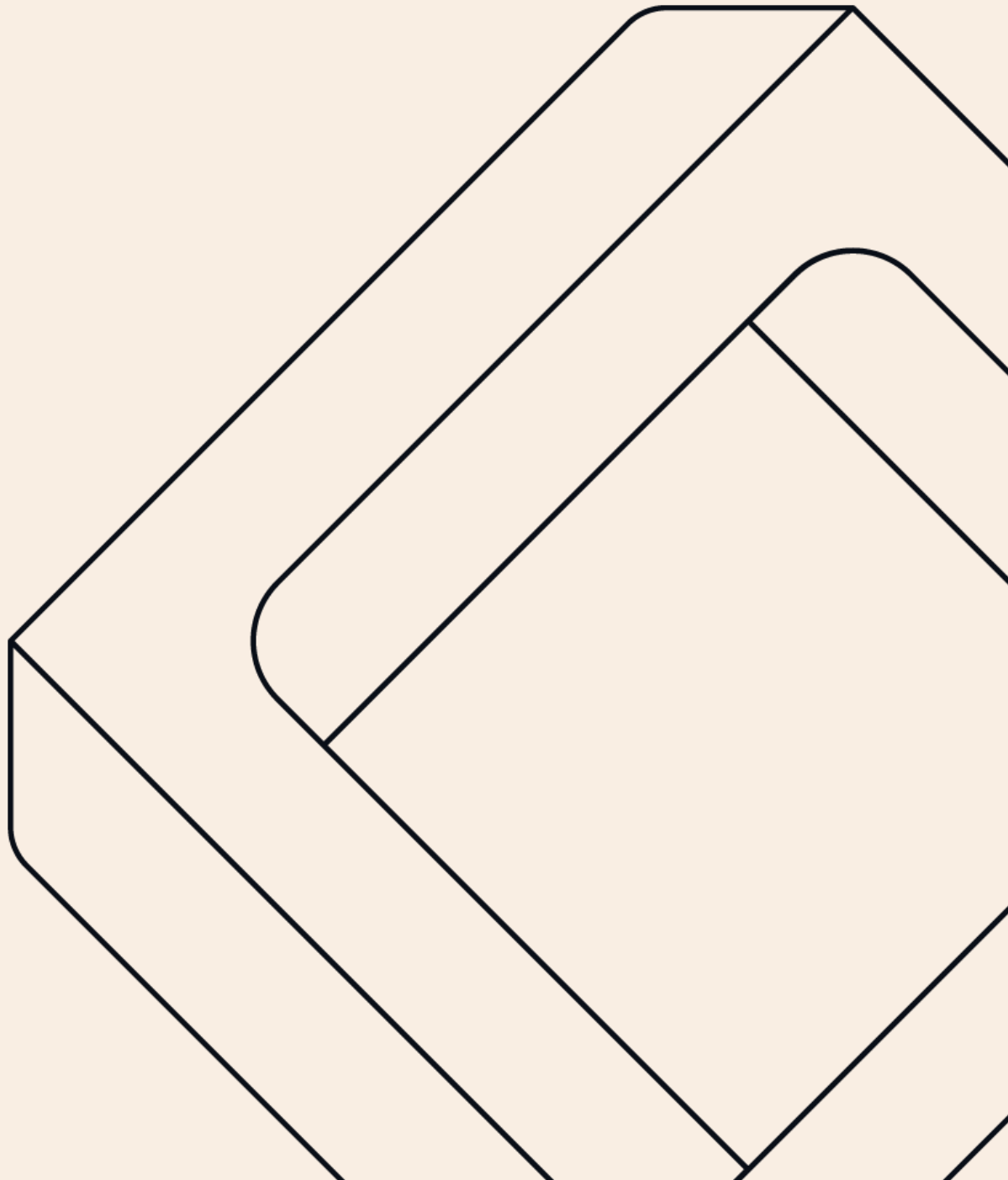


Understanding Society: Wave 15 technical report

August 2025



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Introduction

The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) is known to sample members as Understanding Society. This major longitudinal household panel survey started in 2009, and is the largest study of its kind, with around 40,000 households interviewed at Wave 1. The study collects data from household members aged 10 and above on an annual basis.

It is commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and led by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex.

This report gives details of wave 15 of Understanding Society, which was undertaken by Verian and NatCen Social Research, working in consortium.

Overview of methodology

Households were issued in 24 monthly batches, starting in January 2023, with all households being issued in the same quarter as they were in previous waves. The sample was separated into two issue modes: 'CAWI first' and 'CAPI first'. The vast majority of households (89%) were issued CAWI first, and 11% were CAPI first. The allocation of households to issue mode was done by ISER.

Amongst the CAWI first sample, any households that did not complete online were issued to an interviewer to be interviewed face-to-face, although interviewers were also able to offer telephone interviews as an option.

Survey elements

As with previous waves, there were a number of different elements to the study:

- A household enumeration questionnaire, completed once per household to confirm who is currently living there;
- A household questionnaire, completed once per household to gather some household level information;
- An individual questionnaire, completed by anyone aged 16 or more in each household;
- A paper self-completion questionnaire, completed by children aged 10 to 15;
- Consents for linking to administrative records.

The median questionnaire lengths were 3 minutes and 29 seconds for the household enumeration grid, 10 minutes and 59 seconds for the household questionnaire, and 40 minutes and 3 seconds for the individual interview.

Survey content

The wave 15 survey covered many topics, including some sets of questions that are asked every year, and other 'rotating' content that had been included in some previous waves but not all. A full list of modules included in the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Outputs

Data from Understanding Society is deposited at the UK Data Archive after each wave is completed. As more completed waves of data have become available the number of research projects using Understanding Society data have increased. The latest publications, working papers and media coverage of Understanding Society are available on the study website (www.understandingsociety.ac.uk).

1 Fieldwork design

This section gives details of the sample that was issued at wave 15 and the overall fieldwork design.

1.1 Allocation to issue mode

The majority of households were issued web first, but a small proportion were issued CAPI first. This allocation to issue mode was done by ISER. ISER used a model to identify the 10% of households least like to respond online and these were allocated to CAPI first. The remaining households were then allocated to CAWI first.¹

1.2 Sample

The majority of Understanding Society sample was selected at wave 1, for details of how this was done please refer to the wave 1 technical report. Since wave 1 some households have dropped out of the study, either due to adamantly refusing, continuous non-participation, or moving to an unknown location. Additional households have also been created where households have split, for example, where grown up children have moved out of their parents' home. Additional sample was introduced to the study as part of an immigrant and ethnic minority boost (IEMB), conducted alongside Wave 6 of Understanding Society, for further details please refer to the IEMB technical report. This IEMB sample was incorporated into the main part of the study for the first time at Wave 7. Alongside wave 14 there was a large general population boost (GPS2). This was a UK-wide selection of new households to be added to the study. Households that responded to this at wave 14 were incorporated into the main sample for wave 15.

The total number of 'active' households issued at wave 15 was 26,694. This included five different sample types:

- The general population sample (GPS), originally sampled at Wave 1 of Understanding Society – 12,723 GP households were issued at wave 15
- The ethnic minority boost (EMB) sample, originally sampled at Wave 1 of Understanding Society – 1,584 EMB households were issued at wave 15

¹ After this a small number of adjustments were made for the sake of practicality. For example, each wave a small number of households are issued to the same address. The most common cause of this is a grown up child moving out of their parents' home (e.g. to attend University) so that a new 'split off' household is created for them. They later move back to their parents' address and inform ISER of this between waves. Therefore, at the next wave, both the original household (containing the parents) and the split off household (containing the grown up child) are issued to the same address. Interviewers are aware of this situation and know how to deal with it so that the two households are merged back together. To ensure this would happen any households issued to the same address were issued CAPI first. This meant 10.7% of households were issued CAPI first.

- The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (NIHPS) samples that were incorporated into Understanding Society at wave 2 – 4,427 BHPS/NIHPS households were issued at wave 15
- The immigrant and ethnic minority boost (IEMB) sample, originally sampled at wave 6 of Understanding Society – 1,295 IEMB households were issued at wave 15.
- The GPS2 general population sample, originally sampled at wave 14 of Understanding Society – 6,665 GPS2 households were issued at wave 15.
-

The BHPS/NIHPS sample was all issued in year 1 of fieldwork, and the IEMB sample all issued in year 2.

The number of individuals in the issued sample is shown in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Number of individuals in the issued sample

Sample type	Adults (16+)	10-15s	Under 10s
GPS	24,220	2,097	2,187
EMB	3,999	502	498
BHPS/NIHPS	8,480	720	796
IEMB	3,039	471	431
GPS2	12,369	1,089	1,501

1.2.1 CATI only sample

Within the sample, there were a small number of issued households (n=133) who had previously indicated they would prefer to take part by phone. If these households did not complete online they were issued to an interviewer to contact and interview by telephone only.

1.3 Fieldwork structure

Sample was provided to Verian in eight quarterly batches. This ensured each household was issued in the same quarter as it had been at previous waves. Each quarterly sample was then split into three roughly evenly sized monthly batches. Sample was then issued to field in 24 monthly batches, the first in January 2023 and the last in December 2024.

Where households were issued to the same address as the previous wave they were allocated to the same sample point and each sample point was usually issued in the same month as it had been at wave 14.

1.3.1 Fieldwork timings

The CAWI first sample had an initial web fieldwork period of 5 weeks. At the end of 5 weeks any households that had not completed online were issued to an interviewer. Both the CAWI first and CAPI first sample was issued to interviewers at the same time, 19 weeks before the end of fieldwork.

The web survey remained open throughout fieldwork so the CAWI first sample could still complete online after they had been issued to an interviewer. Once interviewer fieldwork started, interviewers were able to assist with online completion (e.g. re-supplying sample members with their login details and the web survey address) if sample members had a strong preference for completing online rather than by telephone or face-to-face.

Table 1.2 Fieldwork timings

Fieldwork weeks	CAPI first sample	Web first sample
Web fieldwork (5 weeks)	No fieldwork for CAPI first sample	Sample members invited to take part online
Interviewer fieldwork weeks 1 to 10	Assignments with original interviewer - interviewers aimed to have final outcomes for all sample after 10 weeks	Unproductive households issued to interviewers in CATI/CAPI assignments (web survey remains open throughout fieldwork)
Interviewer fieldwork weeks 11 to 19	CAPI/CATI re-issue period ² At the start of week 11 sample members that had not been contacted were sent a letter and email inviting them to complete the web survey	CAPI/CATI re-issue period ³

In reality, there was some flexibility around these timings. Original interviewers could hold on to sample after 10 weeks of fieldwork if there was a good reason to do so. For example if they had made contact with a household and that household were willing to take part but unable to do so until later in fieldwork.

For the last seven months of issued sample (from June 2024 onwards), there was a "CAWI mop up" about 3 weeks before the end of fieldwork. This was when all sample without a final outcome yet (as well as those with an outcome of 'no contact') were sent a letter asking them to take part online. At this point they were also offered an additional £10 incentive for completing in any mode. This was introduced after being shown to increase response on IP16.

² Re-issues were worked predominantly by CAPI, but interviewers were also able to offer CATI interviews at any point during fieldwork.

2 Contact and co-operation

Understanding Society puts much effort into contacting respondents and keeping them engaged with the study. As well as contact for each year's interview, there are also between wave mailings and emails to sample members to feedback findings from the study and encourage people to keep their contact details up to date. This chapter describes the contact strategy for Wave 15, including the between wave mailings.

2.1 Advance mailing

The advance mailing varied a little depending on whether sample members were part of the CAPI first sample or the CAWI first sample.

For the CAPI first sample, all eligible sample members aged 16 or over were sent a letter shortly before the start of face-to-face fieldwork for that month. The letter explained that an interviewer would call soon. A change of address card was attached to the bottom of the letter, and the mailing also included a freepost return envelope for the change of address card.

For the CAWI first sample, all eligible sample members aged 16 or over were sent a letter on the first day of web fieldwork for that month asking them to complete the survey online and providing the web address and their login details for doing so. The letter also explained that, if they were unable to complete the survey online, an interviewer would contact them. The letters also included a change of address card and freepost return envelope. If an email address was available, these sample members were also sent an email with a unique link to start the web survey. Sample members with a mobile phone number in the sample were also sent a link to the survey via SMS.

There were 10 different types of advance letter, depending on individual circumstances, as well as 2 types of letter for new entrants in households completing by web. In part different letter types were to deal with different incentives types and mode types, but they also used slightly different messages tailored to the circumstances. The letter types are shown in table 2.1.

For all addresses in Wales, the letter was sent in both Welsh and English. Individuals who had previously been interviewed in one of the other 8 translated languages (Bengali, Gujarati, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi Gurmukhi, Punjabi Urdu, Turkish, Urdu) were sent a letter in that language.

All letters were designed with Understanding Society branding, and were signed by the Director of Understanding Society. All advance letters were accompanied by an information leaflet, including further details about the study.

Letters were sent to the most up to date address available for each sample member. If a sample member had moved from this address and so did not receive their letter, then interviewers were able to give them a generic copy of the advance letter.

2.1.1 New entrant letters


For the households issued CAWI-first at Wave 15, it was necessary to have a mechanism to contact individuals who had been added to households during household grids done on the web. Letters were sent to these individuals to provide them with their web login details and ask them to take part in the study online. These letters also included a change of address card and freepost return envelope.

Table 2.1: Letter types used at Wave 15 by issue mode

Household type	Adult type	CAPI first	Web first
Responding household at previous wave	Productive adult at Wave 14	Letter 1 (£20 unconditional incentive)	Letter 2 (£20 unconditional incentive)
	Unproductive adult at Wave 14	Letter 3 (£20 conditional incentive)	Letter 4 (£20 conditional incentive)
	Rising 16s ⁴	Letter 7 (£20 unconditional incentive)	Letter 8 (£20 unconditional incentive)
	New entrants	n/a	Letter 11 (£20 conditional incentive)
Unproductive household at previous wave	Adults	Letter 5 (£20 conditional incentive)	Letter 6 (£20 conditional incentive)
	Rising 16s	Letter 9 (£20 conditional incentive)	Letter 10 (£20 conditional incentive)
	New entrants	n/a	Letter 12 (£20 conditional incentive)

⁴ Rising 16s were sample members that had recently turned 16 and were therefore being asked to complete the adult survey for the first time at Wave 15, while in previous years they may have completed the youth paper questionnaire. They received different letters to those who were adults at Wave 14, although the incentives were the same.

Fig 2.1: Example Wave 15 (CAWI first) advance letter, including change of address card



RESP Name
ff_RESP Name
ff_Address1
ff_Address2
ff_Address3
ff_Address4
ff_Address5
ff_PostCode

Participant helpline: 0800 252 853
Web: www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants
Email: contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk
For details of the study's privacy policy, please see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/gpr>

XXXXXXXXXX

Yes, I've moved house:

Name: _____
New address: _____ Postcode: _____
Home Phone (inc STD code): _____ Mobile: _____
Email address: _____ Date of move: _____

Please let us know who will be living with you at your new address. Please list their full names below as we may like to ask them to take part in Understanding Society in the future. If possible, please provide their mobile number.

Name: _____ Mobile: _____
Name: _____ Mobile: _____
Name: _____ Mobile: _____
Name: _____ Mobile: _____

It's time for your Understanding Society interview

Dear RESP_Name

Thank you for being part of Understanding Society. Every time you're interviewed it helps us understand more about life in the UK today.

Interviewing you every year helps us see what's changed and what's stayed the same in your life – this is why we'd like you to complete your interview again this year.

We may also send you a SMS message to your phone with a personalised link to your survey to make it easier for you to access it from your phone. If you are not able to complete your interview in the first week or so, we may send you a reminder in the form of an SMS message.

Thank you for your support

We're very grateful that you take part in Understanding Society. To say thank you we've enclosed a **£20 gift card** which is activated and ready for you to use. If you're able to complete your interview online by **Early_bird_date** we will send you an **extra £10 gift card** as a thank you for completing your survey early.

Have questions or want more information?

Call our participant helpline on 0800 252 853 or email us contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk. We'll be pleased to hear from you and answer any questions you have.

With many thanks,

Professor Michaela Benzeval
Director, Understanding Society.

Taking part
It's easy to complete your survey online – and you don't have to answer all the questions in one go.

- 1 Visit the website**
www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society
- 2 Enter your user name:**
XXXXXX
and password:
XXXXXX
- 3 Answer the questions in your own time.**

If you are not able to complete your interview online, an interviewer will contact you in a few weeks and you can take part in person.

Your continuing participation is very important to us...
...so please let us know if you move to a new home.

You can use the form on the Understanding Society website at www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants

Freephone 0800 252 853

or return this slip in the Freepost envelope (no stamp needed)

If you forward us your new address, we will send you a £5 voucher.

Understanding Society is being conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act. This means your personal details will be kept strictly confidential and you and your household will not be identifiable from the data. 2
262400331 / W15 Letter 2 CAWI

Fig 2.2: Example Wave 15 information leaflet

Building a picture of the UK one interview at a time

Your annual interview

Everyone who takes part in Understanding Society is an individual – your life and experiences are unique. There's no one else in the Study like you and we can't replace your interview with anyone else's.

From across the UK, tens of thousands of individuals take part in Understanding Society and together these interviews help us to build an accurate picture of life in the UK today. Through Understanding Society we can see where people's lives change, what stays the same and the experiences of different generations. It helps us understand which government policies have worked, and which ones haven't, how families and communities change over time and how social and political opinions develop. Understanding Society plays a key role in medical research, helping us better understand health and treat diseases.

In the last year, information from Understanding Society has been used to look at:

- home schooling during the Covid-19 lockdown
- gender equality at work
- how happy children are
- changes in health behaviour
- recruiting and retaining teachers
- the travel needs of older people
- food bank use
- the impact of later life divorce on mental health
- inequalities between generations
- preventing teenage bullying
- the links between air pollution and memory issues

And much, much more. You can find more information about how Understanding Society is being used by looking on our website: www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants

Our participants also tell us that their interview is a chance to reflect on their own life; to take stock and see what's new, or not, each year.

Whatever your reasons for taking part – thank you. Your interview makes a difference.

Understanding Society and confidentiality

We take great care to protect the confidentiality of our participants. Your personal details such as name, address and date of birth are removed from your survey, so that you cannot be identified. Your details are never made available to researchers or other companies who might use them for marketing purposes. However, if you tell us something that makes us worried about your or your children's safety, we may have to discuss this with somebody else as we need to be sure you are safe.

Is my information secure if I do the survey online?

Yes. The information you provide online is secure. You are issued with a unique log-in for the survey. The information you give us is downloaded on to secure servers.

Who checks that Understanding Society keeps information secure?

Understanding Society is compliant with the ISO-27001 data security protocols and procedures, which is an international standard for information security management. We are regularly inspected by an independent auditor as part of our ISO-27001 certification. Our fieldwork partners, NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public, have also achieved ISO-27000 certification.

Is Understanding Society compliant with the GDPR?

Yes. We are compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation
For more information on data security and GDPR go to:
www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/data-confidentiality

Keep in touch with Understanding Society


You can visit our website:
www.understandingsociety.ac.uk

You can contact our participant liaison team by email:
contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk


By Freephone:
0800 252 853

Or write to us:
FREEPOST
RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS
Understanding Society
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester, CO4 3SQ

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[/usociety](https://www.instagram.com/usociety)



Economic and Social Research Council



iSER

1. USOC / Information leaflet to go with letters

2.2 Incentives

The standard incentive amount at Wave 15 was £20 for all adult sample members. The majority of sample members (those that took part at the previous wave, and 'rising 16s' in households that were productive at the previous wave) were sent an unconditional incentive in their advance letter. Adults who had not taken part at the previous wave, rising 16s in households which had not responded at the previous wave, and adults who were new entrants to the study were all given a conditional incentive if they took part in the survey.

In addition to this there was a £10 'early bird bonus' incentive for CAWI first respondents. This was conditional on them completing the web survey in the first five weeks of fieldwork, before households were issued to interviewers.

All unconditional incentives (included in advance letters), and incentives handed out by interviewers were 'Love2Shop' gift cards, that could be used at a variety of shops. For respondents that took part online and were due a conditional incentive (including the £10 'early bird bonus' incentives) they had a choice between being posted a 'Love2Shop' gift card, or being emailed a link to an online portal where they could choose from a selection of e-vouchers.

2.2.1 Youth incentives

Young people aged 10-15 were given a £10 gift card for completing the paper youth self-completion questionnaire. Where the youth questionnaire was posted (as a parent had completed online), the questionnaire and incentive were sent to a parent along with a covering letter asking the parent to pass both the voucher and the questionnaire on to the young person to complete and return in the freepost envelope provided. Where an interviewer completed any CAPI interviews in the household, they would hand out the youth incentives along with the youth paper questionnaire.

2.3 Between wave mailings

A mailing was sent to each household once every six months. This included:

- A covering letter
- A short booklet or postcard highlighting some recent findings from the study
- A change of address card and freepost envelope in which to return it.

The purpose of these mailings was to thank respondents for their participation with the aim of encouraging future participation, and to encourage them to keep ISER informed of any changes of address.

In addition to this, 'likely mover' mailings were sent once a quarter to any adult that had been interviewed in the previous three months and said they expected to move in the next year. These included a letter, a change of address card and a return envelope. The letter asked the sample member to return the change of address card in the event they did move.

2.4 First contact with sample members

Interviewers were instructed to attempt contact with all households within two weeks of the start of fieldwork to minimise the time between sample members receiving their advance letters (or final web reminder letters) and receiving a visit/call from their interviewer.

In most cases, interviewers would attempt first contact by telephone so they could make an appointment to complete the survey. This approach was considered to be both more efficient for interviewers and more convenient for sample members. Where interviewers were not able to make contact by telephone, they would make face-to-face visits to attempt to contact the household.

2.5 Sample information sheets

The majority of information about households and sample members was held electronically on interviewers' encrypted CAPI laptops. However, a sample information sheet was also produced for each household so that interviewers would have some basic information easily to hand. The front page of the sample information sheet included household level information such as: mode allocation (CAPI first or web first); outcome last wave; and the day and time the household questionnaire was completed at the last wave. The back page had individual level information including: first names, ages and genders; outcome at the previous wave; incentive type; and language interviewed in at the last wave.

The sample information sheet also included web login details for each sample member. This was so, if sample members expressed a strong preference for completing online, the interviewer could facilitate this.

2.6 Doorstep documents

Interviewers were provided with a number of materials that they could use on the doorstep to help with contacting sample members and persuading them to take part. All materials were Understanding Society branded. These included:

- **'Interviewer cards'** – these were for interviewers to use as calling cards (if they had called at a household and no one was in), appointment cards and broken appointment cards. Aside from the Understanding Society logo and a freephone number for either Verian or NatCen these cards were blank for interviewers to include their own message or write in appointment details. Interviewers were asked to always include their name on the card and encouraged to include their mobile phone number if they were willing to do so. These cards also included the address of the web survey, and could be used by interviewers to write on web login details if a sample member had expressed a strong preference for completing online.
- **Laminated generic advance letter** – as this was Wave 15 of Understanding Society, and the study branding had remained the same throughout, interviewers found that holding a document with the Understanding Society logo visible when they first attempted contact was useful as sample members would recognise the logo and immediately know why the interviewer was there. This laminated copy of the advance letter was a useful document for interviewers to hold in this situation, it could also be shown to respondents who might not have received their advance letter. Interviewers also had non-laminated copies that they could leave with respondents.
- **'Information for participants' leaflet** – these leaflets included some information about Understanding Society, they were primarily aimed at new entrants to the study but interviewers could also give them to continuing sample members who wanted a bit more information.
- **Case study leaflets** – seventeen of these were produced to be used with respondents who might need a bit of persuading to take part. They emphasised the importance of the study by highlighting a particular policy area, detailing some findings from Understanding Society data in that area, coverage in the media and implications for policy.

3 Movers and tracing

As with any longitudinal study, tracing people who move is a crucial part of maintaining a representative panel. The overall strategy for tracing movers has multiple strands, some of which are undertaken by ISER. These include:

- Providing a change of address card (and freepost return envelope) with mailings to sample members, and at the end of interviews for those that did not receive an advance letter
- Offering multiple options for sample members to update their contact details – posting a change of address card, a freephone telephone number, and through the Understanding Society website
- Offering sample members a £5 gift card in return for updating their address
- Between wave mailings (and corresponding emails) to sample members between fieldwork waves
- During interviews, collecting a variety of contact details (and then verifying these at later waves) including email addresses, mobile and work telephone numbers, and a stable contact
- Interviewer tracing of movers during fieldwork
- Using commercial databases to try to find sample members that are known to have moved.

This chapter focuses on the tracing of movers during fieldwork by interviewers.

When trying to contact households and individuals, interviewers could encounter two different types of move. A whole household move, where none of the sample members were still living at the issued address, and a split off move, where one or more sample members had moved from the issued address, but at least one sample member remained at that address.

3.1 Tracing procedures

Tracing procedures were covered in interviewer briefings, and also detailed in interviewer instructions. Interviewers were instructed to start tracing procedures as soon as they became aware of a household move in order to maximise the time available to trace and then interview sample members.

The methods used by interviewers to trace sample members included asking current occupiers or neighbours, using telephone numbers, and contacting stable contacts. Interviewers were also provided with letters they could use to help with tracing:

- A **tracing letter** – this was for use in situations where the interviewer made contact with someone who did have contact details for a sample member, but was not comfortable giving these to the interviewer. The tracing letter was addressed to the sample member and left with the contact to pass or post to them. This letter asked the sample member to get in touch with ISER with their new contact details.
- A **stable contact letter** – this was for use if interviewers were unable to contact stable contacts by phone or in person, the letter was posted to them. The letter asked stable contacts to get in touch with ISER and provide new contact details for the sample member.

Where interviewers successfully traced a household, they were able to visit the new address straight away if it was in their area. If the new address was further away they would assign the household an outcome code of “moved out of area” and enter the new address in their electronic contact sheet. This would create an update within the sample management system, alerting the sampling team that the household required re-assigning to a new interviewer.

Where interviewers exhausted their tracing options and were unable to find a new address, cases were passed back to ISER for further tracing. This was done via a weekly file, produced throughout fieldwork, which included all individuals that had moved and were untraced. If this second stage of tracing was successful, an address update would be returned to Verian and then re-issued to field.

3.2 Split off households

If an interviewer identified a sample member that had split from their original household, they would attempt to find a new address for that sample member in the same ways used for whole households moves, although in many cases the remaining household members were able to provide a new address for the person that had moved out. Where interviewers found a new address, they entered this in the electronic contact sheet. This then caused an update in the sample management system, and a new household was created for that individual, then issued to field.

3.3 Institutions

With the exception of those that were in prison, sample members who had moved to an institution remained eligible for interview at their new address. Interviewers were instructed to attempt to interview participants where possible, but briefed about the need to contact gatekeepers in advance in some circumstances, and also about allowing for sensitivities relating the reasons for the participants moving into an institution (for example a nursing home).

4 Translations

At Wave 15 the questionnaire was translated into nine different languages to help the survey be inclusive of people that would otherwise be unable to take part, in particular those in ethnic minority groups. For other languages, interviewers could still attempt to interview people, but would use someone else in the household to translate.

Both the web and CAPI version of the questionnaire was translated, so translated interviews could be conducted in any mode⁵.

4.1 Formal translations

For the nine translated languages, core survey materials and the questionnaire script were translated into these languages. Most translated interviews were done online. Where a CAPI or CATI translated interview was required, the interview was conducted in translation either by an interviewer that had been accredited in that language, or by an interviewer accompanied by an interpreter. When interviewing by telephone, using an interpreter was not a viable option, so translated interviews were conducted by an accredited interviewer.

The table below shows the nine languages in which the translated script and materials were available, and also the number of individual interviews conducted in that language.

Table 4.1: Number of translated interviews conducted in each language

Language	No. individual interviews
Bengali	6
Gujarati	4
Polish	21
Portuguese	0
Punjabi Gurmukhi	0
Punjabi Urdu	0
Turkish	0
Urdu	5
Welsh	4

⁵ The CATI version of the questionnaire was not translated, but interviewers were able to do a translated interview over the telephone using the CAPI questionnaire with some small adaptations (e.g. reading out response lists rather than using a showcard).

4.1.1 Accreditation of interviewers

In order to conduct interviews in translation, interviewers had to be briefed on Understanding Society and had to pass an accreditation process. They were sent an extract of the questionnaire that had been translated into the relevant language, then had a telephone call with a translator who spoke the language. The call would be conducted in the relevant language and the interviewer would run through the questions they had been sent with the accreditor acting as a respondent. If the accreditor was satisfied that the interviewer was fluent in both reading and speaking the language, then the interviewer was allowed to conduct translated interviews.

4.2 Informal translations

If a sample member did not speak English or one of the nine translated languages, they could still be interviewed. In these cases the interviewer would use someone else to translate – usually another household member.

4.3 Welsh translations of materials

For all households in Wales, advance letters were sent in both English and Welsh. The youth self-completion questionnaire was also translated into Welsh.

5 The interview

The main component of the Wave 15 interview was the individual adult questionnaire. This was administered using a CAI script, and interviews were attempted with all individuals aged 16 or more in the household. The majority of interviews were completed by web (89%). Most of the remainder (10%) were conducted face-to-face, with just 2% of interviews conducted by telephone. The CAPI questionnaire also included a self-completion (CASI) section. For CATI the majority of the questions from the CASI section were asked by the interviewer, with just the most sensitive ones left out for telephone interviews. Other elements of the Wave 15 interview were:

- The household enumeration grid and household questionnaire (completed once per household)
- The youth self-completion questionnaire for 10-15 year olds (on paper)
- A proxy interview for adults that were unable or unwilling to complete a full interview.

A full list of the topics covered by the Wave 15 questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

5.1 Questionnaire length

The questionnaires were heavily routed depending on an individual's circumstances so the length of interviews varied. Interview lengths were generally longer for people who were employed, had children, or were being interviewed for the first time.

Table 5.1 shows the median interview lengths for different sample types for CAWI interviews only. Table 5.2 gives median interview lengths by sample type for CAPI and CATI interviews. We have included these together since relatively few CATI interviews were completed at Wave 15. Overall, the median individual interview length was a little longer for CATI than for CAPI (52 minutes 25 seconds for CATI and 50 minutes 33 seconds for CAPI).

Table 5.1: Median interview lengths (minutes) by sample type – CAWI interviews

Questionnaire element	GPS	BHPS	EMB	IEMB	GPS2	Total
Household questionnaire (including enumeration)	15:16	15:14	15:46	15:03	14:45	15:09
Individual adult questionnaire – total	38:43	38:19	37:18	37:03	39:40	38:40

Table 5.2: Median interview lengths (minutes) by sample type – CAPI/CATI interviews

Questionnaire element	GP	BHPS	EMB	IEMB	GPS2	Total
Household questionnaire (including enumeration)	15:07	14:55	16:01	16:05	15:28	15:14
Individual adult questionnaire – total	51:11	47:19	53:28	49:47	53:46	50:48
CAI proxy questionnaire	n/a too few to break down by sample type					4:50

5.2 Questionnaire programming

The CAI instrument was programmed using Unicom Intelligence software (previously known as IBM Data Collection), which is able to handle the complexity of the Understanding Society questionnaire. The same script was used for CAPI, CAWI and CATI, with some minor modifications to allow for mode type. Two scripts were created, the first was at household level and included the household enumeration grid, the household questionnaire and administrative content such as call records. The second was the individual level script which included the adult interview, proxy interview and administration of the youth self-completion questionnaire.

5.3 Youth self-completion questionnaire

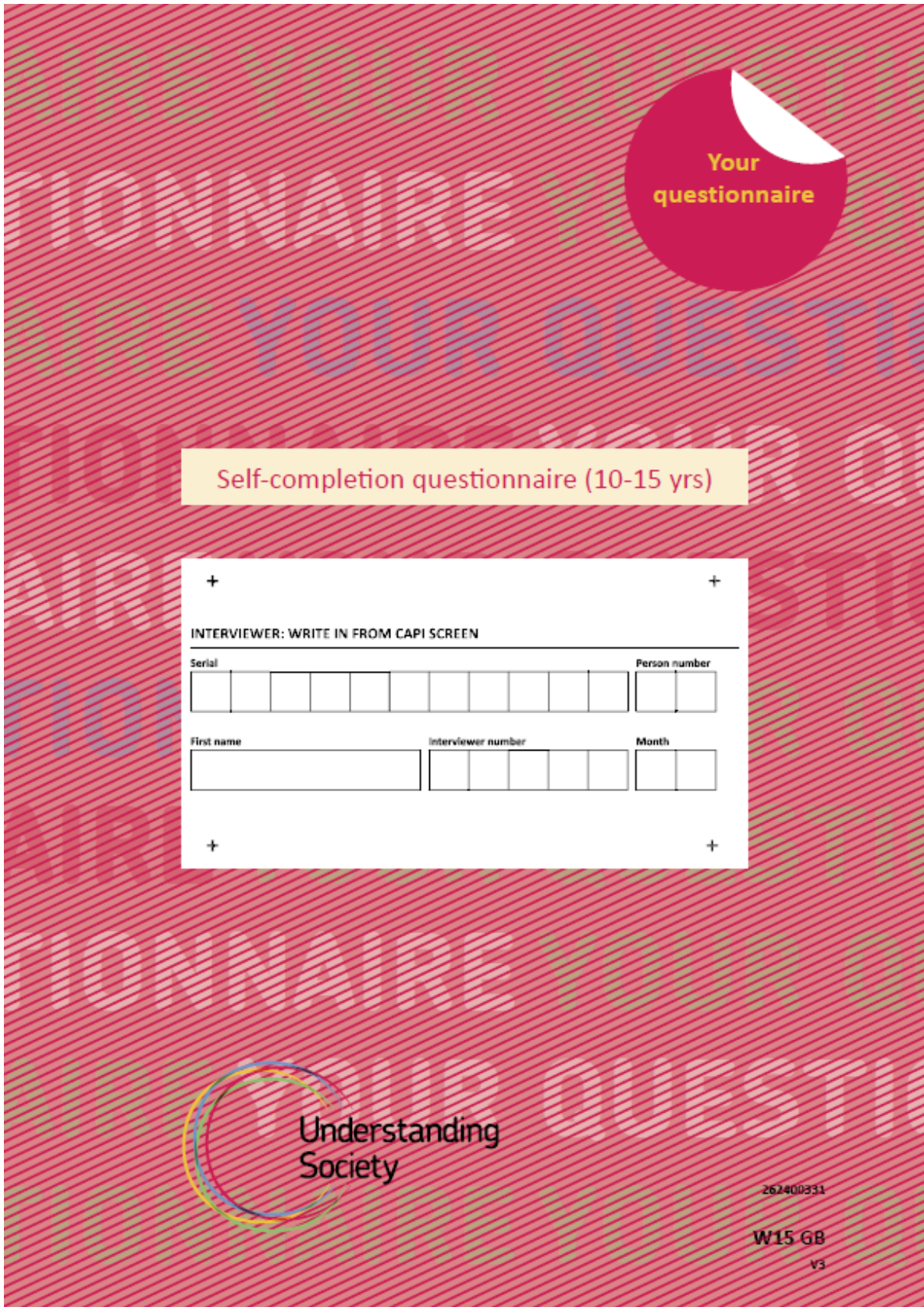
Youth questionnaires for sample members aged 10 to 15 were completed on paper. Where a parent had completed the survey online or by telephone, the youth questionnaire was posted to the parent with a request to ask their child to complete and return the paper questionnaire.

Where a questionnaire was not returned, a reminder was sent later in fieldwork. This reminder included another copy of the questionnaire.

Where an interviewer visited a household, it was their responsibility to administer the youth questionnaire and the individual level script included information to help interviewers with this. Firstly interviewers sought verbal consent from a parent or guardian, then asked the young person if they would complete the questionnaire. The interviewer used information from the CAI instrument to fill in some details on the front of the questionnaire, before handing it to the young person along with an envelope in which to seal it when completed, and a £10 voucher. Ideally the young person would complete the questionnaire while the interviewer was in the household, but this was not always possible and sample members could be left with a reply paid envelope in which to return the questionnaire themselves.

Interviewers could also leave questionnaires with parents to be given to the young person.

Fig 5.1: Youth self-completion questionnaire – front cover



6 Briefings and interviewer materials

6.1 Briefings

New interviewers were recruited in Wave 15. This required a combination of full briefings for those new to Understanding Society as well as refresher briefings for those who already had experience from Wave 14.

The briefings were online and conducted via Teams and were usually with groups of around 10 interviewers. Researchers from Verian and NatCen⁶ ran the briefings with participation from a researcher from ISER who presented part of the session.

Most briefings took place in February 2023, but additional full and refresher sessions were scheduled monthly throughout 2023 and 2024. This was to accommodate any ongoing recruitment of interviewers.

6.1.1 Refresher briefings

The refresher briefings, which lasted approximately three hours, were designed to both motivate interviewers and enhance their understanding of the study. Updates to the processes and fieldwork procedures were detailed and any that were not being consistently followed were revisited. These sessions were more informal and included discussions with interviewers about their experiences with the study so far.

- Insights on the impact of Understanding Society
- Overview of modes of data collection
- Engaging respondents
- Core content for Wave 15 including changes from Wave 14
- Incentive update (additional incentive added for longer interviews due to family questions)
- Field administration

6.1.2 Full briefings

The full briefings, which lasted around 5 hours were designed to give a comprehensive overview of Understanding Society. The content covered included its purpose, processes, and technical aspects. The format was more formal due to the amount of content to be covered but participants were also encouraged to ask questions and clarifications during the sessions.

- Overview of Understanding Society and its impact
- How the work of the interviewer impacts research and policy
- Fieldwork design
- Assignment overview
- Contact procedures

⁶ Each agency was responsible for briefing its own interviewers due to slight differences in administration and fieldwork management structures.

- Detailed review of the questionnaire and interview process
- Purpose and use of interviewer materials
- Incentives administration
- Engaging respondents
- Overview of all modes of data collection
- Field administration

6.2 Interviewer materials

Interviewers were equipped with various materials to assist them during face-to-face fieldwork. These included a set of core and wave specific project instructions which detailed all the information covered in briefings as well as further details such as a full list of outcome codes. These were intended as reference documents that interviewers could use if they needed guidance on any fieldwork procedures. Interviewers were also provided with briefing slides for reference if needed.

Other materials included:

- Sample information sheet (one per household, these included a few details about each household and the sample members living there, most of this information was held electronically on interviewers' laptops)
- Interviewer cards to be used as calling cards, appointments cards and broken appointment cards (other than the Understanding Society logo and a freephone telephone number for either Verian or NatCen these cards were blank for interviewers to write a message or appointment time on)
- Copies of advance letters, including a laminated copy
- Case study flyers (these were eight flyers that highlighted different findings from Understanding Society and how these had been used, the purpose of the leaflets was to help interviewers demonstrate the purpose of the study to any sample members that queried this)
- Showcards
- Information leaflets for participants
- Data linkage consent leaflets and a consent flowchart to demonstrate the information flow during the data linkage process
- Youth self-completion questionnaires, envelopes marked 'confidential' to seal them in, and pre-paid return envelopes
- Change of address cards and pre-paid return envelopes
- Thank you leaflets
- Tracing letters and stable contact letters, along with envelopes and stamps
- Translation cards to help identify the language of non-English speakers.

7 Response

7.1 Household level response

A total of 26,694 households were issued at Wave 15. Of these, 12,723 were in the General Population (GPS) sample, 1,584 were in the Ethnic Minority Boost (EMB) sample, 4,427 were in the British/Northern Irish Household Panel Survey sample (BHPS/NIHPS), 1,295 were in the Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost sample (IEMB), and 6,665 were in the general population boost sample (GPS2), initially recruited at wave 14.

Chart 7.1: Issued sample (households) by sample type

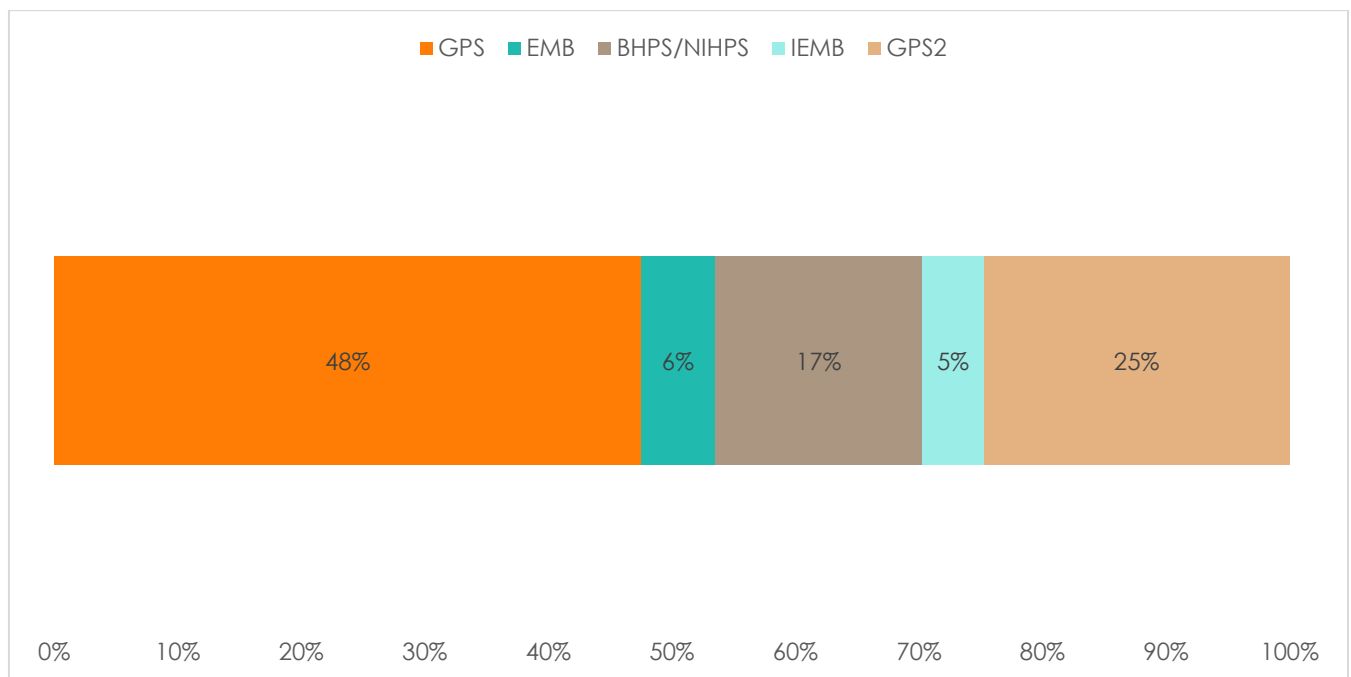


Table 7.1 details household response rates, dependent on whether the households had been productive at the previous wave. As would be expected, households that had been productive at Wave 14 were much more likely to be productive again at Wave 15 than those that had not responded.

Table 7.1: Household response rate by whether productive last wave

	Productive last wave		Unproductive last wave	
	n	%	n	%
<i>Base: All issued sample</i>				
Issued	21,893	96	4,801	97
Split households	905	4	149	3
Total households	22,798		4,950	
<i>Base: Total households</i>				
Ineligible households	446	2	246	5
Eligible households	22,352	98	4,704	95
<i>Base: Eligible households</i>				
Fully productive	13,694	61	685	15
Partially productive	4,897	22	511	11
No contact	833	4	904	19
Refusal	1,434	6	1,632	35
Other unproductive	1,494	7	972	21

Response rates were higher amongst the GPS and BHPS samples, than the EMB and IEMB samples. Response rates were lower for the GPS2 sample as this was only the second wave of fieldwork for them.

7.2 Individual level response

Individual response rates were examined separately for adults that had been interviewed at the previous wave and those that had not. The response rate is calculated as the proportion of eligible adults in each group that gave interviews at Wave 15.

For adults that had been interviewed at the previous wave, the overall response rate was 82%. This varies notably by sample type, as shown in table 7.2. Response is lower for both the ethnic boost sample. Response is also lower for the GPS2 sample, as this was only their second wave of the study.

Overall, the response rate was 23% for adults that had not been interviewed at the previous wave, and 46% for new entrants and rising 16s⁷. Previous wave productive adults were the particular focus for maximising response at Wave 15 and so it is this group that are detailed further below.

⁷ Rising 16s are sample members who have recently turned 16 and so are being asked to complete an adult interview for the first time at the current wave.

Table 7.2: Individual response rate by sample origin for adults interviewed at the previous wave

	GPS	EMB	BHPS/NIHPS	IEMB	GPS2
Productive	88%	80%	88%	79%	67%
Proxy	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No contact	2%	3%	2%	4%	8%
Refusal	8%	13%	8%	12%	19%
Other unproductive	2%	4%	2%	4%	6%
<i>Base: previous wave productive adults</i>	17,318	2,264	6,332	1,506	8,188

7.2.1 Youth self-completion questionnaires

In households that were productive (at least one adult completed an interview), 42% of 10 to 15 year olds completed and returned a paper questionnaire.

In the first quarter of fieldwork, and to a lesser extent the second quarter, there was also an issue with the posting of youth questionnaires to households that completed online. If these quarters are excluded, the youth response rate for wave 15 increases to 52%.

8 Data preparation

8.1 Combining CAPI and CAWI data

At Wave 15 there were two sources of CAI data to be merged – CAPI and CAWI (CATI interviews were also completed on the CAPI script). This meant the first stage of data processing at Wave 15 was combining the CAPI/CATI and CAWI data together.

There were measures in place within the sample management system on Wave 15 to minimise the chances of duplicate interviews being conducted on CAPI/CATI and CAWI. Data was passed between the CAPI/CATI and CAWI systems daily but the transfer of information to and from CAPI/CATI was reliant on interviewers synchronising their laptops. In general interviewers would synchronise each day that they worked on Understanding Society but there could be circumstances under which they did not. There were therefore a very small number of duplicate interviews across CAPI/CATI and CAWI and the data merging process needed to take account of these. If both interviews were fully complete then the more recent interview was usually selected.

It was also possible for a respondent to start their interview on CAWI and complete it via CAPI/CATI. In these cases the interview would restart at the beginning of the first incomplete module (so respondents might be re-asked a few questions) rather than the specific question at which the interview had finished on CAWI. Such cases were extremely rare but, again, the data merging process needed to allow for this and stitch the two partial interviews together.

While Wave 15 used the same CAI script across modes (with routing to tailor question wording depending on the mode), there were some questions which had to be scripted separately for different modes because different question layouts were used. For example at some questions the CAWI script made use of drop down lists rather than standard response lists. In raw data there would be two versions of the question, one for CAPI/CATI and one for CAWI so the formatted data needed to draw data from both of these.

8.2 Data scanning and reconciliation

The vast majority of Understanding Society data was collected using CAI scripts. The scripts made use of consistency checks and range checks to clarify any data discrepancies with respondents as they arose. This means there was little need for any cleaning or editing of the data after fieldwork.

The exception to this was the data from the youth self-completion questionnaires. As these were completed on paper there could be data inconsistencies such as missing data, routing errors, multiple answers at single choice questions, and values out of range. Youth self-completion questionnaires were scanned to capture the data, and then a series of checks were undertaken to find any inconsistencies. Rules were agreed for how to handle data inconsistencies and edits applied in accordance with these rules.

Scanned data needed to be reconciled against CAI data to ensure data was attributed to the correct sample member. This was done using serial number, name, date of birth and gender.

8.3 SIC and SOC coding

Questions from the employment and proxy sections of the questionnaire were coded to 4 digit SIC and SOC codes. The codes and verbatims were included in the data.

8.4 Data checking

Once data from all sources had been combined and formatted, a series of checks were undertaken to validate the data and ensure consistency of format. Three rounds of checking were employed:

- Administrative checks on individuals and households – these were to ensure that all households and individuals were included in the data with a final outcome, that individuals were finally located in one household, that outcomes were consistent with the presence of raw data, and that and joiners added to the household grid were accounted for.
- Structural checks on all files – these checked the format of files, and also that the right households and individuals were included in each file.
- Routing checks – these checked, for every variable, that a response was present when there should be a response, and not present where there should not be a response, according to questionnaire routing.

8.5 Data issues at Wave 15 and script changes affecting data

There were some small errors in and/or changes to the Wave 15 script. Most of these only affected a small number of questions, and were fixed during the course of fieldwork:

- At LASTSCREENB respondents from a productive household at a previous wave and who had received an advance voucher and letter and qualified for the family incentive would see LASTSCREENB. At this variable they were told they would be sent a £5 voucher. This was updated so that respondents would instead see LASTACAPI. This was amended 3 months into fieldwork.
- Where a child's details were corrected in Annual Fertility History or Fertility History (so, the child was in the household grid but some information from the grid was incorrect), the original (incorrect) details from the grid still displayed at CHCORDET. This was fixed 7 months into fieldwork.
- There were some cases of children being double counted at the variable LNPRNT2. This was fixed 9 months into fieldwork.
- The routing in the PrevHcondloop was incorrect. Ff_prevhcondstil81 = 1 and Ff_prevhcondstil82 = 1 should have routed to HOSPCP and to HOSPDPCP but they did not. This was fixed 10 months into fieldwork.

Appendix A – Wave 15 interview content

Understanding Society includes many different topics in the questionnaire. Some topics are included at all waves, while others vary from wave to wave.

Table A1: Content of Wave 15 household questionnaire

Theme	Module name
HH Composition	Household grid
Consumption	HH: Consumer durables
Consumption	HH: Expenditure
Environment related behaviour	HH: Environment behaviour
Expenditure	HH: Fuel type and expenditure
Financial behaviour and attitudes	HH: Financial strain
Financial behaviour and attitudes	HH: Food poverty
Housing characteristics	HH: Structural characteristics
Housing characteristics	HH: Home tenure
Housing characteristics	HH: Taxation

Table A2: Content of Wave 15 adult questionnaire

Theme	Module name
Individual interview modules (repeated annually)	
Basic Demographics	Demographics
Caring	Caring
Change in Characteristics	Annual health conditions history
Change in Characteristics	Annual partnership history
Change in Characteristics	Annual residential history
Change in Characteristics	Annual education history
Change in Characteristics	Annual employment history
Childcare	Childcare

Employment	Current employment
Employment	Employees
Employment	Self-employment
Employment	Job satisfaction
Employment	Non-employment
Employment	Mothers return to work
Employment	Other work
Employment	Job search
Expectations	Educational aspirations
Family relationships	Non-resident relationships (self-completion)
Financial behaviour and attitudes	Household finances
Financial behaviour and attitudes	Student loans
Health and social care utilisation	Health service use
Health status	SF-12 (self-completion)
Health status	Disability
Coronavirus illness	COVID-19
Income and earnings	Unearned income and state benefits
Mental health and wellbeing	GHQ (self-completion)
Satisfaction	Life satisfaction (self-completion)
Individual interview modules conditional on age (repeated annually)	
Family relationships	Child development (self-completion)
Family relationships	Parenting styles (self-completion)
Financial behaviour	Pension drawdown
Young adults	Young adults
Individual interview modules (rotating)	
Environment related behaviour	Environment behaviour
Environment related behaviour	Environmental identity (self-completion)

Expectations	Fertility intentions
Family relationships	Family networks
Family relationships	Parents and children
Family relationships	Partner relationships (self-completion)
Family relationships	Non-resident children
Family relationships	Guardians
Financial attitudes and behaviour	Child maintenance
Financial attitudes and behaviour	Charitable giving
Mental health and wellbeing	Broad discrimination
Mental health and wellbeing	Loneliness (self-completion)
Political and social engagement	Politics (self-completion)
Political and social engagement	Political engagement (self-completion)
Political and social engagement	Political efficacy (self-completion)
Political and social engagement	Attitudes to immigration (self-completion)
Political and social engagement	Socio-political values (self-completion)
Political voting behaviour	General election (self-completion)
Political voting behaviour	Devolved election – Northern Ireland (self-completion)
Time use	Domestic labour
Travel behaviour	Transport behaviour
Ethnicity strand modules (extra 5 minute sample)	
Service use	Service use
Modules asked only once (included for new entrants)	
Chronic health conditions	Health conditions
Chronic health conditions	Mental health conditions
Stable characteristics	Ethnicity and national identity
Stable characteristics	Family background
Stable characteristics	Fertility history

Stable characteristics	Initial conditions
Stable characteristics	Own first job
Stable characteristics	Partnership history
Stable characteristics	Religion
Administrative data linkage (asked at multiple waves where eligible)	
Education	National Pupil Database, England
Education	Early Years Census, England
Education	Individualised Learner Records
Education	National Pupil Database, Wales
Education	Northern Ireland Education data
Education	Scottish Education data
Environment	National Energy Efficiency Data-Framework (NEED)
Young adults (aged 16-21) sub-section of adult questionnaire	
Young adults self-completion	Identity
Young adults self-completion	Social Networks
Young adults self-completion	Family / Meals
Young adults self-completion	Behaviour / bullying at home
Young adults self-completion	Family talking / quarrelling
Young adults self-completion	Education / aspirations
Young adults self-completion	Education / parental involvement
Young adults self-completion	Career Advice
Young adults self-completion	Behaviour / bullying at school / bullying online
Young adults self-completion	Risky Behaviour/Drugs
Young adults self-completion	Sexual orientation
Young adults interviewer administered	Future Intentions: Leave home
Young adults interviewer administered	Future Intentions: Job
Young adults interviewer administered	Future Intentions: other events

Table A1: Content of Wave 15 youth self-completion questionnaire

Theme	Module name
Demographic	
Leisure	TV
Leisure	Online social networks
Family	Meals
Family	Support
Family	Household chores
Family	Supervision
Family	Other
Family	Talking / quarrelling
Step-parent relationship	
Behaviour	Bullying at home
Friends	Friendship Networks
Behaviour	SQD (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)
Happiness	
Education	Homework
Education	Aspirations
Education	Truancy
Education	Misbehaviour
Behaviour	Bullying at school
Savings behaviour	
Pocket money	
Earnings	
Caring	
Health	Disability
Health	Nutrition

Health	Obesity
Health	Exercise
Health	Smoking
Health	Alcohol
Political attitudes	
Environmental behaviour	Attitudes