



**Understanding Society**  
**Fieldwork protocols (Waves 1-18)**



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This paper outlines the development of the Understanding Society fieldwork protocols from Wave 1 through to Wave 18. It starts by describing fieldwork procedures at the beginning of the study (Wave 1) and changes made during Wave 1. We then describe the changes that have been made to the fieldwork design and procedures in subsequent waves. We set out the changes that have been made in the following areas: data collection modes, fieldwork period, tracing, interviewer briefings and materials, participant mailings, and incentives. This paper does not cover the changes made on the Innovation Panel (IP). The IP is used to test methodological innovations, and so the fieldwork procedures are subject to more frequent changes and are covered in the IP user guide.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Original Wave 1 fieldwork procedures

The first wave of Understanding Society, in 2009, started with two different procedures (see Diagram 1 below); one for the General Population Sample (GPS) and one for the Ethnic Minority Boost (EMB).<sup>2</sup> For addresses in the GPS, an advance card was sent to the “occupier”.<sup>3</sup> This is because the sample was drawn from the Postcode Address File in Great Britain, and the register of Land and Property Services Agency in Northern Ireland, and so it was a sample of addresses, not of individuals (Lynn, 2009). The letter introduced the study and included a £10 incentive. The recipients were informed that “Anyone else in your household who is interviewed will be given a £10 voucher by the interviewer when they call”. This was done because we did not know in advance who was living at the address or how many eligible adults there would be.

For addresses in the EMB the process was slightly different because we did not know in advance whether any of the households at the address would be eligible. This is because for the EMB we were trying to recruit households in which at least one person was a member of an ethnic group that we were trying to target. The EMB advance card therefore, informed the recipient that “anyone in the household who is interviewed will be given a £10 voucher by the interviewer when they call”. No voucher was included with the card. For the EMB sample, there was an additional stage where the address had to be “screened” by interviewers to ascertain whether there were any adults in the household who were eligible for the study.

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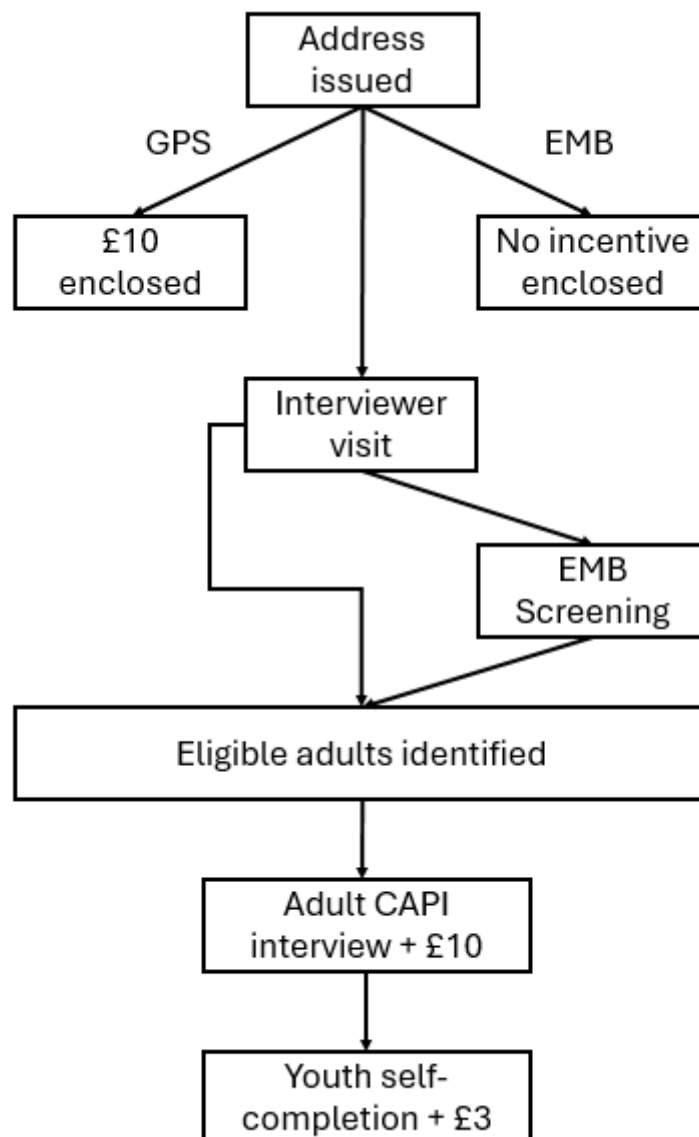
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/innovation-panel/user-guide/innovation-panel-user-guide/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the sampling design for these two samples, see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/working-paper/understanding-society/2009-01> and <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/working-paper/understanding-society/2009-02>

<sup>3</sup> For fieldwork materials see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/fieldwork-documents/>

For both samples, if there was a 10–15-year-old in the household, they were given a paper self-completion questionnaire, and for those who completed this, a £3 gift voucher was handed-over by the interviewer. Adult participants were also given a paper self-completion questionnaire which contained questions which may have been more sensitive. This was considered part of the interview and so there was no additional incentive for completing this.

**Diagram 1. Wave 1 fieldwork procedures for the General Population Sample (GPS) and Ethnic Minority Boost (EMB).**



At the end of the interview, participants were given a “Participants Handbook” and a folder (see appendix). The handbook contained information about the study and the importance of longitudinal studies. Each household was also given a fridge magnet which was branded

with the Understanding Society logo, and had the month of the year printed on, to remind them of their interview date the following year. Interviewers also had Understanding Society-branded pens to give to the participants to fill in their paper self-completion questionnaires, and which they could keep. The folder was used to store the handbook and information leaflet, and the participant's copy of the signed consent form and consent information leaflets (where applicable). Interviewers also handed over a change-of-address card to all participants. If sample members returned these when moving house, they were sent a £5 voucher. This was done to encourage sample members to give us their most up-to-date contact details to reduce non-contact or untraced movers in the field.

The questionnaire and all participant-facing materials were translated into nine languages<sup>4</sup> and the translated instruments were to be used to interview anyone who spoke one of those languages and wanted to be interviewed in that language rather than English. These interviews could only be carried out by accredited bilingual interviewers or an interviewer accompanied by an accredited interpreter. If a sample member spoke another, non-English, language (not one of the 9 survey languages above), then the interviewer could either translate themselves (if they spoke the language) or use someone else nominated by the sample member (either within or from outside the household).

The initial fieldwork period for the first issue was one month, starting on the 8<sup>th</sup> of each month. Then there was a one-week pause when the non-completed sample was reviewed, and then a two-week re-issue period. For the EMB, the screening period took place two weekends before the start of the first issue and covered six days (Wednesday to Monday). No interviewing could be done if a household was screened-in until the 8<sup>th</sup> of the sample month.

### Changes made during Wave 1

There were a number of changes to the fieldwork procedures during Wave 1, which were implemented to try and improve response.<sup>5</sup> These were implemented in response to continual monitoring of fieldwork and the need to increase initial response rates. In addition, there was a planned formal review of the EMB response rates after six initial

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<sup>4</sup> Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Gujarati, Punjabi Gurmukhi, Punjabi Urdu, Somali, Urdu and Welsh. The list of translated languages increased in Wave 7 following the recruitment of the Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost at Wave 6. The updated translations were Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Gujarati, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi Gurmukhi, Punjabi Urdu, Somali, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh. The list decreased again to 9 in Wave 8 and excluded Arabic, Cantonese and Somali.

<sup>5</sup> These are in addition to changes made for other reasons, for example some of the questionnaire modules were cut from Q3 (July Year 1) because the interview was coming in as too long, the sampling fraction for some ethnic minority groups was increased in year 2 because the yield of eligible ethnic minority boost households was lower than expected. For operational reasons, the pause in fieldwork after the first issue was increased from one to three weeks from the start of Year 2.

fieldwork months, to assess the sampling fractions. The EMB review took place in September 2009 and used early data from the first five sample months.

- The screening period was doubled from six to twelve days from July 2009 (year 1) to try to reduce the high non-contact rate during the screening process.
- In July of year 1, an experiment was carried out with the advanced mailing. In half of the addresses, the information leaflet about the study was included with the mailing. The other half of addresses continued to receive just the advance card (and incentive for GPS households). The households that received the information leaflet had a slightly higher response rate, and so after that, all addresses received the information leaflet with their advance card.
- In July of year 1, interviewers were given individual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which set a minimum target for response rate for their allocation, based on past response in that area on previous surveys and characteristics of the postcode based on Census data.
- At the start of year 2 (January 2010), the first issue fieldwork period was extended from four to six weeks to allow interviewers more time to cover their assignment and reduce non-contact rates.
- From June of year 2 (2010), a system was implemented to allow the fieldwork agency to re-issue partially completed households (where at least one adult had participated but at least one adult had not). This aimed to increase the proportion of fully completed households.
- Non-contacted adults in partially completed households from January-May of year 2 were contacted by the fieldwork agency telephone unit, and interviewers attempted to complete a telephone interview.

Except for the changes in screening procedures, these actions were also carried over to Wave 2.

## 2. Fieldwork design changes for Waves 2-18

There have been a large number of significant changes to the fieldwork design since Wave 1 (see Table 1). The two main changes occurred at Wave 6, when the agency responsible for the fieldwork changed; and at Wave 7, when a mixed-mode design using web and face-to-face interviewing was introduced. However, there have been changes across all aspects of the fieldwork design, and these are described below under the headings of data collection modes, fieldwork period, tracing, interviewer materials and briefings, participant mailings, and incentives.

**Table 1. Summary of major fieldwork design changes by wave**

Wave	Key design change
2	Integration of the BHPS sample; tracing movers introduced
3	CATI (telephone) mop-up introduced
6	New fieldwork agency; longer fieldwork period; Recruitment of IEMB Boost (Year 2)
7	Mixed-mode: Web introduced
8	Adaptive web-first expansion
14	Recruitment of GPS2 Boost
16	Biomarker collection, web mop-up introduced on full sample
17	Simplified incentives

### Data collection modes

In the first wave of the study, as noted above, the survey was purely face-to-face. At the second wave, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) sample was incorporated into the *Understanding Society* sample. The BHPS sample included a small number of households that only participated by telephone. These were households that had been contacted during refusal conversion and were only willing to take part by telephone. This small number of households (around 400) was issued to the NatCen Multi-Mode Unit (MMU), randomly allocated to quarters and issued in the final month of each quarter. At Wave 2, these were the only households that were contacted and interviewed by telephone.<sup>6</sup>

At Wave 3 the content that had been in the adult paper self-completion questionnaire was incorporated into the main interview and implemented as a CASI (Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing) section. When interviewers got to this section of the interview, they would pass the lap-top over to the participant to answer a set of questions.

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<sup>6</sup> These can be identified in the hhsamp data files with the variable W\_ff\_tel, where W is the wave prefix.

During the second year of Wave 3 (from July 2012), a telephone (CATI) “mop-up” was introduced. This was started in July but also covered the sample from April to June. The aim of this was to contact adults who could not be contacted by face-to-face interviewers during the main fieldwork period. Adults in households that were non-responding in the main fieldwork period, except those who had adamantly refused or were deemed to be mentally or physically incapable of participating, were contacted by the MMU. The trained and briefed telephone interviewers at the MMU introduced themselves, reminded the sample members of the survey, and asked whether they would be able to take part in the survey by telephone.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the “mop-up” was to increase participation among those who were hard to contact in person. Analysis by NatCen indicates that the telephone mop-up increased the overall household response rate for that period by about 3 percentage points for the EMB and by just less than 2 percentage points for the GPS.<sup>8</sup>

There were some changes to the way that the CATI mop-up was implemented during Wave 6, as the procedures were adapted to try and increase the success of the mop-up. Initially, the households included in the CATI mop-up were left with the CAPI interviewers, and they were instructed to try contacting the household by telephone. It was felt that where interviewers had been making in-person calls to the address, it may be more successful when it came to contacting and interviewing by telephone. However, this approach was not as successful as anticipated. The second approach was to use the fieldwork agency’s telephone unit, where the telephone interviewers would use the CAPI lap-tops to manage the sample and access a CATI version of the interview script. However, this was also not as successful as expected. The third approach was to use a small group of experienced CAPI interviewers who worked from home and used the CATI version of the script. This was the most successful process and so was adopted for Waves 6 to 8.

The mixed-mode design of *Understanding Society* was expanded at Wave 7 with the introduction of online (Web) interviewing. Adults in households that had not responded at Wave 6 were first invited to participate online. Following the initial two-week period of “web-only” fieldwork, the web option remained available to adults in these “web-first” households during the rest of the fieldwork, but interviewers were directed to try and interview them in person (or failing that by telephone during the CATI “mop up” period). Interviewers had access to the unique log-in and password for each sample member, so were able to assist the sample member in accessing the survey online, if this was a clear

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<sup>7</sup> The CATI questionnaire was similar to the CAPI questionnaire, except there were some revisions to take into account the mode, so there were no references to showcards and the interviewers had to read out response categories. Most of the CASI content was carried in the CATI interviews, except for a small number of modules which were felt to be too sensitive to be asked over the telephone.

<sup>8</sup> This mop-up was not conducted with the BHPS sample in Wave 3 since they are interviewed in the first year of each wave.

preference of the sample member. The move to a mixed-mode design using web was informed by experimental work undertaken on the Innovation Panel (Jäckle et al, 2015).

Adults in households that had responded at Wave 6 were issued directly to interviewers, with a 19-week CAPI fieldwork period followed by a 4-week telephone mop-up. Adults in households that were issued CAPI-first but had not responded by the end of the first issue period were sent a reissue letter, which invited them to participate online. The reissue fieldwork period was followed by the telephone mop-up. Thus, the mixed-mode design for the web-first group was

**Web→Face-to-Face→Telephone,**

and for the CAPI-first group was

**Face-to-Face→Web→Telephone.**

At each stage, the previous mode was still available for sample members to take part.<sup>9</sup>

From Wave 8, in addition to adults in previous-wave non-responding households, adults in some households that had taken part in Wave 7 were also invited to complete online. While 20% of the sample was ring-fenced to be interviewed face-to-face, 40% were invited to complete their survey online web-first (or Web-first), and the remaining 40% of the sample were issued directly to interviewers (CAPI-first). The fieldwork protocols for the web-first sample were adapted during Year 1, with experiments implemented for different monthly samples. The variant that was most successful was retained. The experiments involved the use of an early bird completion bonus, the number of reminders, and the length of the web-only fieldwork period. For more information about these experiments, see Carpenter and Burton (2018).

The web survey remained open throughout fieldwork, so the Web-first sample could still complete online after they had been issued to a face-to-face interviewer. The CAPI-first sample could also complete online if they expressed a very strong preference for this. Interviewers were able to give sample members the web address and their login details for the web survey. A web mop-up was also used for the CAPI-first sample. CAPI-first sample members who had not been contacted were sent invitations to complete the web survey after 11 weeks of face-to-face fieldwork.

In the last four weeks of fieldwork, outstanding cases could be contacted by telephone. Not all live sample was transferred to the CATI mop-up; some face-to-face interviewing was still carried out during these last four weeks. Cases to be included in the CATI mop-up were

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<sup>9</sup> The mode in which the household was issued is identified in the hhsamp data file, variable W\_issue\_mode where W is the wave prefix.

reissued to a small group of face-to-face interviewers who made telephone calls from their homes. Using face-to-face interviewers allowed the same sample management system to be used for the CATI mop-up as for CAPI. Following a positive experience with the Wave 14 GPS2 boost, from the end of the first Year of Wave 16 non-respondents were also mailed towards the end of fieldwork and invited once more to take part online, with an explicit deadline mentioned, and the promise of a conditional £10 bonus for completion.

At Waves 7 and 8, when web interviewing was introduced, it was deemed a good opportunity to try to bring back lapsed sample members, i.e. dormant sample, into the study. "Dormant sample" consisted of households that had not been a part of the study for at least two waves but had not asked to be permanently withdrawn from the study. Most of these dormant households were issued at Wave 7, but a small number that had not been issued at Wave 7 were issued in the first quarter of Wave 8. Adults in these households were sent letters and emails (if they had given us an email address) asking them to take part in the web survey. If they did not take part, they were not followed up by an interviewer and remained "dormant". If they did take part, the households were re-incorporated into the active sample at the following wave. The dormant sample re-engagement was not very successful. At Wave 7 4,785 dormant households were issued as web-only, and 210 were productive (4.4%).

In each successive wave since Wave 8 (until the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020) the proportion of the sample invited to take part online increased up to 70% (40% at Wave 8, 60% at Wave 9, 70% at Wave 10). Adults who are invited to complete online, but do not take part in the first five weeks, are issued to interviewers who then try to contact them to take part in person. Adults issued directly to interviewers who do not take part in the first ten weeks are invited to complete online. Both web-first and CAPI-first non-respondents are also eligible for the "web mop-up" towards the end of the fieldwork period. This mode is used to increase participation among those adults who are hard to contact in person (see Table 2 below).

Face-to-face fieldwork was suspended in mid-March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At that time, all CAPI cases being worked were sent a letter informing sample members that they would not be contacted by an interviewer because of the lockdown. The letter included the details to allow the sample member to complete their survey online. Non-responders were followed up by telephone. From April 2020, all adults were issued web-first, with a telephone follow-up. The first five weeks were still a web-only period. At the start of week 6, unproductive cases were issued to interviewers to be contacted and interviewed by telephone (Burton et al, 2020).

From April 2022, the study returned to the pre-pandemic design: web-first with a CAPI follow-up, and CAPI-first with a web follow-up. When face-to-face fieldwork resumed, around 10-12% of households were issued CAPI-first (with web/telephone follow-up) and the rest as web-first (with CAPI/telephone follow-up). The ring-fenced sample has been

dropped, since this sample had been invited to complete their interviews online during the pandemic. After the resumption of face-to-face interviewing, the use of telephone interviewing did not disappear. Some participants wanted to keep being interviewed by telephone, rather than having an interviewer visit them. The use of telephone interviews increased post-pandemic, compared to the pre-pandemic wave. At any point during the CAPI fieldwork period, interviewers were able to conduct telephone interviews if requested by the sample members, without needing to wait until the mop-up period at the end of fieldwork.

Once face-to-face fieldwork resumed from the April 2022 sample, all households had experienced two waves of being interviewed by web or telephone only, and there had been a significant level of change to the interviewer panels at both Kantar Public and NatCen. For these later sample months, a sample point was allocated back to the previous face-to-face interviewer (from Wave 10 or Wave 11, depending on the sample month), where practical, but this was not a priority when allocating sample points to interviewers.

In Wave 14, for the first time on Understanding Society, a General Population Boost (GPS2) sample was issued. The GPS boost sample started in January 2022. The original plan was that 50% of households would be issued web-first, and 50% CAPI-first. However, during January to March 2022, the fieldwork agencies were still rebuilding capacity after the pandemic, and so 80% of the sample were issued web-first and 20% CAPI-first. It had been expected that the fieldwork agencies would be up to full capacity in the spring, and so from April to December 2022, 50% of households were issued web-first and 50% CAPI-first. However, the response for the boost was lower than expected, and lower for the CAPI-first sample than the web-first sample. For Year 2, from January to December 2023, we reverted to 80% of households issued web-first and 20% CAPI-first (Burton, 2025). See the [main survey Wave 14 technical report](#) for further details.<sup>10</sup>

For Wave 15, around 90% of households were initially invited to take part online (Web-first sample) and around 10% initially issued to an interviewer for a face-to-face interview (CAPI-first sample). This decrease in the proportion issued CAPI-first is due to the allocation of the ring-fenced CAPI sample to web-first. The 10% issued CAPI-first are those who are expected to have a very low probability of taking part online.

The mode allocations were changed at Wave 16, which was a biomarker wave and included the collection of biomarkers (blood pressure, height, weight, hip circumference), cognitive function tests, as well as requests to provide blood samples. Some of these measures had been taken during nurse visits after the Wave 2 or Wave 3 interviews. To maximise the number of people for whom we would collect longitudinal biometrics, we allocated households who had taken part in the nurse collection or the cognitive function tests at

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/technical-reports/>

Wave 3 to CAPI-first at Wave 16, regardless of the mode in which they had taken part recently. At Wave 16, 60% of the sample were allocated to Web-first and 40% to CAPI-first.

From Wave 16, the CATI mop-up was replaced by a web mop-up. Telephone interviews had become permitted during face-to-face fieldwork if requested by a sample member, and so there was no need to have a dedicated period at the end of fieldwork. Prompted by slow fieldwork progress because of lower-than-usual interviewer numbers, which meant that often an interviewer could not call during the CAPI period, we introduced a web mop-up. A few weeks before the end of fieldwork, non-respondents were sent another invitation letter. This included a hard deadline of the end of fieldwork and reinstated the £10 bonus that had been available if the sample member had participated in the first five weeks of web-only fieldwork.

Wave 17 returned to the previous Web-first (90%) and CAPI-first (10%) study mode allocation design, and the web mop-up bonus was extended to completion in any mode in the last couple of weeks.

In addition to interviewing adults (16+), Understanding Society also collects data from 10-15-year-old children. From the beginning of the study the youth survey was done using paper booklets that would be posted to households where parents completed the survey online or handed out by an interviewer in households where parents completed their interview in CAPI. At Wave 16, we also introduced an online version of the youth survey, alongside the paper questionnaire. The online youth survey was previously tested experimentally on Wave 9, but the uptake was too low to justify the development costs, and so it was not implemented until Wave 16. In households where a parent completes their interview online, a letter is sent to them which includes information about how their child can log in to the online questionnaire. The letter also contains the gift-card for the young person, a copy of the paper self-completion questionnaire, and a Freepost return envelope. From Wave 17, the letter also contains a leaflet aimed at the parent, which provides information on why we are asking their child to take part. There is an email reminder for the parent if the youth questionnaire hasn't been completed, and later a reminder letter is sent with another copy of the questionnaire.

**Table 2. Data collection modes and follow-up strategies (Waves 7–18)**<sup>11</sup>

Stage	Web-first sample	CAPI-first sample
Initial	Online survey invitation	CAPI issue
First follow-up	CAPI issue	Online survey invitation
Late fieldwork	CATI mop-up (+ web mop-up from W16)	CATI mop-up (+ web mop-up from W16)

<sup>11</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to March 2022) all samples were issued Web-first with telephone follow-up.

Table 3, below, summarises the changes in the mode design used on Understanding Society from Wave 1 through to Wave 18.

**Table 3. Summary: Evolution of data collection modes (Waves 1–18)**

Wave	Primary modes	Key change
1	CAPI (single mode)	
2	CAPI + CATI	BHPS added, included telephone-only sample
3	CAPI + CATI mop-up	CATI mop-up introduced
7	Web + CAPI + CATI	Web introduced
10-12	Web + CATI	CAPI suspended during Covid-19
16	Web + CAPI/CATI + web mop-up	Web mop-up introduced

### Fieldwork period

The second wave of Understanding Society was the first longitudinal wave, and so interviewers had to deal with sample members moving house and tracing them to a new address. To allow time for this new task, there was an additional four-week period to enable interviewers to trace movers, either through their own efforts or where a new address had been identified by in-office tracing and reissued to the interviewer (see Diagram 3 below). From April of year 1 (2AP1), the reissue fieldwork extended to four weeks, from two. This meant that the fieldwork period was now four months long.

At Wave 4, the fieldwork period changed from that used at Waves 2 and 3. In the first year of Wave 4, the initial six weeks of main issue, followed by a two-week gap for office administration, were followed by a two-week CAPI reissue phase and then a six-week CAPI mop-up to allow extra time for tracing movers, and then there was a four-week CATI mop-up, where the first week overlapped with the sixth week of the CAPI mop-up. This resulted in a 19-week fieldwork period. In year 2 of Wave 4, this was adapted to lengthen the issue periods. The initial main issue was increased to ten weeks, with an additional two-week extension to cover appointments and traced movers. The in-office administration and tracing gap was removed, but this work was done on an ongoing basis, and cases were reissued in two batches at weeks eight and 10. The CAPI reissue and CAPI mop-up stages went on until week 16, with an additional three-week period for appointments. The last four weeks of this period ran in parallel to the CATI mop-up (weeks 16-19).

At Wave 6, there were more significant changes to the fieldwork design due to the change in fieldwork agencies following the competitive procurement process for Waves 6-8.<sup>12</sup> These were implemented because it was thought that they would improve the response on the study. The fieldwork period was increased from 19 to 23 weeks; an initial issue of eight weeks with a two-week mop-up period, then three weeks whilst the sample was returned to the operations department and reviewed for reissues, a six-week CAPI reissue period, then a four-week CATI mop-up period, although during these last four weeks some face-to-face interviewing could still be done.<sup>13</sup>

The 23-week fieldwork period for the web-first households at Wave 7 was broken up into two weeks of 'web-only' fieldwork, 17 weeks of CAPI fieldwork, and then four weeks of the telephone mop-up.

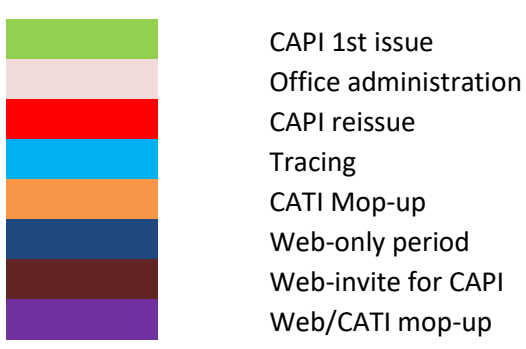
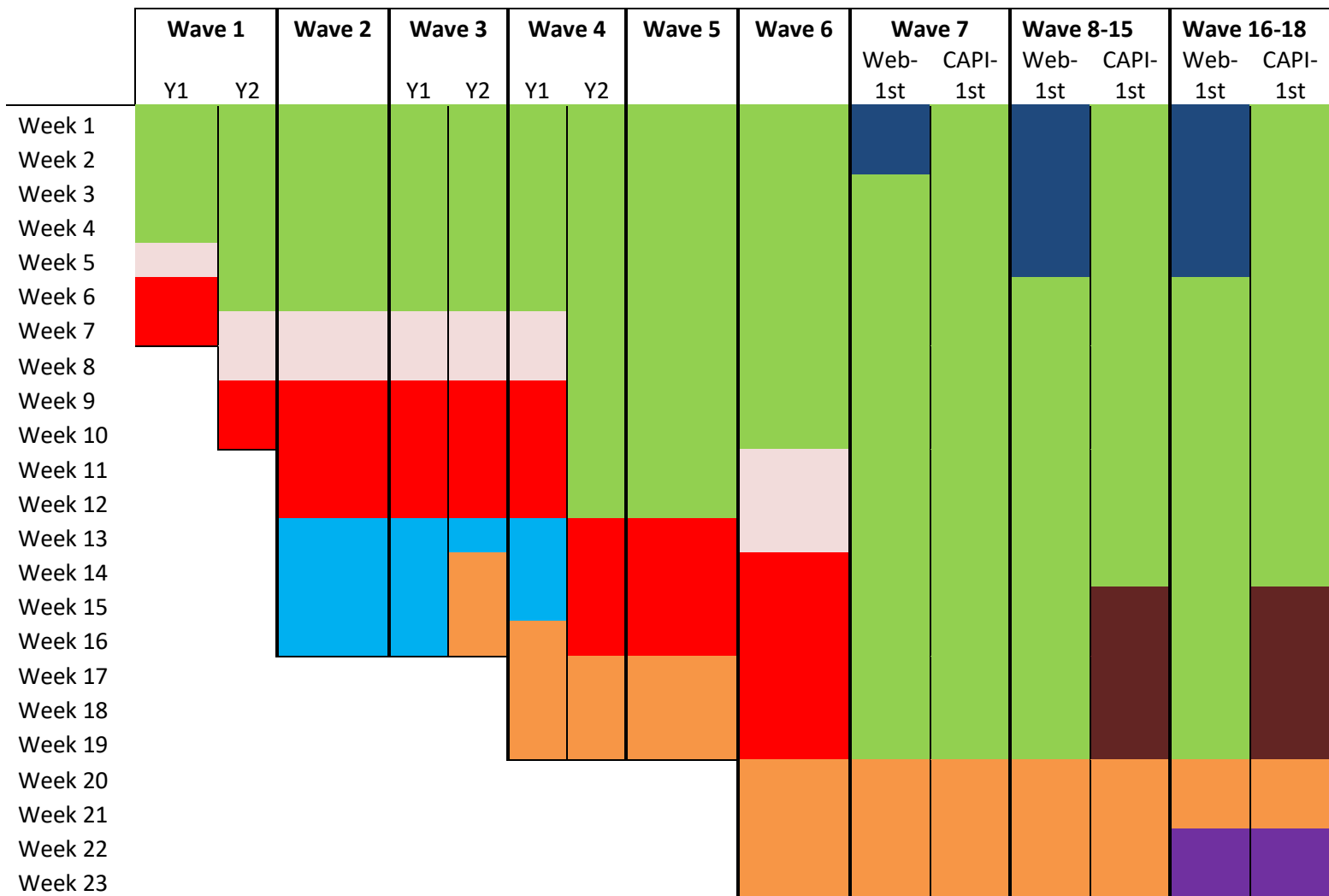
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<sup>12</sup> At Wave 6 the sample were delivered to the fieldwork agency in quarterly batches. Since this was the first wave conducted by the agency, and so there was little consistency of interviewers, the fieldwork agency reviewed the location of the sample and allocated it to monthly sample points to maximise interviewer efficiency.

<sup>13</sup> There was some flexibility around these timings, so interviewers could retain households after 10 weeks if they had a strong chance of interviewing them, such as where there are appointments.

The diagram below (Diagram 3) illustrates the changing fieldwork period from Wave 1 to Wave 18.

**Diagram 3: Evolution of fieldwork period waves 1-18**



Fieldwork timings for the Web-first sample varied a little during Wave 8 (see Table 4 below). This was because an adaptive design approach was adopted to maximise response during the initial web-only fieldwork period.<sup>14</sup> At the start of Wave 8, a three-week web fieldwork period was used; this had increased to five weeks by the second year of Wave 8 fieldwork. Both the non-responding Web-first sample and the CAPI-first samples were issued to face-to-face interviewers at the same time, 19 weeks before the end of fieldwork. This fieldwork period design remained in place from Wave 9 onwards.

**Table 4: Web-first protocol comparison waves 8 and 9**

Event	Start of Wave 8	Start of Wave 9
Initial contact	Letter + email	Letter + email
Reminder 1	Email	Letter + email
Reminder 2	Email	Email
Reminder 3	None	Letter + email
Reminder 4	None	Email
Bonus	None	If complete by day 34
F2F start	Week 3	Week 5

## Tracing

Tracing sample members who move from their issued households is a very important task on a panel survey. Those who are more mobile, who change their address more often, are different on a range of characteristics to those who stay at the same address for many years. To keep the sample representative of the population, we need to be able to interview those who have moved house in between waves. From Wave 2, as noted above, the fieldwork length increased to allow for the tracing of sample members who move. Also at Wave 2, to help with tracking movers, interviewers were given two new letters: a tracing letter and a stable contact letter.<sup>15</sup> The tracing letter was used when the current resident knew where the sample member had moved to but did not want to tell the interviewer. The letter was given to the resident with a pre-paid envelope, and they were asked to send the letter to the sample member at their new address. The letter asked the sample member to contact ISER with their new address details. The stable contact letter was to be used where we had the contact details of a person nominated by the sample member as someone we could contact who would know where the sample member had moved to. The interviewer

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the adaptive design at Wave 8 see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/working-papers/2018-05.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> For specific fieldwork materials, please see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/fieldwork-documents/>

would post the letter to the stable contact. The letter asked the stable contact to ask the sample member to contact ISER with their new address.

The in-office tracing processes have also expanded since Wave 2. These are processes which are done within ISER, after the interviewer has tried to track the mover in the field. The untraced movers are returned to ISER for additional tracking. In the office, those for whom we have an email address are sent an email. We have also used an online service to trace sample members. The service used currently checks the Post Office Change of Address database, the death registers, and a range of other databases. Since Wave 3 we have also used a couple of members of out-of-office-hours tracing staff, who use telephone numbers for the sample member, as well as the stable contact, to try to get in contact. This is something the interviewer would have attempted in the field, but the out-of-office-hours staff are able to work on these cases for longer.

**Table 5. Field and in-office tracing procedures for movers.**

1.	Interviewer field tracing (asking current residents, neighbours)
2.	Tracing letter / stable contact
3.	In-office tracing (email, databases)
4.	Out-of-hours tracing staff
5.	Reissue to interviewer (if fieldwork active)

### Interviewer briefings and interviewer materials

Interviewers are briefed at the start of each wave. The briefings inform the interviewers about changes in the fieldwork design, changes in the questionnaire (new content coming in, previous-wave content no longer included), and let them know about research findings from the study, including any media coverage and other examples of impact. The interviewer briefings for Waves 2 and 3 were similar to those at Wave 1. These were mostly fairly small in scale (around a dozen interviewers at each) and took place in different areas of the country.

At Waves 4 and 5, interviewers experienced a different style of project briefing. For interviewers who had worked on the study before, the fieldwork agency used four large ‘conference-style’ briefings rather than around 80-90 smaller briefings held in previous years. The focus of the briefings shifted away from the technical procedures for administering the survey, and more towards engaging and motivating the interviewers, giving them more information about what was being done with the data so they could relay this to sample members, and to give them more of a chance to communicate with each other and share best practices.

At Wave 6, these types of briefings stopped; the change in the fieldwork agency meant that all interviewers had to have more detailed briefings, and so the style of briefing reverted to the earlier version (face-to-face), with a dozen or so interviewers at each, which continued for Wave 7. Wave 6 included an Immigrant and Ethnic Minority boost, which meant additional briefings needed to be organised for interviewers working on this part of the project, which included screening and recruitment of new households.

For Waves 8-12, two different types of briefing were used:

- ‘Refresher’ briefings for interviewers who had already worked on Wave 7 of Understanding Society.
- ‘Full’ briefings for interviewers who had not previously worked on the study.

Both types of briefing were conducted face-to-face (except during the Covid-19 period when all briefings were moved online) and were usually with groups of around 15 interviewers. Researchers from Kantar Public or NatCen, and ISER jointly ran the briefings.

At Wave 13, all interviewers had experience of Understanding Society from previous waves; therefore, the only type of briefings necessary for Wave 13 were refresher briefings. These briefings were conducted online via Teams and were usually with groups of around 10 interviewers.

There were new interviewers recruited for Wave 14 (due to the General Population Boost, GPS2) so the briefing sessions were a combination of full briefings for interviewers new to Understanding Society, and refresher briefings for those who had experience of the survey from Wave 13. These briefings were conducted online via Teams and were usually with groups of around 10 interviewers.

At Wave 16 (a biomarker wave), interviewer briefings were held face-to-face due to the need to accredit interviewers in the collection of biomeasures. New interviewers were assigned to two-day briefings where day 1 was devoted to the overall project background and procedures training, while day 2 was about the Wave 16 biomeasure collection protocols and hands-on training using the equipment. This was followed by an interviewer accreditation process. For interviewers already experienced on Understanding Society at previous waves, the training was shorter (one or one and a half days) and covered everything that was new in Wave 16. In some cases, the experienced interviewers were given a half-day online training on the Wave 16 procedures and were then asked to attend a half-day in-person accreditation event on biomeasures in-person. New materials were provided to interviewers that explained the process of biomeasure collection. These included information leaflets on blood sample collection, a cognitive measures information leaflet, and a health information leaflet. The interviewers were also provided with a biomeasure collection protocol document for their reference.

At Wave 17, a new survey software was introduced (Forsta Plus), and so interviewers needed to be trained to work with it. The briefings included a technical training on the software as well as project briefings. Depending on the interviewers' level of experience with the survey they were invited to a refresher or a full briefing. The refresher project briefings were normally online, while the full-day ones included a mixture of online and face-to-face ones.

### Interviewer materials<sup>16</sup>

To help interviewers “sell” the survey on the doorstep, provide additional information to sample members, or try to and engage them with the aims of the survey, the interviewers are given a set of leaflets and other materials. At every wave, they have had an information leaflet all about the study. At Wave 4, the interviewers were given an additional document which they could use on the doorstep to persuade people to take part if they felt it would be helpful. This was a laminated double-sided A4 sheet which contained key facts about the study, examples of media coverage and how the results could feed into policy debate.

At Wave 6, Interviewers were given a laminated A4 page of “*Understanding Society* in the news” which included headlines from media outlets which covered research using the study. In the second year of Wave 6, to coincide with the start of Wave 7, interviewers were also given an additional set of documents to use on the doorstep. These were a set of four case-studies, each was a laminated A5-sized double-sided document. The case studies were all headed “How is my information used?” and set out how specific questions in the survey were used by researchers, what the research found, media coverage of the findings, and the implications for policymakers. These documents were created to help interviewers answer questions about the impact of the study. The four case-studies covered different topics so that the interviewer could select one which would be most relevant to the person they were talking to. At subsequent waves, the number of case studies increased to include more recent research findings.

At Wave 8, the rules requiring interviewers to make first contact face-to-face were relaxed, and they were permitted to telephone first to make an appointment for households where they had personally interviewed in Wave 7. Previous-wave non-responding households, and households where the interviewer was new at Wave 8, were still contacted in person. The aim of this was to reduce the number of in-person contact attempts required. The approach changed in March 2020, after the Covid-19 pandemic procedures were introduced, after which all contact attempts by interviewers were made by telephone. No more visits to households were made until the start of 2022. When face-to-face interviewing resumed another leaflet was included with the advance letter, which explained the protocols being

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<sup>16</sup> For interviewer materials see <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/fieldwork-documents/>

used to work in a Covid-secure manner. Interviewers were expected to make a telephone contact in advance of visiting households.

## Participant mailings

### **Advance mailings**

At the second wave of the study, we knew the names of the sample members and so advance letters were sent to named adults and included the incentive voucher. There were different versions of the letter for previous-wave responding adults, previous-wave non-responding adults, rising-16s (those who had been 15 at the previous wave and were expected to have turned 16 since), and the BHPS and NIHPS (Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey) samples, who were incorporated into *Understanding Society* during year 1 of Wave 2. From Wave 5, the BHPS and NIHPS samples received the same advance letters as the GPS and EMB samples.

The advance letter design also changed at Wave 5. Up to that point, the letter had been a traditional style of text, in paragraphs, on letter-headed paper with the *Understanding Society* logo. At Wave 5, the design was refreshed, with greater use of colour and callouts in the right-hand column. The amount of text was reduced, with additional information on the reverse of the letter. The change-of-address slip was attached to the advance letter, rather than being a separate postcard.

The introduction of the web-first design at Wave 7 required a change in the advanced materials. Whilst the CAPI-first sample members still received an advance letter, containing their incentive, the web-first sample members received an invitation letter. This letter included their incentive, where applicable (depending on their previous-wave outcome), and also included the sample member's unique login and password to access the survey. Sample members for whom we had an email address were also sent an invitation email, which contained a direct link to access their survey (the login and password were embedded within the URL).

At Wave 9 the advance mailings were re-designed. The callouts in the right-hand column were removed and more information about why the sample member should take part, and who was using the study was included on the back of the letter. At Wave 12, because of COVID-19, the letters were re-designed again because there was no interviewer face-to-face contact. All adults were issued web-first and so there was more information about why this decision was necessary. In the right-hand column there was a bullet point list of how to take part. At Wave 13, this list was turned into bubble callouts, and the letter text was broken up with highlighted section headings to make it easier to read. At Wave 14 we reverted back to separate CAPI-first advance letters and Web-first invitation letters, with the bubble callouts retained from Wave 13. The Wave 15 letters aimed to include more white space, with the amount of text reduced. The information which had been included was moved to the back of the letter with more use of callouts and icons.

The letters were next re-designed for Wave 16 because of the requirement to include much more information about the health and biomarker collection. The CAPI-first letter mentioned the blood sample specifically, and that the interviewer would take a few simple health measurements. The Web-first letter had to go into more detail, because there would not be an interviewer present when the participant was completing online. The Wave 16 web-first letter also introduced the use of a QR code to make it easier for sample members to start their online interview.

We saw that at Wave 16 there was a lower response to the survey among sample members who previously took part online but at Wave 16 were issued to CAPI to re-collect cognitive measures. A new advance letter category was added from December of Year 1 for this group of participants. The letter explained to them in more detail than the original version why it was important for us that they took part with an interviewer in Wave 16. The letter also gave the sample member their login details in case they strongly preferred to take part online.

#### **Inter-wave mailings**

An inter-wave mailing was sent to sample members after the Wave 1 interview. It had originally been planned to be sent approximately six months after the interview, but because of the fieldwork period at Wave 1, and the delays in getting data deliveries established, for the first year of Wave 2, the inter-wave mailing report was sent out with the advance letter. After Wave 2, there was a set of 'tailored' reports, with content targeted at groups in the sample: young adults, workers, older people, ethnic minorities, the BHPS/NIHPS samples, and then a generic one for the remaining sample members. In 2011, a 140-page report based on early findings from the study was produced<sup>17</sup> and a short 15-page summary of this report was produced for sample members and sent as the inter-wave mailing report after Wave 3.

After Wave 3, the inter-wave mailings became wave non-specific and were sent to the whole sample at certain times of the year. During 2013, the mailing strategy changed, with four reports being sent throughout the year. Three of these reports were brief, one-page A5-sized 'postcards' with information about a piece of research, whilst the fourth was a more substantial report. All adult sample members received two of the postcard mailings and the longer report; they missed the postcard mailing for the quarter in which they were in the field. This strategy was followed in 2014 and 2015. In 2016, we returned to the strategy of just one inter-wave mailing for each sample member. In that year, there was a special report for the former BHPS sample, to mark the start of the 25<sup>th</sup> year of data collection. Other sample members received the participant version of the "Insights 2016" report. In 2017, all adult sample members received a participant version of "Insights 2017".

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<sup>17</sup> <https://understandingsociety.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/insights/Understanding-Society-Early-Findings.pdf>

From 2018, a different strategy was adopted for the between-wave mailings so that a mailing was sent to each household (whether they were currently in the field or not) once every six months (a summer and a winter edition). Both types of mailings included:

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

In 2021, we introduced an annual between-wave mailing for 10-15-year-olds, which included a Highlight magazine with findings from the youth survey and was sent to participants once a year.

Those who provided health measures in Wave 16 were sent an additional mailing in 2025 which included a thank you leaflet for contributing to the health study and provided examples of important health research done based on Understanding Society data.

#### **Other participant mailings**

In 2016, when we reduced the number of mailings each year, we introduced a “likely mover” mailing. To those who say, in their annual interview, that they are likely to move in the next year, we send an additional letter and a change-of-address card a couple of months after the interview. This arrives before the inter-wave mailing and so has a better chance of tracking people if they move.

In late-2014, we also introduced a birthday card for those who were turning 16. The cards are sent out each quarter for those in the sample who are turning 16 within that period. The card was introduced to try to increase the response to the adult questionnaire for those who become 16 and are therefore eligible for the full interview for the first time. A welcome pack was also introduced in 2014 for those who were turning 10 and therefore becoming eligible to complete a youth survey. In 2018, we introduced a welcome pack for those turning 16 and so eligible for their first adult interview. The welcome pack was discontinued due to having no positive impact on response.

Wave 16 mailings included additional documents due to it being a health study. Advanced mailings included a health information leaflet. The categories of advanced letters remained the same, although the text within the letters changed to include information about the biomeasures and blood samples collected at Wave 16. There were also additional reminders added to those who did not provide biomeasures (blood pressure) or did not complete a cognitive survey as part of the interview, and those who did not return a blood sample.

An additional “end of fieldwork” mop-up letter for adults and youths was introduced in Wave 16 as a last chance to take part which provided the sample members with a deadline by which they were able to take part and reminded them their login details.

At Wave 16, we also introduced an online version of the youth survey and the online link with login details were included in the youth invitation letter. The online youth survey was previously tested experimentally on Wave 9, but the uptake was too low to justify the development costs, and so it was not implemented until Wave 16.

In Wave 18, the youth survey was split into two versions: for 10-12 and 13-15-year-olds. Following this change, the youth between-wave mailing magazine was also split into a version for the older age group (Highlight) and the younger age group (Spotlight).

To help engage children and families with children from a young age, additional mailings were introduced for babies (up to 18-month-olds) and those turning 5 in the survey year. Interviewers were also given additional leaflets for parents about why it is important for us to interview children.

### Incentives

As noted above, the adult incentive at Wave 1 of *Understanding Society* was a £10 High Street gift voucher (known as “Love2Shop”). In August to October 2010, an experiment was run to test the efficacy of Post Office vouchers, rather than the Love2Shop vouchers. The Love2Shop vouchers limited sample members to certain shops. One advantage of the Post Office voucher was that the sample member could take it to the Post Office and exchange it for cash, which they could then spend anywhere. This did mean that sample members had to visit a Post Office first, so added an extra task. From the survey contractor’s point of view, another advantage of the Post Office voucher was that they only had to be paid when redeemed rather than when purchased, which was the case with the Love2Shop voucher. This meant that if a sample member did not use their Post Office voucher, it did not have to be paid for. The sample was randomly allocated to the Post Office or Love2Shop voucher group. It was found that among the BHPS sample, the response rate was slightly lower for the group receiving the Post Office vouchers, but this was the only difference. From Wave 3 year 2, and Wave 4 year 1, all vouchers for the GPS and EMB groups were Post Office vouchers, whilst the BHPS sample kept receiving the Love2Shop vouchers.

Towards the end of Wave 3, September 2012, a trial was conducted in two field areas in which an additional £20 incentive was used at the re-issue stage. This was then rolled out across the sample from October and so covers the last quarter of Wave 3. In the implementation, non-responding households were reviewed by the fieldwork agency’s operations department for re-issue and possible re-allocation to a different interviewer. Households which had refused to participate in the initial fieldwork period, but where the assessment was that this was a “soft” refusal, were sent a re-issue letter which mentioned an additional incentive if they participated during the re-issue fieldwork period. Other non-responding households were sent a normal re-issue letter, but the interviewers had discretion to offer the additional incentive on the doorstep if they felt that this would convert a non-responding household to a participating household.

During the early months of Wave 4 (from 4AP1), the youth incentive for the GPS and EMB samples increased from £3 to £5 (see Table 7), to bring it in line with the incentive for the BHPS youths. From 4AP2, young people who returned their questionnaire to the interviewer were given their £5 voucher, rather than it being posted to them from the office later.

At Wave 6, the incentive strategy changed (see Table 8 below). Rather than there being an additional incentive at the interviewer's discretion, adults in previous-wave non-responding households were eligible for the increased incentive automatically. Those adults in households who had refused at Wave 5 had a £20 incentive included with their advance letter. Those adults in other non-responding households from Wave 5 were offered a £20 voucher if they were interviewed (i.e., conditional). The reason for the different approaches is that we had evidence that for whole-household refusals that at least one sample member had still been resident in the previous year, whereas for the other non-responding households – mostly non-contacts – we did not know whether a sample member had been resident and so the risk of increasing costs by sending vouchers to households where there were no sample members was higher. From Wave 6, most sample members were sent an unconditional incentive with their advance letter. This was only different for previous-wave non-responders and new entrants to the household.

At Wave 6 there was also a change for the youth self-completion, where the incentive voucher was handed over with the blank questionnaire, rather than after the completed questionnaire was received. This meant that the voucher was partially unconditional, since the young person did not have to complete the questionnaire and hand it back. However, if the young person refused up-front to participate, neither the questionnaire nor the voucher was given.

There was an additional incentive for those sample members who had turned 16 since the previous wave and so were now eligible for their first full adult interview. These “rising-16s” were also informed that if they completed their adult interview, they would be entered into a draw to win an iPad. This draw was carried out at the end of each quarter and included all those rising-16s who had been interviewed during those three months.

Following a round of testing on Wave 8, an “early bird” bonus of £10 was introduced to all adults who completed the survey online within the first five weeks of web-only period, before households were issued to interviewers.

From Wave 7, where households completed online, the youth paper questionnaire, along with the £5 voucher, was sent to a parent 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.

At Wave 13, the standard incentive for adults increased to £20, and for youth to £10. Most household members (those who took part in 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. This meant that there was no longer a distinction between households that had refused and those that had not responded for other reasons at the previous wave.

In Wave 15, there was a longer battery of questions on family and children, and adults who answered those were given an additional £5 incentive.

At Wave 16 (a biomeasure wave), additional incentives were offered for completing additional tasks: £5 for completing the cognitive function tests, and £5 for returning a blood sample. The incentive strategy changed from December 2024 (Wave 16, Year 1) as an intervention directed at increasing the return rates of the blood samples. The incentive for returning a blood sample increased to £10, and an additional incentive was introduced for reporting blood pressure measurements (£5).

An additional incentive change from December 2024 included dropping the early bird incentive for web-first sample members and instead offering a conditional additional incentive of £10 upon completion in any mode at any time during the fieldwork period. This was done because of the strategy of allocating some households who had been web-first to CAPI-first, so that we could collect some longitudinal measures of cognition and other biomeasures. This meant that participants who had been receiving a £10 bonus for several waves were no longer eligible, because they were issued to interviewers, rather than being invited to take part online.

At Wave 17, the incentives were increased to £30 for adults and £15 for children (10-15s). The incentive strategy was also slightly simplified to reduce the number of advanced letter types. The letter types and incentive type were now based only on the last wave individual outcome and not the household outcome. All previous wave productive adults received £30 in their advanced mailing, and all previous wave unproductive adults received £30 upon completion. Rising 16s and new entrants also received incentives upon completion. During Wave 16, and from the start of Wave 17, we also introduced an end-of-fieldwork mop-up about 4 weeks before the end of fieldwork. Those who had not responded till then were sent a 'last chance to take part' letter which promised an extra bonus of £10 (in addition to the standard survey incentive of £30) if the survey was completed before the fieldwork end deadline. A similar youth mop-up letter was sent to parents of non-responding 10-15-year-olds, which promised an extra £5 upon completion before the end of fieldwork. Also from Wave 17, the iPad draw for rising-16s was changed to a £250 Amazon gift card draw. Table 6, below, sets out the current incentive strategy that is used for adults. Tables 7 and 8 summarise the changing incentive strategy for adults and youths since the start of the study.

**Table 6: Current incentive strategy for adults, Waves 17-18**

<b>Adult type</b>	<b>Amount and administration of incentive</b>
Previous wave responding adults and rising 16s in productive households at the previous wave	£30 gift voucher included in advance letter
Non-responding adults in the previous wave	£30 gift voucher handed out by interviewer at the end of the interview (or posted for web respondents)
New entrant adults to households that had taken part in previous wave	£30 gift voucher handed out by interviewer at the end of the interview (or posted for web respondents)
“Early Bird” web completion to those who complete their online interview in the first five weeks of fieldwork	£10 gift voucher posted to respondents after the interview
Mop-up bonus, for completion in the last few weeks of fieldwork	£10 gift voucher posted to respondents after the interview

**Table 7. Summary: Evolution of Adult Survey incentive strategy**

<b>Wave</b>	<b>Adult incentive</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1	£10	£10 sent with advanced mailing + £10 after each adult interview
3	£10+£20	£10 unconditional + £20 conditional upon reissue for non-responders
6	£10 or £20	£10 for adults in previous wave responding households; £20 for adults in previous wave non-responding households (unconditional for refusals, conditional for non-contacts)
8	Early Bird Bonus £10	£10 bonus introduced for web responders in Web-first sample
13	£20 (+£10 EB bonus)	£20 for all individuals (unconditional for previous wave responding households, conditional for non-responding households)
16	£20 (+ £10 bonus)	in W16 year 1 EB bonus applied but in year 2 it was changed so anyone who completed the survey in any mode received an additional £10
17	£30 (+EB/web mop-up bonus)	£30 for all individuals (unconditional for previous-wave responding adults, conditional for previous-wave non-responding adults); Early Bird bonus was reinstated during the end of fieldwork web mop-up

**Table 8: Summary: Evolution of youth survey incentive strategy**

Wave	Incentive value	Notes
1	£3 for UKHLS, £5 for BHPS	conditional
4	£5 for all	conditional
6	£5	unconditional
13	£10	unconditional
17	£15	unconditional

This paper has summarised the development of the Understanding Society fieldwork protocols from Wave 1 through to Wave 18. The intention is that this working paper will be updated when there are changes made to the design protocol of the main Understanding Society study.

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## Appendices

Including as appendices to this working paper is a copy of the original Participant Handbook, a set of advance/invitations used on the study, and a selection of the Participant Updates sent to sample members each year. The full set of fieldwork materials are available on the Understanding Society website at

<https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/fieldwork-documents/>

The advance/invitation letters selected for the appendices are those mentioned in the text of the working paper, where there had been significant design changes since the previous wave.

Appendix 1: Participant Handbook

Appendix 2: Selected advance/invitation letters

- Wave 1 advance card
- Wave 2 advance letter
- Wave 5 advance letter
- Wave 7 CAPI advance letter
- Wave 7 Web invitation letter
- Wave 9 CAPI advance letter
- Wave 9 Web invitation letter
- Wave 11 CAPI advance letter
- Wave 11 Web invitation letter
- Wave 12 invitation letter
- Wave 13 invitation letter
- Wave 14 CAPI advance letter
- Wave 14 Web invitation letter
- Wave 15 CAPI advance letter
- Wave 15 Web invitation letter
- Wave 16 CAPI advance letter: Months 1-11
- Wave 16 CAPI advance letter: Months 12-24
- Wave 16 Web invitation letter: Months 1-11
- Wave 16 Web invitation letter: Months 12-24

Appendix 3: Selected inter-wave mailings

- Wave 1 Inter-wave mailing (IWM)
- 2013 Q1 variant: Generic
- 2013 Q1 variant: Ethnic Minority Boost

- 2013 Q1 variant: Workers
- 2013 Q1 variant: Young Adults
- 2013 Q3
- 2014 December
- 2015 December
- Participant News Autumn 2025
- Highlight (13-15 years youth report) Issue #5, 2025
- Spotlight (10-12 years youth report) issue #1, 2025

Appendix 1

# Participants' Handbook





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**Understanding Society** is a study that will reveal amazing and important things about who we are and how we live.

You're one in 100,000 – the number of people specially chosen to take part in the study. You're also one of a kind, and without you the study would be missing an important element.

We want to hear about your experiences and opinions. The information you share with us about yourself will help us build up a detailed picture of life in the UK and how it's changing.

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# Make your mark

Whatever your point of view, it's a distinctive, essential part of *Understanding Society*. If you choose not to take part in the study, we can't replace you with anyone else. There will be a gap in the study where your voice should have been.

This study isn't just about generalities. It's made up of individual people, individual households, and individual lives. That's what makes *Understanding Society* special.



# Talk to us

The size and scale of *Understanding Society* means we'll get a better picture than ever before of life in the UK and how it's changing. On these pages, you can read some of the information gathered by similar studies. We hope this gives you an idea of the kinds of patterns and trends we can find through meeting and talking to people around the UK, including you.

Opinions and experiences aren't set in stone, so information like this can quickly become outdated. That's why your continuing participation in the study is really important – we want to be sure that different points of view are represented.

Following divorce, the incomes of women with children fall while those of men do not



45% of men but only 30% of women think that a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works

Young adults have a 50% chance of inheriting their parent's religious beliefs

"It's a safe area, we have nice neighbours and it is convenient for the children's school - And I was born here so I have relatives nearby."

**86%** of people think their area is good to live in.

Just **5%** say their area is bad.

“You don't have the same stresses so you can enjoy things a bit more, like seeing your friends more often. But I do worry I'll have less money to splash out on things.”

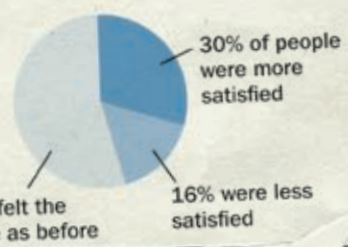
One in three men work long hours, compared to just under one in eight women



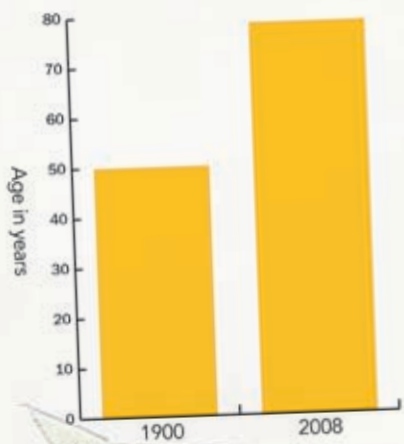
More than half of workers aged between 60 and 64 worry a lot about how much money they will have in retirement

The average number of hours worked a week is 34, but a quarter of us work around 43 hours per week

**When asked if their lives were better or worse than a year earlier,**

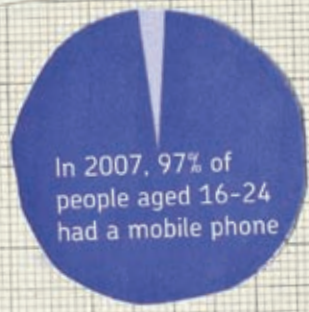


### Life Expectancy



“I'm happy and healthy and successful in my job. And I'm in a happy relationship - I think that's what everyone wants in life.”

“Having good health and being able to get out and about is the most important thing for me.”



#1

A bit less 9 to 5

Working practices that suit employees as well as employers mean happier people and a more productive workforce. But a 2005 study found that 40% of people in paid employment are unhappy with the hours they work.

This evidence fed into the UK government's 2007 decision to extend the right to flexible working to more people than ever.

#2

Glass ceilings and sticky floors

Most people agree that men and women should get the same pay for doing the same job. Yet recent research has shown that women are still paid less than men - by between 12% and 23% across the countries of Western Europe. It revealed that average figures typically hide 'glass ceilings' and 'sticky floors': in other words, there are bigger differences at the top and bottom of the pay scale.

The findings of this study have influenced new policies, such as this year's Equalities Bill, which aims to end pay discrimination in the workplace.

# Change the world

*Understanding Society* will help us learn more about each other. And when we know more about each other, we can make better decisions about how to improve everyone's lives.

In the past, studies like this have contributed to changes in the law, given insights into human psychology, and helped doctors treat illnesses more effectively.

#3

## The UK in good health

What makes people healthier - a national health service paid for with taxes like we have in the UK, or private health policies like in the USA? A study compared people's health in both countries over an 11-year period. People in the UK were in better health compared with the USA, and their health was more likely to improve. And US policies tend to mean that people who are in poor health have to stay in paid work.

It's research like this that encourages British politicians to keep putting money and effort into maintaining the NHS.



1954

Newcastle quayside

2006



# Nothing stays still

Life changes and shifts all the time, so a snapshot of the present can only tell us so much. That's why we'd like to come back and interview you next year so that we can follow how your life changes over time.





# The future

We can never know exactly what the future will bring. But we can guess what it might be like by looking at the present and the past.

We do know that many years in the future people will still be reading and discussing the results of *Understanding Society*. The study will help us all better understand the world around us.

This is your chance to take part in shaping the future – without your help, this groundbreaking study would not be possible.

**We hope to see you again next year.**



# Contacts

**For any information about the study or your interviews, or to update your details, write to:**

Understanding Society, University of Essex  
FREEPOST, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ

**Website:** [www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants)

**Email:** [contact@understandingsociety.org.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 0800 252 853

---

*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.



## **Economic and Social Research Council**

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's leading research funding and training agency addressing economic and social concerns.

[www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk)



## **Institute for Social and Economic Research**

The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) specialises in the production and analysis of data and evidence which tracks changes in the lives of the same individuals over time.

[www.iser.essex.ac.uk](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk)



## **National Centre for Social Research**

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is the largest independent social research institute in Britain.

[www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)

---



#### PRIVACY POLICY

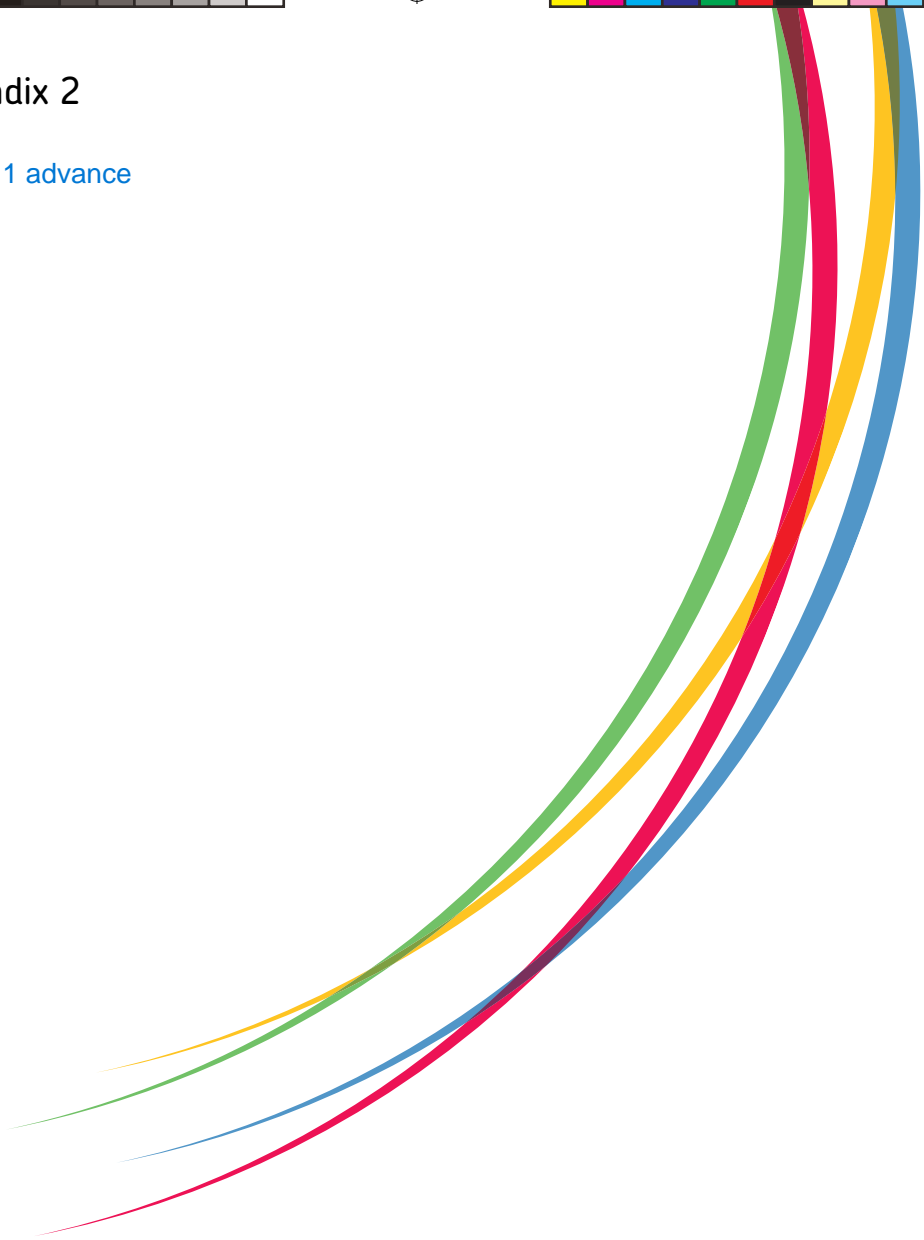
When you're giving out personal information, you want to feel secure about how it will be used. *Understanding Society* is an independent social research project and we can assure you that any information you give us will be kept strictly confidential. It will be used only for research purposes and it will be impossible for anyone to identify you or your household from the study's results. We work under the rules of the Data Protection Act to protect your privacy.





## Appendix 2

Wave 1 advance  
card





## **Introducing Understanding Society**

*Understanding Society* is the biggest study of its kind in the world, conducted by researchers from the **University of Essex** together with the **National Centre for Social Research**.

The study covers important subjects such as our health, our opinions, our families and our jobs, and will create a lasting record of who we are and what we believe.

Your household is being asked to take part as your address was randomly selected, which means that we can't replace your address with another. Having your point of view is important to ensure the study correctly represents all types of people across the UK. Your participation is completely voluntary and we hope you will be able to help.

As a small thank-you in advance, we have enclosed a £10 gift voucher for you. Anyone else in your household who is interviewed will be given a £10 voucher by the interviewer when they call (£3 for children aged 10-15).

The results of *Understanding Society* will help us to understand the world around us and help people make better decisions about how to improve everyone's lives. By talking to one of our interviewers you can take part in shaping the future. Each person's interview will take around 30 minutes but could take up to an hour depending on your circumstances.

For more information visit [www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants) call the **University of Essex** on **Freephone 0800 252 853**

*This study 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.*





---

*Understanding Society* is the biggest study of its kind in the world and will help us build up a detailed picture of life in the UK and how it's changing. We'd really like you and your household to take part and an interviewer will be calling at your home some time in the next few weeks to ask you for an interview.

Your participation is completely optional but we hope you will find the time to help with this important study and that you enjoy taking part.

Yours,

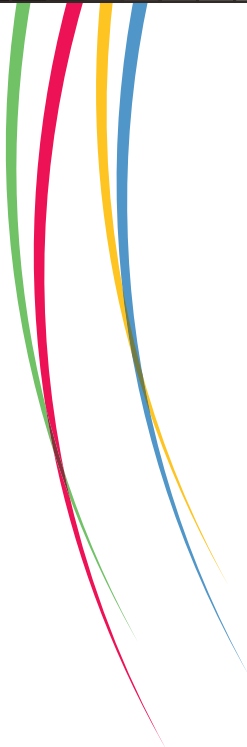
**Nick Buck**  
Director,  
Understanding Society

**Your interviewer**  
Understanding Society

---

P2822 W1 Advance Card GP





Printed on Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accredited and 50:50 recycled paper



You might already know about *Understanding Society* – it’s the biggest study of its kind in the world, conducted by researchers from the University of Essex together with NatCen. By taking part, you can help us paint a unique picture of life in the UK.

Our study asks people questions about subjects such as health, caring for others and how you spend your leisure time. Your answers will help us create a lasting record of who we are and what we believe. In the past, studies like this have contributed to changes in the law, helped scientists understand human psychology and helped doctors treat illnesses.

Your point of view is important to us – it helps to ensure that the study represents all types of people across the UK. Because you were specially selected before the study began, we can’t replace you with anyone else, so it’s especially important to us that you take part.

An interviewer will be in touch with you soon to arrange a convenient time for an interview – it could last from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on your circumstances. The interviewer will be carrying an identification card, with their photograph and NatCen’s logo. Your participation is completely voluntary and we really hope you will be able to take part.

**As a small thank you for taking part, everyone in the household who is interviewed will be given a gift voucher.**

If there are children aged 10-15 in your household, we hope they will be willing to complete a short questionnaire about their hobbies, friends, school life and hopes for the future. Each child will receive a gift voucher as a thank you for completing the questionnaire.

For more information please contact us using the details below.

Yours,



.....  
Nick Buck  
Director,  
*Understanding Society*

*This study 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.*



Wave 5 advance  
letter

Dear

You may have already heard about Understanding Society – it's the biggest study of its kind in the world.

Understanding Society is important as it gives you a voice on issues that matter, like how the recession is affecting people in different parts of the country, or whether we are leading a healthy lifestyle. Your point of view is vital. It ensures that the study represents people of all ages and backgrounds across the UK. No-one else can take your place as no-one else has your particular mix of circumstances.

Understanding Society asks about subjects such as health, caring for others and how you spend your leisure time.

If you have any questions at all about Understanding Society and your involvement in it, please don't hesitate to call us on **01206 872957**.

Results from previous years have generated widespread interest. You can read more about what has been found so far, and where the study has featured in newspapers and on TV, at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk). You can also follow us on Twitter [@usociety](https://twitter.com/usociety).

We'd like to send you updates about how the information you give in Understanding Society is being used, so please either give your interviewer your email address or write to [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

Understanding Society makes your voice heard and your help is always much appreciated.

Many thanks for taking part,

**Professor Nick Buck**

Director, Understanding Society  
Institute for Social and Economic Research  
University of Essex

To say "Thank You"  
for taking part, we'll  
send you a £10 voucher.

**Contact us:**

Web:  
[understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
Email:  
[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
Phone:  
**01206 872 957**

## Why are you important?

Without your unique input, the survey will be less complete. We can't simply replace you with someone else as the people taking part were selected scientifically to represent the whole population. No-one else has your unique combination of circumstances and in a very real way you are personally vital to the success of the study. The strength of Understanding Society is that it talks to the same people each year so we can see how things like the economic situation and the way our society is changing affects your life. The study is your study and is about issues that affect you and everyone in our diverse society.

## About the study.

Long-term studies like Understanding Society help us find out about issues that matter to all of us – how the recession is affecting people in different parts of the country, what standard of facilities you have – or don't have – in your area, our attitudes towards health and the environment. The information collected can inform Government policy and is used by academics, policy-makers and researchers working for charities and the voluntary sector in this country and abroad.

## The interview.

An interviewer will be in touch soon to arrange a convenient time to interview you and other members of your household. The interview will last around an hour. The interviewer will be carrying a photo ID. If it's not convenient when your interviewer calls, please feel free to choose a day and time which is easier for you.

## Young people in the house?

If there are any young people aged 10-15 in your household, I hope they will be willing to complete a short questionnaire about their hobbies, friends, school life and hopes for the future. Each one will receive a voucher as a thank you for completing the questionnaire.



<<Serial\_number>><<ChkL>>/  
<<FF\_personno>><<FF\_PID>>

<resp\_name>  
<FF\_Address1>  
<FF\_Address2>  
<FF\_Address3>  
<FF\_Address4>  
<FF\_Address5>  
<FF\_PostCode>

<Date>

Dear <NAME>,

You are an important part of the Understanding Society Study.

Your £10 voucher

We've enclosed a £10 voucher to say thank you for your help and let you know we value your contribution.

What happens next?

An interviewer will be in touch with you soon to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

Over 60,000 participants take part in this study every year but each individual matters to us. Your participation is crucial to the success of the study, its value to researchers and accuracy of their research findings. If we lose you, we can't replace you. At the bottom of this letter is a change-of-address card. Please let us know if you change any of your contact details, either by using this card or using the "Contact us" details below. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Sandra Jones or Colette Lo from our Participant Helpline.

With many thanks,

**Professor Nick Buck**

Director, Understanding Society  
Institute for Social and Economic Research  
University of Essex

**We need your help**

**We'll arrange a time**

**Complete the survey**

**Here's £10**

**Find out more**

**Contact us:**

Participant helpline  
(Sandra & Colette):  
0800 252 853  
Web:  
understandingsociety.ac.uk  
Email:  
contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk  
You can also follow us on  
Twitter @usociety.

This study 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.

<125325/Letter 1>

**Moving home?  
Take us with you.**

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk  
contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk  
FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Understanding Society, University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ



## Why are you important to us?

You make the survey more complete and useful. Without you, the study is less complete.

You have been specially selected to help us make sure that Understanding Society accurately represents experiences of all types of people. This way, we can see how factors such as the economy or housing affect lives across the whole of the UK.

Your participation is crucial to the success of the study, its value to researchers and accuracy of their research findings. If we lose you, we can't replace you.



## What is the study about?

Understanding Society is a long-term study that helps us find out about the issues that matter to everyone. How is the recession affecting you? Are you happy with your local services and facilities? Are your health care requirements being met?

The information we collect is used by academics and researchers to inform policy debates on issues that matter to you.

## Why do you interview young people?

Young people's opinions matter to us, too. If there are young people aged 10-15 in your household, we hope that they can complete their part of the survey. We'll ask them about their hobbies, friends, school life and hopes for the future. Each child that takes part will receive a £5 voucher.



Your continuing participation is very important to us. Please let us know if you move by updating your details on the Understanding Society website at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk), alternatively you could call us on Freephone 0800 252 853 or return this card in the Freepost envelope (no stamp needed).

Name: RESP\_NAME

PID: FF\_PID

MOVING FROM...

FF\_ADDRESS1

FF\_ADDRESS2

FF\_ADDRESS3

FF\_POSTCODE

MOVING TO...

New Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(inc STD code)  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail 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: \_\_\_\_\_

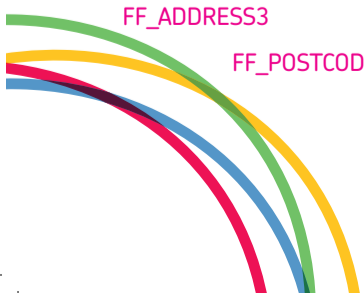
Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_





Understanding Society

<<Serial\_number>><<ChkL>>/  
<<FF\_personno>><<FF\_PID>>

<resp\_name>  
<FF\_Address1>  
<FF\_Address2>  
<FF\_Address3>  
<FF\_Address4>  
<FF\_Address5>  
<FF\_PostCode>

<Date>

Dear <NAME>,

You are an important part of the Understanding Society study.

**Your £10 voucher**

We've enclosed a £10 voucher to say thank you for your help and let you know we value your contribution.

**3 reasons to be part of Understanding Society**

1. We can't replace you. No-one else can take your place as no-one else has your mix of circumstances.
2. Your contribution helps build a more detailed picture of life in the UK. Each year the study becomes more valuable to researchers who are interested in how changes in society are affecting the lives of people in the UK and the choices they make.
3. Understanding Society gives you a voice on issues that matter. Whether it's how you're coping with changes at home or work, or what facilities are missing from your neighbourhood, Understanding Society is letting people who make decisions get a better understanding of our lives.

**What happens next?**

This year the survey is available online at the website shown below, so you can complete it at a time that's best for you. (Please use a computer, rather than a mobile device.)

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/Society](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/Society)

When you've reached the website, you'll be asked to enter your unique username and password:

Username: <USERNAME>

Password: <PASSWORD>

If you are unable to complete your questionnaire on-line, an interviewer will be in touch with you to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

With many thanks,

**Professor Nick Buck**

Director, Understanding Society  
Institute for Social and Economic Research  
University of Essex

I enjoy the time with my interviewer – it gives me a rare chance to reflect on life

I've been part of the study since it started and I feel like I'm doing something useful for society at large

It's interesting to hear how policy makers are using the study and how it's making a difference – it makes me know my time is well spent

**Contact us:**

Participant helpline  
(Sandra & Colette):  
0800 252 853  
Web:  
[understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
Email:  
[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
You can also follow us on  
Twitter @usociety.

This study 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.

< 125325/ Letter 13>

**Moving home?  
Take us with you.**

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Understanding Society, University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ



Understanding Society

## Why are you important to us?

You make the survey more complete and useful. Without you, the study is less complete.

You have been specially selected to help us make sure that Understanding Society accurately represents experiences of all types of people. This way, we can see how factors such as the economy or housing affect lives across the whole of the UK.

Your participation is crucial to the success of the study, its value to researchers and accuracy of their research findings. If we lose you, we can't replace you.



## What is the study about?

Understanding Society is a long-term study that helps us find out about the issues that matter to everyone. How is the recession affecting you? Are you happy with your local services and facilities? Are your health care requirements being met?

The information we collect is used by academics and researchers to inform policy debates on issues that matter to you.



## Completing the Survey online:

To access the survey please type [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/Society](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/Society) into the navigation bar on your Internet Browser.

On arrival at the survey homepage please input your username and password into the space provided and press the Next (>) button.

### How long will it take?

The survey should take 45 minutes to an hour, depending on your circumstances.

### Do I have to do it all in one go?

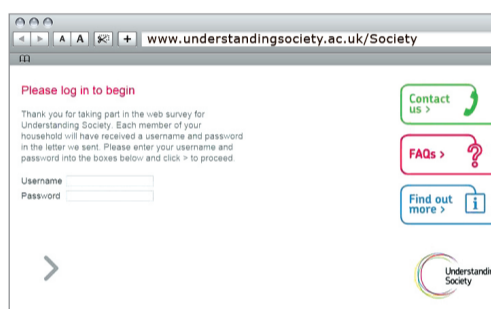
No, you can exit the survey at any time. To log back in to complete it, just access the web-site and re-enter your username and password.

### If I exit the survey, will I need to start from the beginning?

No, your answers will be saved and you will be able to continue with the survey at the point where you stopped.

### Why isn't there a progress bar?

The interview is tailored to you and your circumstances. Each person's interview will be different. This means that it is difficult to calculate at any point how long the rest of the survey will be.



Your continuing participation is very important to us. Please let us know if you move by updating your details on the Understanding Society website at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk), alternatively you could call us on Freephone 0800 252 853 or return this card in the Freepost envelope (no stamp needed).

Name: RESP\_NAME

PID: FF\_PID

MOVING FROM...

FF\_ADDRESS1

FF\_ADDRESS2

FF\_ADDRESS3

FF\_POSTCODE

MOVING TO...

New Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(inc STD code)

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail 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: \_\_\_\_\_

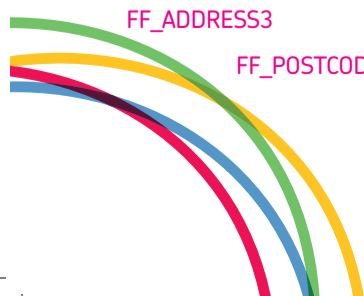
Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_





Firstname Lastname  
Address1  
Address2  
Address3  
Address4  
AB12 3CD

Contact us:

Participant helpline: 0800 252 853  
Web: www.understandingsociety.ac.uk  
Email: contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk

Month 2017

Dear Firstname Lastname

Thank you for your continuing support for *Understanding Society*. Your participation is giving a voice to the experiences of thousands of people like you.

The information you provide is used by academics, policy makers and charities such as Age UK and The Children's Society. To find out more about who uses the study data, please visit

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants)

Please be assured that all the information you provide is treated confidentially. To read more on our policy on confidentiality, please visit

<https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/data-confidentiality>

We hope you will help us again this year as only by interviewing the same people every year can we accurately measure how life in the UK is changing. An interviewer will be in touch with you soon to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

To say thank you for your help and let you know we value your contribution, we've enclosed a £10 gift card which has already been activated for you, and is ready to use.

At the bottom of this letter is a change-of-address card. Please let us know if you change any of your contact details. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to get in touch with our Participant Helpline.

With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval** – Director, Understanding Society  
Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

139140/Letter 1  
00001

This study 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.

Your continuing participation is very important to us. Please let us know if you move by updating your details on the Understanding Society website at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk), Freephone 0800 252 853 or return this card in the Freepost envelope (no stamp needed). To say thank-you we will send you a £5 voucher.

Name: Firstname Lastname

PID: 00203411350051

MOVING FROM...

Address1

Address2

Address3

Address4

AB12 3CD

MOVING TO...

New Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(inc STD code)

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail 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: \_\_\_\_\_

## WHY TAKE PART?



Your contribution helps build a more detailed picture of life in the UK



It only takes 40-60 minutes to complete the survey



Understanding Society gives you a voice on issues that matter



There are gift cards available for those who take part

## WHO'S USING THE STUDY?



### Academics

By taking part, you're helping universities all over the world carry out important work which helps researchers to understand society today.



### Charities & think tanks

Your ongoing support means you're helping charities such as Age UK to improve their services.



### Policy makers

Policy makers can make better decisions based on you answering the survey questions every year and this could change laws.

## Moving home? Take us with you.

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Understanding Society, University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester. C04 3SQ





Firstname Lastname  
Address1  
Address2  
Address3  
Address4  
AB12 3CD

Contact us:

Participant helpline: 0800 252 853  
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Month 2017

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[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society)

When you've reached the website, you'll be asked to enter your unique username and password:

Username: <b>082adxrv</b>	Password: <b>Greens</b>
---------------------------	-------------------------

If you are unable to complete your questionnaire on-line, an interviewer will be in touch with you to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

To say thank you for your help and let you know we value your contribution, we've enclosed a £10 gift card which has already been activated for you, and is ready to use.

**If you're able to complete your interview online by February 7th, we will send you an extra £10 gift card soon after this deadline as a thank you for your early co-operation.**

At the bottom of this letter is a change-of-address card. Please let us know if you change any of your contact details. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to get in touch with our Participant Helpline.

With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval** – Director, Understanding Society  
Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

139140/Letter 2  
00002

This study 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.

Your continuing participation is very important to us. Please let us know if you move by updating your details on the Understanding Society website at [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk), Freephone 0800 252 853 or return this card in the Freepost envelope (no stamp needed). To say thank-you we will send you a £5 voucher.

Name: Firstname Lastname	MOVING TO...
PID: 00203411350051	New Address: _____
MOVING FROM...	
Address1	Home Phone: _____
Address2	(inc STD code)
Address3	Postcode: _____
Address4	Mobile: _____
AB12 3CD	E-mail 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: _____

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[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Understanding Society, University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester. C04 3SQ





# Understanding Society

RESP\_Name  
ff\_Address1  
ff\_Address2  
ff\_Address3  
ff\_Address4  
ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

### Contact us:

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

Postal\_Date

## Your annual interview helps us understand how life in the UK is changing

### Salutation

Thank you for supporting *Understanding Society*. The information you share helps us to understand what people think, feel and do. It also helps us to see how society is changing over time. We would very much like you to complete the survey again this year. It's only by interviewing the same people each year that we can build an accurate picture of what is happening in the UK - this is why you are irreplaceable!

### Taking part

One of our interviewers will be in touch to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

Every day *Understanding Society* is being used in new ways by university researchers, government policymakers and leading charities. You can keep up to date with how *Understanding Society* is being used by visiting [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants)

### Thank you

To say thank you for your help and let you know we value your contribution, we've enclosed a £10 gift card which has already been activated for you, and is ready to use.

If you have any questions about *Understanding Society*, or about completing the survey, please do get in touch with us using the Participant Helpline.

With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval** – Director, *Understanding Society*  
Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

303970/Letter 1

Counter

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Name: RESP\_Name

PID: ff\_PID

MOVING FROM...

ff\_Address1

ff\_Address2

ff\_Address3

ff\_Address4

ff\_Address5

ff\_PostCode

MOVING TO...

New Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(inc STD code)

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of move: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

## WHY SHOULD I KEEP TAKING PART?



Your contribution helps build a more detailed picture of life in the UK.



*Understanding Society* gives you a voice on issues that matter.



There are gift cards available for those who take part.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES *UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY* MAKE?

Age UK used the data to find out what improves wellbeing for older people. Their Wellbeing Index is used to plan services and support for older people.

The Social Metrics Commission used *Understanding Society* to show who is living in poverty now and how that has changed over time. The new scale they developed reflects more accurately the realities and experiences of living in poverty than previous measures.

A national housing association has used *Understanding Society* to look at how the style of housing developments can boost community wellbeing.

To find out more about how *Understanding Society* data is used visit [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants)

### Is the information I give confidential?

Yes. All the information you provide is confidential. To read more on our policy on confidentiality, please visit

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### Moving home? Take us with you.

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Understanding Society, University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester. C04 3SQ





# Understanding Society

RESP\_Name  
ff\_Address1  
ff\_Address2  
ff\_Address3  
ff\_Address4  
ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

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### Taking part

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With many thanks,

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303970/Letter 2

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ff\_Address1  
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ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

MOVING TO...  
New Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(inc STD code)  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of move: \_\_\_\_\_

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RESP\_Name  
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ff\_PostCode

Postal\_Date

# Understanding Society - every interview matters

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This year, because of the health risks caused by the coronavirus Covid-19 we have decided to pause face-to-face interviews for the moment.

Instead of an interviewer visiting your home, you can complete your Understanding Society survey online.

### Thank you for your support

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Every time you complete your interview you are helping the government, policymakers and university researchers understand more about what real people think, feel and do.

**This year it is particularly important that you complete your interview** as the government and researchers will be using Understanding Society to understand more about the Covid-19 outbreak and how it impacts the UK.

### Have questions or want more information?

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Thank you for your continuing support for the Study. With best wishes,

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If you are not able to complete your interview online, an interviewer will contact you by telephone in a few weeks and you can take part over the phone. Unfortunately interviewers cannot do any in-person interviewing until government advice around reducing contact is relaxed, so doing your interview online is the easiest way to take part this year.

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Name: RESP\_Name

PID: ff\_PID

#### MOVING FROM

ff\_Address1

ff\_Address2

ff\_Address3

ff\_Address4

ff\_Address5

ff\_PostCode

#### MOVING TO

New Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(inc STD code)

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of move: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_



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RESP\_Name  
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ff\_Address2  
ff\_Address3  
ff\_Address4  
ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

Postal\_Date



Counter

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2

Enter your user name:  
XXXXXX  
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XXXXX

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ff\_PID

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

New address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone (inc STD code): \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of move: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

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**...so please let us know if you move to a new home.**

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Counter  
WebNo

RESP\_Name  
ff\_Address1  
ff\_Address2  
ff\_Address3  
ff\_Address4  
ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

Postal\_Date

## It's time for your Understanding Society interview

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With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval**  
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### Taking part

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\_\_\_\_\_  
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**2**

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username  
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password

**3**

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Understanding  
Society

Wave 15 CAPI advance  
letter

FinalSerialNum  
FF\_personno/ff\_PID

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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.

# Yes, I've moved house:

ff\_PID

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: \_\_\_\_\_

**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](http://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

## Contact us:

Participant helpline: **0800 252 853**

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RESP\_Name  
ff\_Address1  
ff\_Address2  
ff\_Address3  
ff\_Address4  
ff\_Address5  
ff\_PostCode

XX/XX/XXXX

## It's time for your Understanding Society interview

### How to take part

You don't need to do anything to take part...

...one of our interviewers will be in touch to arrange a convenient time for an interview.

### Salutation

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.

## This year we'd like to ask you more about your health

As part of your interview, we'd like you to give us a few simple health measurements. This is completely voluntary – you don't have to do this part of the interview, but we hope that you will. Collecting health measures on a large study from a variety of people will help researchers better understand the health of the UK population. There is more information in the leaflet accompanying this letter.

### Blood sample

During your interview we will ask you if you agree for us to send you a kit so you can take a small sample of your blood. The kit will contain everything you need to collect the sample and include detailed instructions on how to use it. You do not have to give a sample – it is completely voluntary.

If you do not want to take a blood sample, or give us health measurements, then we would still be grateful if you could complete your normal survey.

## Thank you for your support

We're very grateful that you take part in Understanding Society. To say thank you for your help, we've enclosed a **£20 gift card** which is activated and ready to use.

If you send us your blood sample we will give you an **extra £5**.

### Have questions or want more information?

Call our participant helpline on 0800 252 853 or email us [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto: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.

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## Someone new has joined my household – can they take part?

**At the start of your interview we ask you about who is living with you. If a new adult (aged 16 and over) has joined your household, they may be able to take part in Understanding Society too.**

We will write to any new adults in your household to invite them to take part. This is why we will ask you to enter their name and contact details during your interview. It's important that you have asked permission before you share their contact information, so please ask any new adults in your household whether they are happy to be contacted by Understanding Society.

If they would like more information about the Study they can look on our website [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk). Understanding how households change and grow over time is an important part of the Study, so we hope that any new adults in your household will take part with you.

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Understanding Society

Wave 16 CAPI advance letter: Months 12-24

FinalSerialNum  
FF\_personno/ff\_PID

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RESP\_Name  
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#### Your health

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We recognise we are asking more from you in this interview, so if you take part we will send you a further **£10 gift card**.

#### Giving a blood sample

We'll be asking you to send us a small sample of your blood. If you agree, we'll send you a kit that has everything you need to collect the sample. Blood samples help us find out how healthy people are, and will be used by researchers to study the health of the population and find out how certain diseases develop and can be treated. If you send us your blood sample we will give you an **extra £10**.

If you don't want to give a sample, that's fine. Please complete your annual interview as normal.

#### About the study

##### How long will it take?

This year your interview will take around 65 – 90 minutes.

#### Thank you!

We appreciate the time you volunteer for Understanding Society. To say thank you for your help this year, we've enclosed a **£20 gift card** which is ready to use.

With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval**  
Director, Understanding Society.

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If they would like more information about the Study they can look on our website [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk). Understanding how households change and grow over time is an important part of the Study, so we hope that any new adults in your household will take part with you.

**Your continuing participation is very important to us...**

**...so please let us know if you move to a new home.**

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# Understanding Society

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## It's time for your Understanding Society interview

### Salutation

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.

## This year we'd like to ask you more about your health

As part of your interview, we'd like you to give us a few simple health measurements. This is completely voluntary – you don't have to do this part of the interview, but we hope that you will. Collecting health measures on a large study from a variety of people will help researchers better understand the health of the UK population. There is more information in the leaflet accompanying this letter.

### Blood pressure

We would like to ask you to have your own blood pressure measured before completing the online questionnaire. You can take the blood pressure measure at home, if you have the equipment available, or alternatively you can visit your local GP surgery, or a pharmacy where this service is offered for free.

If you are able to obtain your blood pressure readings, please use the enclosed card to record the measures as well as where and when the readings were taken. We will then ask to report those readings to us during your interview. If you are pregnant we are not asking you to get your blood pressure measured. If you cannot obtain your blood pressure readings, we would still like you to take part in the interview.

### Body Mass measures

We are also interested in body shape - included in this letter is a tape measure. If you are willing, please measure your **waist and hips**, following the instructions in the leaflet enclosed, and write down the results on the enclosed card. You will be asked to enter the numbers during your interview.

### Blood sample

During your interview we will ask you if you agree for us to send you a kit so you can take a small sample of your blood. The kit will contain everything you need to collect the sample including detailed instructions on how to use it. You do not have to take the sample – this is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take a blood sample, then we would still be grateful if you could complete your normal survey.

## Thank you for your support

We're very grateful that you take part in Understanding Society. To say thank you for your help, we've enclosed a **£20 gift card** which is activated and ready 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.

If you send us your blood sample we will give you an **extra £5**.

### Have questions or want more information?

Call our participant helpline on 0800 252 853 or email us [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto: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**  
**1**  
Visit the website  
[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society)

**2**  
Enter your  
**user name: username**  
**and password: password**  
We may send you a SMS text to your phone with a personalised link to your survey.

**3**  
**Answer the questions in your own time.**  
If you can't complete the survey online that's fine – we can arrange for an interviewer to visit you instead.



## Yes, I've moved house:

ff\_PID

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

New address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

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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.

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## Someone new has joined my household – can they take part?

**At the start of your interview we ask you about who is living with you. If a new adult (aged 16 and over) has joined your household, they may be able to take part in Understanding Society too.**

We will write to any new adults in your household to invite them to take part. This is why we will ask you to enter their name and contact details during your interview. It's important that you have asked permission before you share their contact information, so please ask any new adults in your household whether they are happy to be contacted by Understanding Society.

If they would like more information about the Study they can look on our website [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk). Understanding how households change and grow over time is an important part of the Study, so we hope that any new adults in your household will take part with you.

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**...so please let us know if you move to a new home.**

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RESP\_Name  
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XX/XX/XXXX

## It's time for your Understanding Society interview

### Salutation

Thank you for being part of Understanding Society. Every time you're interviewed it helps us see what's changed and what's stayed the same in your life.

### Your health

This year we are going to ask you for a few simple health measurements. This is completely voluntary – you don't have to do this part of the interview, but we hope that you will. Collecting health information from people taking part in Understanding Society will help us better understand the health of the UK population. You can read more in the leaflet in with this letter.

Given the extra time this interview will take we will send you an additional **£10 gift card** to thank you for taking part.

**Blood pressure** We would like to ask you to have your own blood pressure measured before completing the online questionnaire. You can take the blood pressure measure at home, if you have the equipment available, or visit your local GP surgery, or a pharmacy where this service is offered for free.

If you are able to measure your blood pressure, please use the enclosed card to record the measures as well as where and when they were taken. We will then ask to report the measures during your interview.

If you are able to tell us your blood pressure in the survey, we will send you an **extra £5 gift card** to thank you for doing this.

If you are pregnant we are not asking you to get your blood pressure measured. But if you cannot measure your blood pressure, we would still like you to take part in the interview.

**Body Mass measures** We are also interested in body shape - included in this letter is a tape measure. If you are willing, please measure your **waist and hips**, following the instructions in the leaflet, and write down the results on the card. You will be asked to enter the numbers during your interview.

### Giving a blood sample

We'll be asking you to send us a small sample of your blood. If you agree, we'll send you a kit that has everything you need to collect the sample. Blood samples help us find out how healthy people are, and will be used by researchers to study the health of the population and find out how certain diseases develop and can be treated. If you send us your blood sample, we will give you an **extra £10**.

### About the study

**How long will it take?** This year your interview will take around 45-60 minutes.

### Thank you!

We appreciate the time you volunteer for Understanding Society. To say thank you for your help this year, we've enclosed a **£20 gift card** which is ready to use.

With many thanks,

**Professor Michaela Benzeval**  
Director, Understanding Society.

**How to take part**  
**1**  
Go to: [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/society)



**2**  
Enter your  
user name: username  
and password: password

**3**  
Complete your  
survey, with the  
health measurements  
if you want to.

**4**  
If you agree, your  
blood sample kit will  
arrive in the post.  
If you don't want to give a blood sample, that's fine. Please complete your annual interview as normal.  
If you can't complete the survey online, that's OK. An interviewer will be in touch to arrange a suitable time for your interview.

## Yes, I've moved house:

ff\_PID

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.

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We will write to any new adults in your household to invite them to take part. This is why we will ask you to enter their name and contact details during your interview. It's important that you have asked permission before you share their contact information, so please ask any new adults in your household whether they are happy to be contacted by Understanding Society.

If they would like more information about the Study they can look on our website [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk). Understanding how households change and grow over time is an important part of the Study, so we hope that any new adults in your household will take part with you.

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**Family life**

Young people aged 10 - 15 are more likely to talk about things that are important to them with their mum than their dad. 38% talk to their mum 'most days' about things that matter to them while 19% talk to their dad 'most days' about things that matter to them.

If young people were worried or upset about something and they wanted to talk about it, most would want to talk to their mother about it (65%), whilst more would talk to a brother or sister (13%) than talk to their father (8%). Only one in fifteen young people say that they would not talk to anyone in their family.

Nearly all young people feel supported by their family - 79% say that they feel supported in most or all of the things that they do, whilst just 1% say that they do not feel supported by their family.

**Kids online**

90% of young people aged 10 - 15 access the internet at least once each week and just over half of all young people do this every day, with girls using the internet daily more than boys. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of young people said they belong to a social website such as Bebo, Facebook or



MySpace. Girls spend more time on these sites than boys. Five in ten girls and four in ten boys who belong to a social website spend between 1 and 3 hours chatting or interacting with friends on a normal school day. 70% of young people use a computer for their schoolwork at least once a week

**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](http://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](mailto:understandingsociety@essex.ac.uk)

Or you can write to us at

**Understanding Society**  
University of Essex  
FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ



Sandra



Colette

*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.



# Participants' Update 1

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



## First findings from *Understanding Society*

What you tell us matters! And 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](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants). While you're on the website, why not use your personalised invitation login to check and update your details. If you have moved 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 questions ranging from how environmentally friendly you think you are to whether you were feeling the pinch as the credit crunch began to take hold. All your responses are now being used by researchers in their analysis. Here are some of the things they are finding that we thought you might find interesting.

More detailed findings are available on the website. [www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/participants)

### Are you green to go?

We were keen to find out about your attitudes towards the environment and how this affects your day to day life, such as how much energy you use around the house.

16% of people are either environmentally-friendly in most or everything that they do. Those aged 55 and over were over three times as likely to be environmentally-friendly than those aged 16-24.

Almost three-quarters (74%) of households always separate their rubbish for recycling; this is higher among those households who own their accommodation (84%) than those who rent (62%).

Fewer than one in a hundred households has solar water heating or solar panels for energy. *Understanding Society* will provide vital information on longer term trends in the coming years.



### Managing your money



At the moment we are all experiencing a 'credit crunch' and the continuing fall-out from the banking crisis. With your help on *Understanding Society*, we are uniquely placed to be able to see the effect the financial situation is having on people in all types of circumstances.

28% of you said you were 'living comfortably' and 33% of you were 'doing alright'. However, a 27% of you are 'just about getting by' and around 12% are finding things difficult.

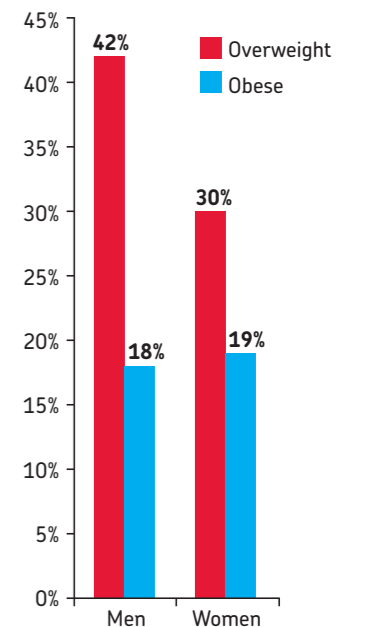
One-quarter of people (25%) thought that looking ahead they would be financially better off one year from now. A sixth (16%) thought they would be worse off. With the data from *Understanding Society* we will be able to see what impact the economic crisis is having on people's lives in the longer term, which types of people remain relatively unaffected and which are most badly affected by the financial downturn

### Putting on weight?

Much has been said recently about the growing problem of obesity. We asked you to tell us your height and weight, and with this information we can calculate the Body Mass Index or BMI. BMI indicates whether someone is underweight, normal weight, overweight or obese. Here's what we found.

Men are more likely to be overweight than women. Approximately 42% of men are overweight for their height, compared to 30% of women. A similar proportion of men (18%) and women (19%) would be considered obese.

Of those aged 16-24, 18% are overweight and a further 7% are obese. Amongst those between the ages of 25 and 34, about three in ten are overweight and 14% are obese. The least healthy age appears to be 45-64 where six in ten people are either overweight or obese.



### Work stress

There is a group of people who work long hours, have long commuting times to and from work, and have a lot of pressure in their job. Perhaps you are one of them!

The average number of hours worked in a week, for those in employment, is around 32. But this particular group of people work around 43 hours a week. They also spend an average of 35 minutes travelling to work, a third more than the time of other working people (24 minutes).

About 1 in 3 men and 1 in 8 women are in this group of work-pressured people.

**This group of people work an average of an extra 11 hours per week**



2013 Q1 variant:  
Generic

Healthy eating  
Recycling  
Where we live  
**What do they have  
in common?**

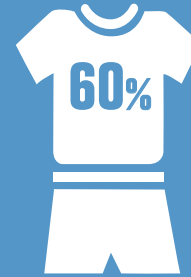


# Understanding Society has the answers

People who eat **more fruit and vegetables**, and fewer crisps and sweets also tend to be **happier**.



Households with **couples** **recycle more** than single households.



**Almost 60%** of people in **England** and **Scotland** participate in sport, compared to **half** in **Wales** and **Northern Ireland**.

**42%** of those born in the UK live **within 5 miles** of where they grew up.



[www.understandingsociety.org.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk)

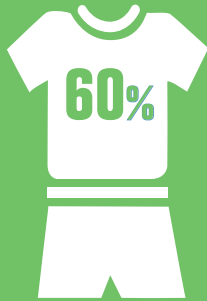


Healthy eating  
Playing sport  
Feeling British  
**What do they have  
in common?**



# Understanding Society has the answers

People who eat **more fruit and vegetables**, and fewer crisps and sweets also tend to be **happier**.



**Almost 60%** of people in **England and Scotland** participate in sport, compared to **half** in **Wales and Northern Ireland**.



Ethnic **minorities** typically express a **stronger British identity** than the white British majority.

As people approach **retirement age**, they become **less optimistic** about the future.



[www.understandingsociety.org.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk)



2013 Q1 variant:  
Workers



Talking more  
Stopping work  
A long commute  
**What do they have  
in common?**



# Understanding Society has the answers

**Women** have a wider circle of people they can talk to about their problems than **men**.



As people approach **retirement age**, they become **less optimistic** about the future.



£10k

People with the **longest commutes** earn, on average, **£10,000 more** than those with the **shortest commutes**.

Those with a **higher income** tend to participate in **more sport**.



[www.understandingsociety.org.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk)



Where we live  
Healthy eating  
Staying out late  
**What do they have  
in common?**

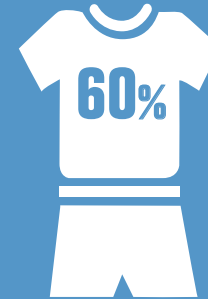


# Understanding Society has the answers

People who eat **more fruit and vegetables**, and fewer crisps and sweets also tend to be **happier**.

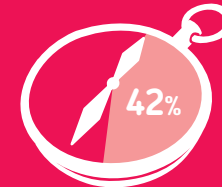


Those who **stay out late** without parents' knowledge are **3x** more likely to **smoke, drink** and try cannabis.



**Almost 60%** of people in **England and Scotland** participate in sport, compared to **half** in **Wales and Northern Ireland**.

**42%** of those born in the UK live **within 5 miles** of where they grew up.



[www.understandingsociety.org.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk)

2,000,000

3% of the UK population are of mixed race

### What you told us about... Who you are

A few months ago we worked with the BBC to look at how people describe their ethnicity and what this tells us about the make-up and diversity of people living in the UK.

What was really interesting was that less than 1% of people describe themselves as being "mixed". But when we looked at the figures a different way, by asking people about their parents' ethnicity, we found that the figure was more than double.

The BBC concluded that this could put the number of people of mixed race at around 2,000,000. That's 3% of the total UK population, which is twice the number estimated by the Office for National Statistics.

Another interesting piece of research looked at 'how British' people from different ethnic backgrounds felt themselves to be and found that people from ethnic minority backgrounds identify more closely with Britishness than their white counterparts.

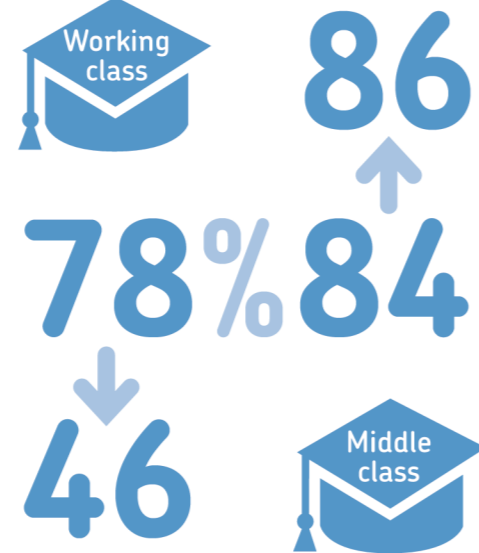
### What you told us about... Going to university

One researcher used Understanding Society data to look at the backgrounds of people who go to University nowadays. They wanted to see if ongoing efforts to encourage young people from poorer backgrounds into University have been successful or not.

The research shows an 11% increase in children from middle class backgrounds getting a degree compared with a 5% increase for the children of working class parents.

Separate research also shows that the recession seems to have had a negative impact on the educational aspirations of young people from poorer backgrounds compared with those from middle class backgrounds.

The proportion of young people from poorer, low educated backgrounds wanting to go to university dropped from 78% to 46%, while the proportion of children from better-off backgrounds wanting to go, grew from 84% to 86%.



### What you told us about... Work

One of the interesting things to come out of what you told us about work is that it seems that those of you who are between 16 and 24 have it the hardest when it comes to finding and keeping a job.

Before the latest recession, about 50% of this age group who were unemployed in 2006 managed to find a job in 2007. This halved during the recession, with only 27% of unemployed young people in 2009 getting work by 2010.

For the 25-44 age group the drop was only 3%, and for people aged 45 or above actually increased.

If you come from an ethnic minority background, you are more likely to be overqualified for your job than people born in the UK.

Women aged 41 or 42 earn around 35% less than men the same age. Professional women earn nearly three times as much as same-age unskilled workers.

### What you told us about... Getting a good night's sleep

A lot of us find it difficult to get a good night's sleep. 35% of people in the UK tell us they sleep less than seven hours a night, just over a half get seven to nine hours and one in ten sleep more than nine hours.

People getting a good night's sleep are more likely to describe themselves as feeling calm and peaceful, having good levels of energy, and of being satisfied with their health. 65% of adults said they feel calm and peaceful when sleeping seven hours a day or more. For those who sleep for less than seven hours a day, only 50% feel this way.



2013 Q3



Understanding Society  
The story so far...



A message from Professor Nick Buck, Director of Understanding Society

## Helping us make history

Dear Understanding Society Participant,

You may not know it, but, by taking part every year in our survey, you are helping to make research history. Over time, as we gather more information, a chronicle will emerge about how people's lives are changing. We look forward to sharing this story with you.

Can you believe it has been around five years since we interviewed you for the first time?

It takes quite a bit of time for us to gather all your responses and then make them available to researchers who can then use what you told us to look at the important issues affecting all our lives. But we are happy to report that, just as we had hoped, hundreds of researchers from around the world are now doing just that.

This evidence is then used by policy makers to inform what works and what doesn't as the UK moves through the 21st Century.

The team behind the study wanted to tell you a bit more about how the information you gave us is being used and what has been found out. So we came up with the idea of The Story So Far, a short report on some of the most interesting research to date.

We hope you find it all as fascinating as we do and, more importantly, that it reminds you how important your contribution to this incredible study is.

Enjoy reading it and don't forget there is a lot more background and detail on our new website. Here's to the next chapter of Understanding Society.

Thanks to you all.

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)

## What you told us about... Your partner

Families are important, but family life isn't always easy, that's for sure.

You told us about your relationship with your partner – how happy you are and the role your partner plays in supporting you.

It seems that whether living together or married, the vast majority of couples in the UK are happy in their relationship – in fact around 90%.

The couples who said they are happiest:

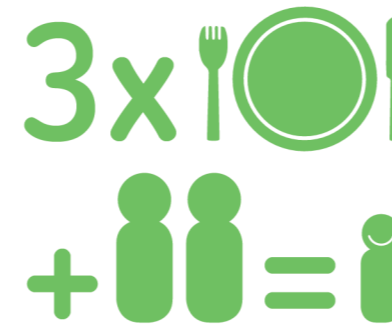
- have no kids
- have been together for less than five years.

90%

90% of couples in the UK are happy in their relationship.

Quite a lot of us find our partner gets on our nerves – 72% of women and 59% of men told us that. But nine out of ten people in a relationship said they rely on their partner for support when a problem crops up and 88% said their partner understands the way they feel.

One in ten of us feels let down by our partner, although it appears the older we are, the less likely we are to let our partner down. 74% of over-65s said their partners never let them down, compared with around 66% of couples younger than 65.



Children who ate an evening meal with their family at least three times a week were more likely to say they were happy with their family situation than children who never ate with their family, or who ate together less than three times a week.

## What you told us about... Family matters

We asked everyone aged 10-15 in your household a few questions about family life.

Over 60% are completely satisfied with their family situation. For those who aren't happy there is often a link with how well their parents were getting on.

Where mum is unhappy in her partnership, just over half (55%) of young people are 'completely happy' with their family situation – compared with 73% of young people whose mums are 'perfectly happy'.

Children who don't quarrel with mum or dad more than once a week, and talk about important matters with them occasionally, have a 74% chance of being happy with family life. This falls to 56% for children who quarrel with both parents at least once a week – and to 45% for children who hardly ever discuss important matters.

## What 10-15 year olds told us about... Being young and happy

The stereotypical view of young people these days is that they are only happy when they are on their phone or Facebook. But our survey paints a very different picture!

What matters most to 10-15 year-olds is a stable home life, good friends, a healthy lifestyle, a sense of community and their classmates behaving.

Unhappy children are likely to be at a school where other children misbehave, eat fast food, eat less than five fruit and vegetables a day and spend more than an hour a day on social networking sites.

Young smokers have lower happiness scores compared to those who have never smoked. Young people who never drink alcohol are more likely to report being happier than those who tell us they have drunk alcohol.



Being happy is also linked with playing sport, having a bedroom to themselves, owning a bike, going swimming and having friends over for tea.

## What you told us about... Being green

We asked you a few questions about the environment, such as who does the recycling at home. From what you reported, it seems that women take on the majority of recycling duties, with men who live on their own least likely of all to recycle.

Generally couples are more likely to recycle than their singleton neighbours. 69% of single women compared with 58% of single men recycled.

People with degrees are 25% more likely to pay more for environmentally-friendly products, but less likely to use public transport.

Men seem to get more involved with recycling where kerbside collections were available, but women go out of their way to recycle a wider range of materials such as clothes.

On average, people with degrees are 25% more likely to be green, than people with no education qualifications – at least in terms of buying environmentally-friendly products. But they are less likely to switch off the TV and lights off overnight or in unused rooms and to use public transport rather than a car.



[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)

Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
Colchester CO4 3SQ

Tel: +44 (0)1206 872957  
[info@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:info@understandingsociety.ac.uk)  
[@usociety](https://twitter.com/usociety)



Understanding Society has been commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Scientific Research Team is led by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex.

2014  
December



## Introduction

A message from Professor Nick Buck,  
Director of Understanding Society

Dear Understanding Society Participant,

Enclosed in this leaflet are some of this year's research findings from the study. They are taken from our annual report, titled Insights, which we published in October. We hope they help you to understand how the study is being used and how the information you provide makes a difference to our society.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank you for your participation and remind you how important your contribution is. Every participant helps to build a big picture of how lives are changing in the UK. This helps researchers and policy makers to learn about how to improve society for people, families and communities.

If you want to find out more about the research in this publication, I encourage you to read the full report online. See the 'Staying in Touch' page for information about where to find it.

I hope you enjoy this mailing and it inspires you to talk about the study to your friends and family. Please tell them about the important role you have in influencing a better society.

Thank you to all.



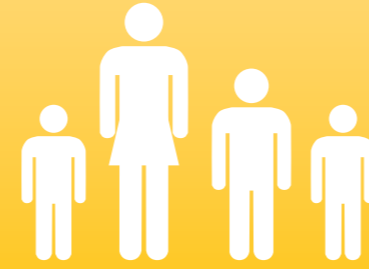
## CHAPTER 1 LIVING IN RECESSION



In assessing how recession changed the UK, we need to dive down into the unexplored corners, the backwaters and byways of national life that we might not notice sitting on some cloud in the upper atmosphere.

**Mark Easton, BBC journalist and  
commenter in Insights**

### POST-RECESSION POVERTY TRIGGERS



Across 2010 to 2012  
poverty rates fell for most  
groups except couples  
with children.

### HOUSEHOLDS IN THE MIDDLE: SURVIVORS OF THE SQUEEZE

Over  
1 in 10

middle income households in  
2011-12 reported being behind  
on rent or mortgage at least  
once in the past year.



### MECHANICS BEHIND THE BOOMERANG GENERATION

welcome  
back

60%

of men and over 40% of women who  
become unemployed on leaving full  
time education are likely to return  
home to mum and/or dad.

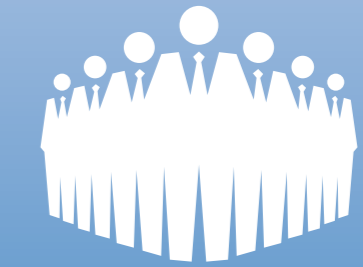
## CHAPTER 2 EFFECTS OF DIVERSITY



The research in this chapter illuminates the  
consequences of the UK's ethnic diversity.

**Professor Shamit Saggar, Director of  
Understanding Society's Policy Unit**

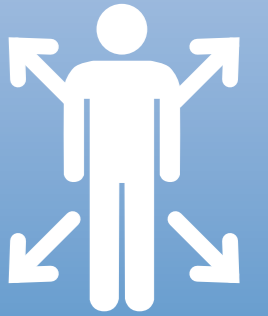
### ETHNIC MINORITY INEQUALITIES IN THE JOB MARKET



Although all ethnic minority  
communities have higher levels of  
unemployment and lower levels of  
full time workers than the White  
British, Indians cluster in the  
highest skilled professions.

### DEMYSTIFYING 'WHITE FLIGHT' IN ENGLAND

Minorities who are less  
religious were more likely  
to move to a whiter area  
than minorities who attended  
religious ceremonies regularly.



### PORTRAIT OF A MODERN UK



further  
education

All ethnic minority groups have  
higher proportions of students  
staying on in formal education at 16  
and 18 than the White population,  
especially at university.

# CHAPTER 3 FAMILY TIES & SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



The fact that almost half of mothers rely on grandparents when they return to work after maternity leave suggests that the family is alive and well and that the UK is a much less mobile society. But grandparents cannot look after children if they live on the other side of the country.

**David Goodhart**



## MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE



Those aged 16–24 experience the highest rates of change, typically including leaving home, partnership formation/separation and living in households with unrelated adults

## BEING LUCKY IN LOVE CAN MATTER IN LATER LIFE

30%

of women living alone feel 'dissatisfied' compared to 24% of men.



## GRANDMA & GRANDPA - THE UNSUNG HEROES OF MODERN UK CHILDCARE



63%

of all grandparents with a grandchild under 16 look after their grandchildren.

## Staying in touch

Read the full version of Insights online:  
[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/insights-2014](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/insights-2014)

To request a hard copy of Insights 2014, please contact Sandra or Colette on the participants helpline number: 0800 252 853 or use the email address: [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

Sign up to receive email updates:  
[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/stories/newsletter](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/stories/newsletter)

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram:  
[@usociety](https://twitter.com/usociety)

Like us on Facebook:  
Understanding Society - UK Household Longitudinal Study

To change your address or ask a question about the survey please fill in our online form:  
[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/change-of-address](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/change-of-address)

Or complete the enclosed Change of Address card and send to:  
Understanding Society  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
Colchester CO4 3SQ UK



# INSIGHTS

2014 FINDINGS FROM THE LARGEST LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF UK HOUSEHOLDS



Does your health limit you a lot, a little or not at all?

Have you ever been turned down for a job in the UK?

What do you consider your national identity to be?

How many of your friends have a similar education as you?

Did you do any paid work last week?

What tasks do you do in your job?

How well are you managing financially these days?

How important is being British to you?

Do you have any biological children?

Are you a supporter of any one party?

Which ethnic group(s) do your friends belong to?

Do you ever use any type of childcare for your child(ren)?

Have you ever lived with someone without being married?



2015  
December



## INTRODUCTION

A MESSAGE FROM  
**PROFESSOR MICHAELA BENZEVAL**  
DIRECTOR OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

Dear Understanding Society Participant,

As the new Director of Understanding Society I would like to start by thanking you for your time and contribution to the study so far. The study would not be possible without you. Every time you are interviewed, you help to build a detailed picture of changing lives of families in the UK.

As the length of the study grows, so does the value of the findings from it. Such research is already contributing to shaping policies, for example, in relation to smoking, transport and low incomes. To show how your data is used to make a difference, we produce an annual report called Insights of selected findings and this leaflet is a shortened version of it. It highlights some of the recent research that is being generated from the study and why it's important.

If you want to find out more, I encourage you to read the full report online, and other research based on the study. Thanks to your answers, this research covers all aspects of our lives, all ages and backgrounds.

I very much hope you understand the valuable contribution you are making and will continue to work with us on the study. There are a number of ways you can stay in touch – please see the back page of this leaflet.

Thank you!

Professor Michaela Benzeval,  
Director of Understanding Society  
Institute for Social & Economic Research, University of Essex

CHAPTER ONE

# HOUSING

“

THIS YEAR'S INSIGHTS GIVES CAUSE FOR CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF HOUSING. WE ARE SEEING A TREND TOWARDS MORE INSECURITY, LESS STABILITY AND A LOWER QUALITY HOUSING OFFER FOR MANY PEOPLE. IT'S VITAL WE UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THESE TRENDS ON MIXED AND STABLE COMMUNITIES AS WELL AS ON INDIVIDUALS.

**Stephen Howlett,**  
Chief Executive of Peabody, one of London's oldest and largest housing associations

CHAPTER ONE

Research articles in this chapter:

## THE GROWTH OF PRIVATE RENT:

People are remaining in the private renting sector to an older age – particularly families and single people. The number of individuals renting with children aged 16 or below increased from 21% to 25% between 1991-2000 and 2001-2008, by 2011-2014 this had risen to 36%. (Coventry University)

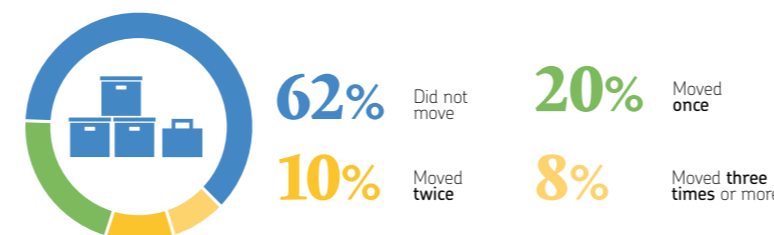
## INVOLUNTARY HOME MOVES:

Young single adults make more voluntary moves, but fewer involuntary moves than other household types. This suggests that despite multiple moves, young single adults are avoiding a high proportion of forced moves. Couples and lone parents, though less likely to move overall, are as likely to move multiple times involuntarily as their single counterparts. (University of York)

## FINANCIAL STRUGGLE CONNECTED TO NEIGHBOURHOODS:

Households in regions with strong neighbourhood ties are less likely to report being in financial arrears. (University of Sheffield)

### BREAKDOWN OF ALL MOVES



CHAPTER TWO

# HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

“

HEALTH LIFESTYLE BEHAVIOURS ARE PART OF WIDER OVERALL LIFESTYLE ROUTINES, THE MORE WE UNDERSTAND THIS THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAILORED TO OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

**David Buck,**  
Senior Fellow, King's Fund, an independent charity working to improve health and health care in England.

CHAPTER TWO

Research articles in this chapter:

## INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF ACTIVE COMMUTING:

Men who walk or bike to work have significantly higher levels of good cholesterol than would be seen by chance alone. (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)

## HEALTH BURDEN OF THE DAILY COMMUTE:

For car users, increases in commuting times from one year to the next, reduced both health and wellbeing for women, but not for men. (University of Manchester)

## ACCESS TO SPORTS FACILITIES: A HURDLE TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?:

Environmental factors are a key contributor to physical activity participation rates in communities, with access to sports facilities one important element of this. Perceived difficulty in accessing sports facilities is significantly and positively associated with lower levels of physical activity. (Newcastle University)

## TARGETING URBAN HEALTH INEQUALITIES:

Unhealthy behaviours cluster together: people who smoke are more likely to have unhealthy diets etc. These behaviours also cluster with other characteristics – wealth, family, attitudes – which help policy makers predict how to target policies to improve health and reduce health inequalities. (University College London)



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING



WELLBEING IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT THE ABSENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS BUT HOW SATISFIED WE ARE WITH THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES, OUR DAY TO DAY EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES AND OUR WIDER MENTAL WELLBEING.

*Professor Paul Burstow,  
City University*

Research articles in this chapter:

## PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS MATTER THE MOST, MORE THAN FRIENDS OR SIBLINGS:

When a child is being bullied by friends or siblings, strong parent-child relationships protect against the negative effects on their life satisfaction. *(William Paterson University of New Jersey)*

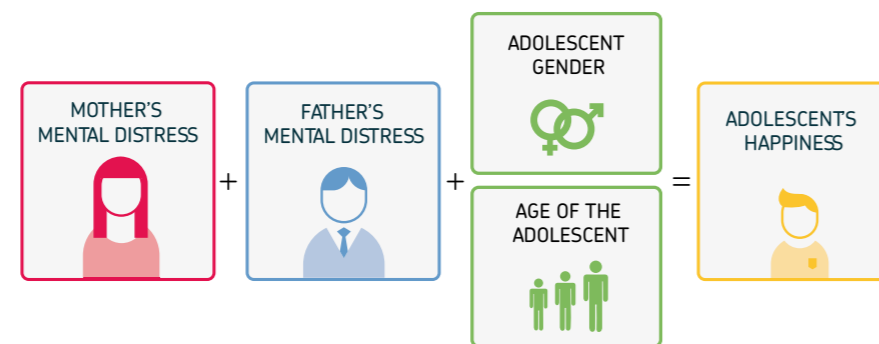
## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD WELLBEING:

In families with adolescent children, the mental health of the mother in the household is central to the health of the other household members in subsequent years, but not that of the father's. *(University College London)*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD INFLUENCES:

Teenagers who are dissatisfied with their neighbourhoods are more likely to smoke and to drink alcohol. *(Heriot-Watt University)*

### THE HOUSEHOLD SYSTEM



## STAY IN TOUCH

Read the full version of Insights online at:  
[WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK/RESEARCH/INSIGHTS-2015](http://WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK/RESEARCH/INSIGHTS-2015)

Sign up to receive email updates:  
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Follow us:



### MOVING HOME ?

If you have changed your address or would like to ask a question about the survey please write to us or fill in our online form:  
[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/change-of-address](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/participants/change-of-address)

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FREEPOST RRXX-KEKJ-JGKS  
COLCHESTER CO4 3SQ UK



## UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY INSIGHTS 2015

2015 findings from the UK household longitudinal study



## FRIENDS, FAMILY & NEIGHBOURS

THIS ISSUE IS ALL ABOUT  
RELATIONSHIPS!

How has your survey  
helped with the  
latest relationships  
research?

[www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)

### WHAT'S INSIDE?

- How does 'grey divorce' affect people's mental health?
- Do siblings follow similar education and career paths?
- Stronger communities and green spaces help reduce multiple health conditions

# Welcome

Welcome to Participant News. In this edition we're pleased to share with you the latest research about relationships. We have had lots of quality research recently about the importance of social connections and thought it was relevant to highlight this in this issue.

Relationships are not just personal – they shape health, identity, society, and culture. Studying them helps us better understand human behaviour and improve our quality of life.

By taking your survey every year, we can study relationships longitudinally which means tracking the same people (or groups) over time, rather than just taking a single snapshot.

Thank you for being part of Understanding Society – the time you spend on your annual interview is always appreciated.

## Participant Q&As

**Your Question:** I do my interview online but I'm struggling to find the link to my survey, where can I find it?

**Our Answer:** If you do your interview online, the link to your survey is in your invitation letter. Type this link into the URL/address bar, not the search engine.

If you do a web search for the survey it will only show the Understanding Society website, not your personal survey link, so it's important to type the full survey link from your invitation letter into the URL bar. If you're having trouble finding the survey login page, please contact us.

You may remember that your survey login used to be available in the participants' area of the Understanding Society website. Unfortunately, we've had to remove this for a few months while we transfer the online survey onto a new platform. We have several surveys in action at the same time, and some are on the new platform, others are on the older one. The link will return to the website in the future, but for the moment, please use the link in your letter.

## “ Tell us

If you would like to suggest a theme for a future issue of Participant News, or give us any other feedback, please get in touch via email: [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk) or Freephone: 0800 252 853

# First-born daughters linked to bigger career setbacks for mothers

Mothers whose first child is a daughter earn 26% less than before childbirth after five years. Mothers with first-born sons see only a 3% drop over the same period, says new research.

The research team based at the universities of Essex, Exeter and Warwick used Understanding Society to look at the 'child penalty' – the reduction in earnings after the birth of a first child – which is known to be larger for women than men.

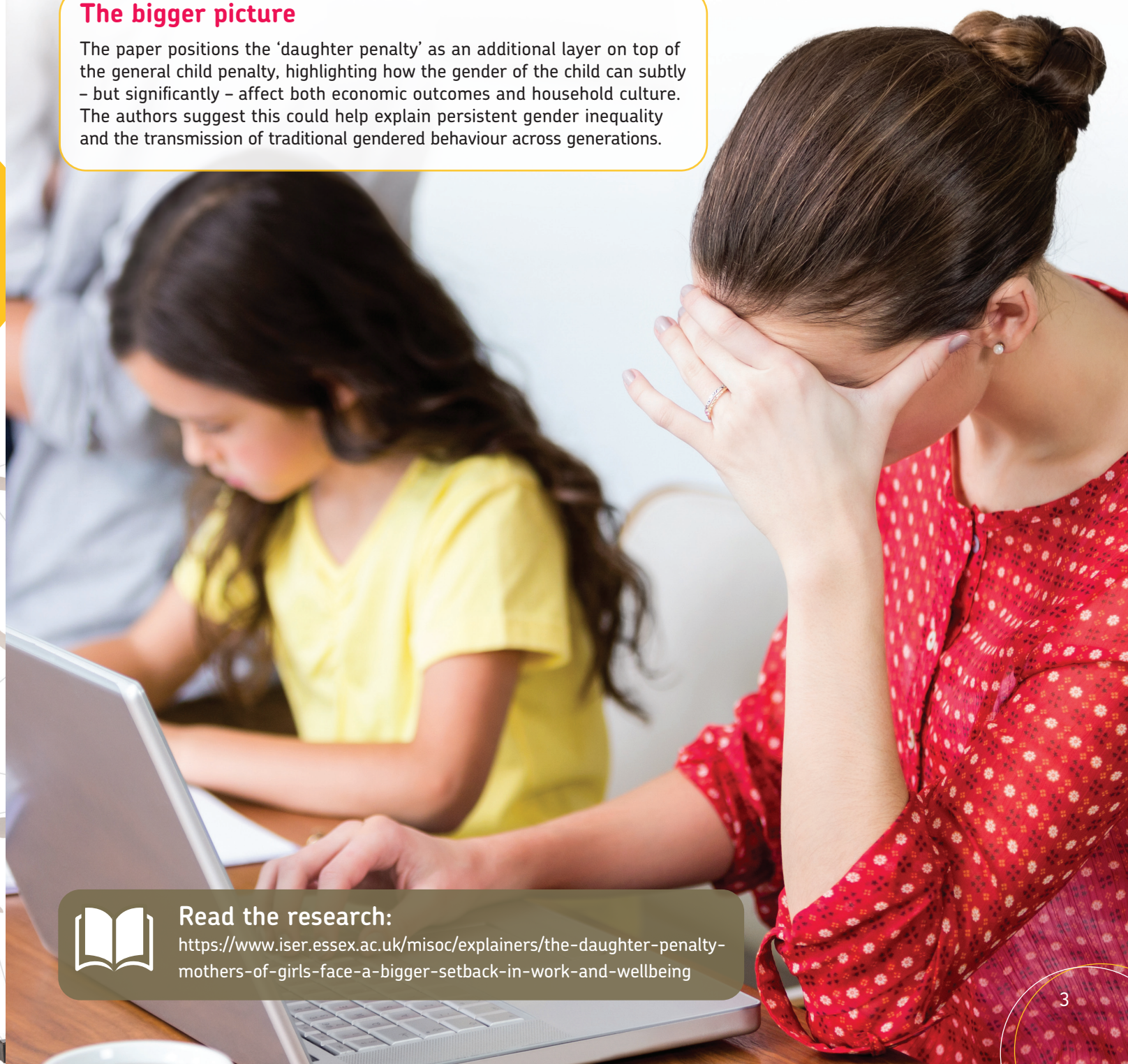
They also found that mothers of daughters are less likely to be employed. They take on more household chores and childcare compared to mothers of sons.

## The bigger picture

The paper positions the 'daughter penalty' as an additional layer on top of the general child penalty, highlighting how the gender of the child can subtly – but significantly – affect both economic outcomes and household culture. The authors suggest this could help explain persistent gender inequality and the transmission of traditional gendered behaviour across generations.

## Other key findings

- **Fathers of daughters** are more satisfied with their marital relationships. This is linked to a shift toward more traditional gender roles.
- **Mothers of daughters** become less supportive of gender equality than they were before giving birth. This suggests a reinforcing loop between the child's gender and gender-role attitudes.



### Read the research:

<https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/misoc/explainers/the-daughter-penalty-mothers-of-girls-face-a-bigger-setback-in-work-and-wellbeing>

# How does 'grey' divorce affect people's mental health?

Divorce later in life can be tough emotionally, especially leading up to and during the separation, but most older adults eventually recover, says new research.

Researchers wanted to understand how divorce affects mental health for people aged 50 and above. They used data from Understanding Society to follow people over time, from 2009 to 2018. The study focused on 909 older adults who went through a divorce or separation during this period.

## Main findings

- **Mental health worsens before and during divorce:** People showed more signs of depression before and right after separating from their partner.
- **Recovery happens over time:** After divorce, most people's mental health improved and returned to normal levels.
- **Parents take longer to recover:** Those with children adjusted more slowly than those without.
- **No difference between men and women:** Both genders recovered at similar rates.
- **First vs. second divorce doesn't matter:** Whether it was their first or a later divorce didn't affect how quickly they recovered.

## Why is this important?

Many studies on divorce and mental health only looked at people at one point in time, which doesn't show the full picture. This study followed people for years, so it could show how mental health changes before and after divorce.

## Connections matter

Older people may have more money to help them cope after divorce, but they often have fewer close social connections for emotional support.



Read the research:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953620302495>

# Do siblings follow similar education and career paths?

New research has explored how siblings in the UK share or diverge in their education and employment paths, taking into account early teenage experiences.

The study led by University College London drew on Understanding Society data and found that siblings are more likely to follow similar post-16 education and employment trajectories compared to unrelated peers, even those from similar social or economic backgrounds.

The study also found parents' education and the family structure shaped young adult's journeys. Children of highly educated mothers and two-parent households had smoother school-to-work transitions, while those from less advantaged families had fewer education or work opportunities open to them and more turbulent paths. First-born children and siblings from smaller families were also more likely to remain in education, pointing to family-level advantages.

At the same time, siblings often took different paths. Individual aspirations, perceived family support, and teenage mental health were key predictors of differences. Positive aspirations and supportive home environments increased

the likelihood of staying in education, while behavioural and emotional difficulties heightened the risk of experiencing precarious transitions.

Overall, the study highlights how the shared family context and individual choices jointly shape early life trajectories. These findings stress the importance of considering both parents' background and teenage experiences when addressing inequalities in the school-to-work transition.



**Read the research:**

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1569490924000637>

## New relationships and life satisfaction

Forming a new partnership has benefits for women who are parenting on their own.

Researchers compared information from Germany and the UK and found that in both countries entering a new living-together partnership significantly increases life satisfaction for women. In Germany the 'honeymoon period' of increased life satisfaction lasts for more than two years after re-partnering, while in the UK it's just one year. It's not clear why there is this difference, but the researchers suggest that it could be because Germany has more generous state support for single parents, so there is less practical need to re-partner, which might lead to more stable relationships.

Along with more emotional support, moving in with a new partner provides women with practical help by improving the financial situation in the household and reducing financial stress. However, the research also found that while entering a new partnership improved financial stability, women who re-partnered spent significantly more time on housework than single mums.



**Read the research:**

<https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/news/2024/08/21/life-satisfaction-improves-for-single-mothers-when-they-experience-new-partnerships/>

# Who is caring for aging parents?

Women and part-time workers are most likely to provide care for their older parents who don't live with them.

The study carried out by the University of St Andrews and the University of Strathclyde used Understanding Society to look at what influences adult children to provide care for their aging parents.

Only 10.7% of adult children provide care for their parents, while most (89.3%) do not. Six key social factors - gender, whether they have children at home, if they provide care inside their household, whether they live with a partner, employment type, and income - were used to group people into different caring categories. The results show that women, those who already care for someone at home, and part-time workers are more likely to provide care to parents. People with children at home are less likely to provide care, and there were no clear differences based on living arrangements, self-employment, or income.

The least likely groups to be caring for parents were men, full-time work workers and those with a higher income.



## What does an ageing population mean for care, jobs and communities?

In this podcast, Taha Bokhari and Abby Jitendra from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation share their work on future care needs in the UK.

Listen here: [understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/future-care-needs](https://understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/future-care-needs)

Whilst not all impacts of providing care are negative, many can adversely affect carers in a range of outcomes including on their health and economic well-being. These insights highlight a need for targeted policy interventions that provide support to the most impacted individuals.



# Stronger communities and green spaces help reduce multiple health conditions

People living in friendly, connected neighbourhoods are less likely to have multiple long-term health problems.

The research team based at the University of Edinburgh used Understanding Society to find that being lonely and living in an area with weak social connections is associated with higher rates of multiple health issues. They used the long-term nature of Understanding Society to look at people who had no health conditions in the first year of the study and followed how their health changed over the next 10 years.

## Other key findings

- Living in deprived areas increases the risk of multiple health problems, even when taking into account personal income, education, and lifestyle.
- Moving to an area with fewer social connections increases the likelihood of experiencing health problems.
- Access to parks, rivers, and other green or blue spaces may help protect against developing multiple health conditions.



## How could policymakers use these findings?

The findings highlight the importance of social features of place, not just individual-level factors, in addressing health problems.

- Community-level interventions to reduce loneliness and promote cohesion may offer cost-effective health benefits.
- Further research is needed to explore how physical and social features of neighbourhoods interact to influence health.

“ This link between the psychosocial environment at the neighbourhood level and loneliness and health at the individual level is important as it highlights the potential for neighbourhood-wide interventions to tackle loneliness and its effects on health. ”



Read the research:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/multiple-chronic-illnesses-could-double-risk-of-depression>

# How has information on your relationships helped charities?

In Understanding Society, we ask you about many areas of life including health, income, employment, education, family life, and your social relationships.

The wide range of questions we ask you help researchers to see the relationships you have in the context of your wider life and life experiences.

Interviewing you every year helps us see what changes over time – and what stays the same.

Knowing what's happening in people's relationships is very helpful for charities like...

**Gingerbread** – who used Understanding Society to look at the impact of the Covid pandemic on single parents.

**Relate** – who relied on Understanding Society to find out how many people in the UK were in distressed relationships.

**Age UK** – who used information from our older participants to find out that the over 80s save the government £23 billion a year through the unpaid care they give to loved ones.

**The fatherhood institute** – used Understanding Society to look at how dads influence young people's mental health, risk behaviours, and education.

**Gingerbread\*** **Relate**



**FATHERHOOD  
INSTITUTE**

## More information


If you want to understand more about how we collect data, please see our contact details below...


## Contact us

Have a question for us? We're always pleased to hear from participants.

 [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

 Freephone 0800 252 853

 Understanding Society, Freepost RRXX-KEJ-JGKS, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, C04 3SQ

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# highlight



Should there be more youth clubs?

What is overcrowding?

5 ways to be a good neighbour



Understanding  
Society

# hello!

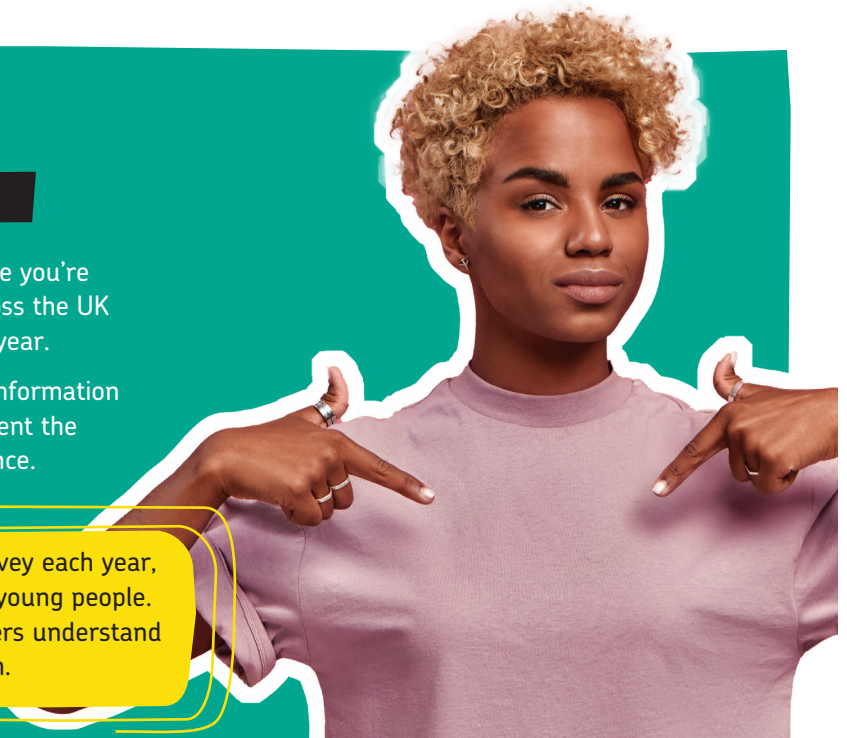
## Hey survey superstar!

We hope your year's going well! You're getting this because you're part of a unique group of around 4,000 young people across the UK who take part in the **Understanding Society** survey each year.

In this newsletter, we'll show you what happens with the information you share. Every time you take part, you're helping represent the voices of people your age — and that makes a real difference.



By spending **just 15 minutes** on the survey each year, you're helping shape a better future for young people. Your opinions matter, and they help others understand what life is really like for your generation.



So keep going!  
Here's why it matters:

Speak up  
for young  
people  
like you

You can  
change  
society in  
just 15  
minutes!



# Read all about it!

## What's the latest news?

Every year you answer questions about your life. Researchers then use this information to help understand **what matters to young people in the UK**. This research is picked up by people who influence decisions about life in the UK - like the Children's Commissioner or charities working for young people. Read on for the latest discoveries...



### Conflict at home...

Did you know that when families argue a lot, it can affect your short-term and long-term wellbeing. If this is an issue for you and your home, please contact Childline: [childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk) or **0800 1111**



### Who's using social media?

Teenagers now spend more time on social media, but young people from poorer households use social media less than kids from richer households.



### Friends make us happy 😊

Most people in the UK have five close friends, but the number is not that important. What matters the most is the friendship quality, and the time spent together. So, enjoy making memories with your mates.



### Feeling better after the pandemic

Scientists have found that the drop in mental health that young people experienced during the covid pandemic hasn't lasted. Young adult mental health has bounced back to where it was before covid.

## YOU'RE HELPING

Your survey is helping us find out lots of new things.

**THANK YOU**  
for taking part!



# SPOTLIGHT ON

## overcrowding

Children who live in overcrowded homes can sometimes experience lower mental health and wellbeing.

### What is overcrowding?

Overcrowding happens when there isn't enough space in a home for the number of people living there. For example, a home may be overcrowded if more than two children share a bedroom.

### What do the scientists say?

- About **1 in 10 children** in the UK live in overcrowded homes.
- In London, it's even higher — **1 in 3 children** are struggling for space.
- Research using answers from the **Understanding Society** survey showed that nearly **4 in 10 Black children** live in overcrowded homes, compared to **1 in 10 White children**.

Overcrowding can make it harder to focus, sleep, and feel emotionally well — especially if you don't have space to be on your own when you need it.

### Are you overcrowded?

If you answer yes to one of these questions below, you might be living in overcrowded conditions

- Are you sharing a room with a sibling of a different sex, and one of you is over 10 years old?
- Are there more than 2 children in your bedroom?
- Are you sleeping in a space not meant for a bed — like a kitchen or storage room?

If so, your parent or carer might be able to ask the local council for help.

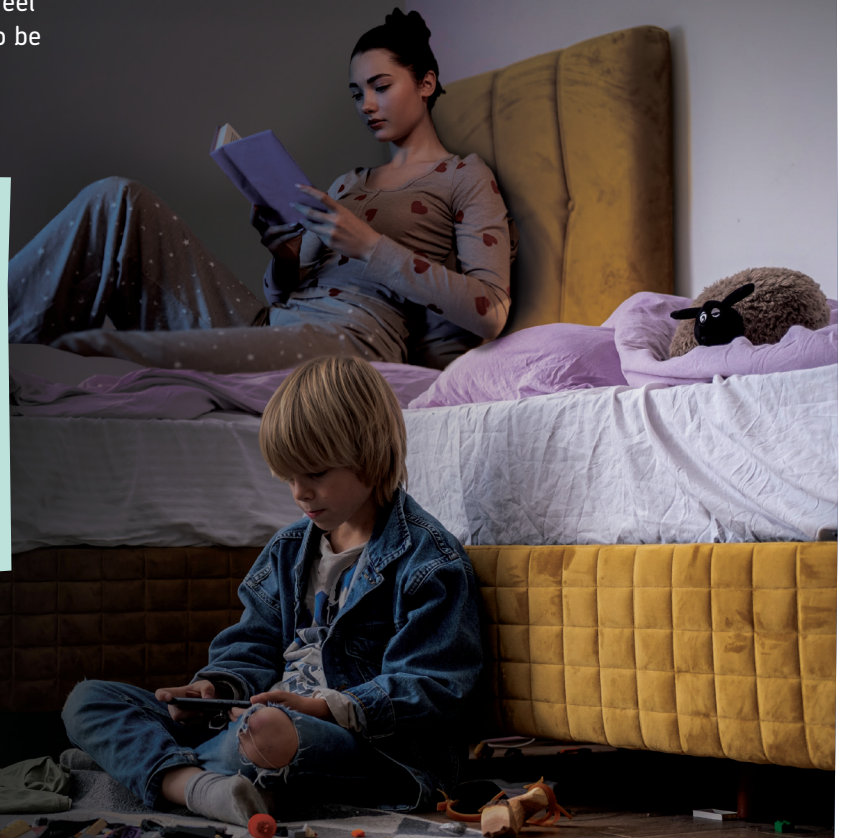
### Want to Know More?

Visit [shelter.org.uk](https://www.shelter.org.uk) to find out what support is available for families living in overcrowded homes.

## Sharing a bedroom can be fun!

Not everyone has a bedroom of their own — sharing a room can be a good thing.

- ✓ Sharing creates a bond between siblings
- ✓ It makes good use of the space in the house
- ✓ It can reduce boredom and loneliness





# Join the debate

**Should there be more youth clubs?**

Youth clubs are closing fast — over half (53%) shut down between 2011 and 2023. But does that matter when it comes to keeping young people safe?



A scientist from the University of Warwick looked at your survey answers and found something interesting:

**When youth clubs close, youth crime goes up.**

**What do you think, should we keep youth clubs open?**

## **YES! We still need them!**

Closing clubs isn't actually saving money. For every £1 saved, nearly £3 is lost in extra youth crime costs.

Clubs give you real-life experiences. You can meet new people, build confidence, and learn new skills — all in a safe place.

## **NO! Times have changed**

More young people hang out online now.

Instead of spending money on clubs, some people think it should go toward tech and internet access for families who can't afford it.

## **So, what do YOU think?**

Do youth clubs still have a place in today's world? Or should we focus on helping young people in other ways?

## **Want to join one?**

If you'd like to join one of the 9,000 youth organisations in the UK, start your search here: [www.ukyouth.org](http://www.ukyouth.org)



# QUIZ



## All about uni!

Are you thinking about going to university? What makes you more likely to go? There are several reasons why some people have a higher chance of going to university. All of these answers have come from information from young people in Understanding Society.

Circle your answers and then check the results at the bottom of this page.

**1** Are there more women or men going to university?

Answer: Women or men

**2** If your parents went to university, are you more likely to go?

Answer: Yes or no

**3** How many people are studying at university in the UK right now?

Answer: 10,000 people or 300,000 people or 2.9 million people

**4** Does being interested in politics make you more likely to go to uni?

Answer: Yes or no

**5** If you go to art galleries and museums, are you more likely to attend university?

Answer: Yes or no



### Education for all

Anyone can go to university and money should not be a boundary to higher education. There are lots of scholarships and grants available. Visit the UCAS website for more info: [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

Answers 1: Women 2: Yes 3: 2.9 million people 4: Yes 5: Yes

# 5 ways to be a good neighbour

People who live in a close community tend to be happier and healthier. When people move to unhappy neighbourhoods, they often develop health problems! This has been proven using the survey answers from Understanding Society.

So, you might be wondering how can you boost your local community? Here's some ideas to get you started:

## Simply smile!

Sounds easy but you can cheer up your neighbours by simply sharing your lovely grin and a greeting!

## Clean up!

Do a litter pick with your family, friends or school. Just be sure to wear suitable gloves and a high-vis jacket - these items can sometimes be hired from your local library.

## Do a donation drive!

There are lots of charities right on your doorstep that need support. Could you donate some food to your local foodbank or is there a beauty bank near you that needs some shampoo or shower gel?

## Get crafty!

Brighten up your neighbourhood by creating painted rocks. Pick up a stone, make a design and then hide it for someone to find. See Pinterest for some ideas!

## Be a bookworm!

Try setting up a community book swap - this can be in a waterproof container outside your house, in school or even in a community centre. If you can't find a suitable place, maybe start a book club in your school?



# Shout about it!

Be proud of taking part in Understanding Society by sharing your survey news with others.



## Tell your teacher

Does your school know you take part in Understanding Society? Tell them how important you are! If they want to know more there are some handy teaching materials on our website: [understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/teaching-datasets/ks4](http://understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/teaching-datasets/ks4)



## Impress your family and friends

Before you recycle this newsletter, share it with your parents, friends or siblings so they can see the great work you're doing.



## Share with The Scouts or Guides

If you're a Scout or a Guide share your survey news with your leaders. Taking part in Understanding Society may contribute to those all-important badges.



## Be proud!

If you are taking part in a volunteering award like The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, tell them about your survey. It could work towards your final certification.



Gift card **£££**  
**REWARD**

Thanks for your time - you will always receive a gift card for every interview you complete!



Give us your feedback

We really hope you have enjoyed this issue.

We always love to hear from you.

## Keep in touch



You can email us [contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)



Or write to us  
**Understanding Society**  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
Colchester  
C04 3SQ

# SPOTLIGHT



**TAKE YOUR  
SURVEY  
AND BUILD  
A BETTER  
WORLD**

## **13 THINGS TO TRY BEFORE YOU TURN 13**

Think you can complete all these fun challenges before you become a teenager?

## **FOOTBALL OR MOODBALL?**

Turn your football into a mood-o-meter! Colour it in each day to show how you feel – happy, silly, sleepy, excited... you choose!

## **5 YUMMY WAYS TO MAKE FRUIT SALAD**

Want to wow your friends? Try these tasty and fun fruit salad ideas!



# Hi there!

Welcome to your first ever issue of Spotlight! This cool newsletter is just for kids aged 10-12 who take part in the Understanding Society survey. We're super happy you're part of our team!

In this issue, we'll show you how your answers help us learn what makes kids happy and feel good. So, keep filling in your survey – you're helping your generation live their best lives!

## HELP US CRAFT A BETTER FUTURE FOR EVERYONE

by taking your survey!



## Swapsies?

# highlight



If you have an older brother or sister, they might receive a publication called Highlight.

We send this newsletter to all our 13-15-year-olds. You might want to swap mags with your brother or sister? Up to you...



# 13 things to do before you turn 13

Before you turn 13, there are lots of things you can do to help yourself and others. Maybe share your challenges below with your friends?

**1** Take part in the Understanding Society survey (this one should be easy for you!)

**2** Learn how to sign the alphabet

**3** Make something to solve a problem

**4** Find out about someone's life history

**5** Write a poem or create some art to inspire other people

**6** Design a new board game

**7** Keep a diary for a month

**8** Donate to a good cause (time or money)

**9** Create a list of things that you are looking forward to

**10** Bake something (you might need help with this one)

**11** Offer help to a friend

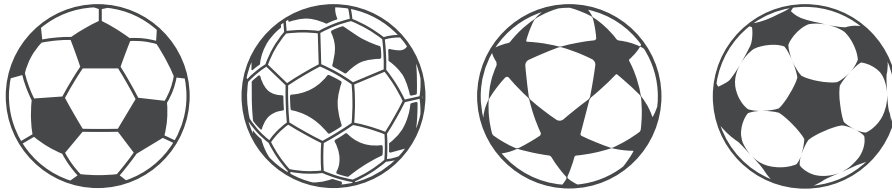
**12** Learn something new

**13** Plan a fun day for you and your friends

# Football or moodball?

Did you know that regular exercise can increase your levels of happiness?

Colour a different part of the football below each day to track your mood.



## TIME TO KICK OFF!

You can decide which colours reflect your mood, but here are some suggestions...



**YELLOW: HAPPY**

**RED: ANGRY**

**ORANGE: ENERGISED**

**BLUE: SAD**

**GREEN: CALM**



## Sport stats

Scientists have used your survey answers to find the top ways young people like to keep fit:

Walking (including walking the dog) **82%**



Running **39%**



Football **37%**



Cycling **35%**



Swimming **23%**



## Did you know..?

Tennis/badminton has become less popular over time.

15 years ago, **23%** of young people played racket sports often, now only **16%** do.



**Read more:**

[www.kent.ac.uk/news/science/29718](http://www.kent.ac.uk/news/science/29718)

# Friendships matter

You don't need loads of friends to be happy, but making connections with people can help lift your mood! Share your friendship tokens below with your nearest and dearest!

## SHARING IS CARING!

Cut out a token, personalise it and then share it with a friend. You will certainly make someone smile today!

You make me laugh when you ...

.....  
.....  
.....

I love your ...

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

You are awesome because ...

.....  
.....  
.....

Let's do more ...

.....  
.....  
.....  
... together

My favourite memory of you is ...

.....  
.....  
.....

### I FEEL LONELY

Loneliness is a difficult feeling for anyone. If you feel lonely often, talk to someone you trust for help and advice.

## WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY?

Experts used your answers from Understanding Society to find that being **curious and open to new things** helps people make more friends.



Read more:

[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37591156](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37591156)








# Pets make us feel happy

Did you know that having a pet like a dog or cat can make people just as happy as having close friends.




That's what some very smart scientists from the University of Kent and the London School of Economics found in a new study, which used answers from Understanding Society.

## WHAT DID THEY FIND OUT?

-  People who **like cats** are usually quieter and more thoughtful
-  People who **like dogs** are often more outgoing and social
-  Pets make us feel **calm** and **loved**
-  Stroking pets can help **lower stress** and make you feel better when you're sad
-  They **help lonely people** feel less alone

## HELP, I DON'T HAVE A PET!

Here are some other ways to have fur friendships:

-  Offer to look after friends' pets when they are on holiday
-  Visit your local farm park
-  Sponsor a pet through an animal charity (like the RSPCA or Cats Protection League)



**Read more:**

[kent.ac.uk/news/health-social-care-and-wellbeing/36435](https://kent.ac.uk/news/health-social-care-and-wellbeing/36435)

# 5 ways to make a fancy fruit salad

Eating fruit and vegetables helps to boost your body and your brain. Impress your friends and family with some of the super salad ideas below...

- 1 Use cookie cutters** - ditch the biscuits and use your cutters to create some fruity shapes!
- 2 Try the rainbow effect** - use a variety of colours to get that salad looking fresh!
- 3 Shop the seasons!** Try to use fruit that is in season, for example British strawberries are only available from May until September.
- 4 Find the perfect plate!** Use a plate or bowl which makes your fruit look super delicious. Does a flower shape made of fruit look better on a round plate? Can you match the colour of your fruit to your plate?
- 5 Add protein for added oomph!** For that final flourish, you could add yoghurt, nuts or seeds (just remember to double check people's allergies before serving to anyone).



## Fruity facts

Using info from Understanding Society, scientists have found when young people get older, they eat **less fruit** but **more vegetables!**



**Read more:**

[nature.com/articles/s41430-025-01609-x](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41430-025-01609-x)

# Why take part in

# in Understanding Society?

## Great question!

Here's why we want to hear from **you** every year:

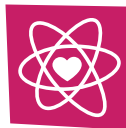
### 1 Your voice is super important

We want to know what you think – about school, friends, health, and more! Your answers help adults make better decisions for kids like you.



### 2 You help make things better

Your answers can help schools, doctors, and clubs understand what kids need – and how to make things more fun, fair, and helpful!



### 3 You get to speak up

Answering questions helps you get good at sharing your thoughts and feelings. It's like a workout for your confidence!



### 4 You get gift cards!

Yep, you read that right! Every time you fill in the survey, you get a gift card to spend on something you love. How cool is that?



## More science please!

If you liked reading this mailer, we have a website devoted to young people and research.

Just scan the QR code below and enjoy!



## Did you enjoy that?

What do you think of this mailer? Is it something you would share with a friend or do you think there is something missing?

Tell us your thoughts and we can make changes for the next issue. Let us know:

[contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:contact@understandingsociety.ac.uk)

