



Understanding Society Participant Panel Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

Understanding Society is a flagship longitudinal household panel study of the UK population. It provides valuable new evidence about the people of the UK: their lives, behaviours and beliefs, and enables researchers and policy makers to identify the changing nature of society and its impact on different population groups. The interviews that Study participants complete are wide ranging and multi-topic, including many aspects of life in the UK.

Understanding Society participants are recruited into the Study using strict scientific criteria to ensure that the sample is broadly representative of the UK population. As a household panel study, Understanding Society is changing over time - as families and individuals move and change new households are created. Study participants are an essential part of Understanding Society and information is provided to them several times a year, giving them information on their interview and additional information on how data from the Study is being used.

2. Overview

The **Participant Panel** will represent the range of participants who are part of the Study. The broad remit of the Panel will be to:

- (a) Provide feedback on our communications with participants.
- (b) Comment on the survey process from a participant perspective.
- (c) Comment on the experience of being part of a longitudinal study.
- (d) Comment on questionnaire content, where appropriate.

3. Membership

The Panel will have up to 50 participants, ideally representing the range of people participating in the Study. Participants will be able to serve on the panel from the age of 16 years.

Panel members will be appointed for an initial term of two years, with the option to extend their membership for an additional two years. Panel members should not serve for more than four years.

4. Specific Terms of Reference

The Participant Panel provides feedback on the activities of Understanding Society.

They do this by:

- Providing feedback on our communications with participants, including participant facing fieldwork documents, inter-wave mailings and group specific tailored mailings. The Panel may be asked to suggest improvements to communications activities or provide comments on specific letters or mailings.
- Comment on the survey process from a participant perspective. Giving feedback on the experience of completing interviews by different mode to improve the experience for participants and to enable Understanding Society to give constructive feedback to fieldwork agencies.
- Comment on the experience of being part of Understanding Society. Being part of a long-term study is a unique experience and a large number of our participants have been interviewed for many years. Including the participant 'voice' via the Participant Panel will help ensure that the views and experiences of participants are taken into consideration in our planning for new activities.
- Comment on questionnaire content, where appropriate. This could include seeking feedback on new modules or changes to questions. Participant Panel involvement in questionnaire content will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the questionnaire development team and may not be appropriate for some modules/questions.

5. How the Participant Panel will operate

Members of the Panel will be recruited through our participant mailings, newsletters, and emails. The membership of the Panel will be determined by who volunteers to take part, but ideally will include a range of people that represent the breadth of participants in the Study.

Contact with Panel members will be via email, telephone or zoom call, depending on their personal preference. We do not envisage bringing all Panel members together in a single meeting, but rather sending members information for them to consider and they can email their response to us or have a follow up phone or zoom call with a member of the Understanding Society team.

The Panel will be contacted twice a year, with a specific topic chosen for each 'meeting'.

The Participant Panel will be managed jointly by the Survey and Communication teams, with oversight for the Panel provided by the Associate Director for Surveys and the Associate Director for Communications and Engagement.

6. Focus Groups

From time to time Understanding Society may wish to convene focus groups to explore specific research questions. Due to the Panel not being representative of the whole sample and to ensure that Panel members are not over-burdened by the Study, the Understanding Society Executive Team have agreed (meeting date 5 June 2024) that it is not appropriate for the Participant Panel to be used for focus group research – other than in very exceptional circumstances, e.g. where the Panel itself might be of research interest.