Role of mode in respondents' decisions to participate in IP5: Findings from a qualitative follow-up study.

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NatCen Social Research

Understanding Society
THE UK HOUSEHOLD LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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Non-technical summary

The fifth wave of the Understanding Society Innovation Panel (IP5) experimented with inviting people to participate in the survey on-line before those who did not respond on-line were allocated to a face-to-face interviewer. This design ("mixed modes") was compared to one in which people were directly contacted by a face-to-face interviewer. This was done to assess, among other things, the impact of a change in data collection method on the proportion of households that responded to the survey. Results from this experiment suggested that offering a mixed mode approach negatively affects response rates both at the household and individual level. A small follow-up study was undertaken to understand the role that mode played in decisions about whether to continue to take part. This follow-up study consisted of in-depth interviews with those who had responded and those who had not responded at IP5. Specifically we wanted to answer two questions of particular interest to the scientific leadership team at ISER.

1. Why are respondents in the mixed mode sample group who do not respond by web then refusing at a higher rate to the face-to-face interviewers?
2. Why are members of households where one other person has taken part by web less willing to take part when asked by a face-to-face interviewer?

In exploring these issues, however, the research also sought to find practical and effective actions that would improve the implementation of a mixed mode design at the next wave of data collection.

A range of factors were found to influence panel members' decisions to continue to take part in the study. Some factors were 'generic' – whether respondents felt valued and unique, incentivised, had a positive past experience, had a strong relationship with the interviewer, and or had changed circumstances. However there were other factors that were specific to the mixed mode design and the initial invitation to take part by web. These mixed mode-specific factors were related to:
- Availability of a working computer and or an internet connection when the request to take part arrived.
- Convenience or perceived convenience offered by the web as a means of taking part compared to a face-to-face interview.
- Importance or perceived importance of panel members' contribution to the survey and their continued participation as conveyed by the invitation to take part by web.
- Experience of others in the household of completing or attempting to complete the survey online and the impact this had on others' decisions.

Generic and specific factors combined in different ways to influence individuals' decisions to participate or not.

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Abstract:
Results from IP5 suggested that a mixed mode approach affects response rates. A small qualitative follow up study was undertaken to understand the role that mode played in panel members' decisions about whether to continue to take part and in particular the role of the web instrument in this process. A range of factors were found to influence IP5 panel members' decisions to continue to take part in the study. Some factors were 'generic', however there were other factors that were specific to the sequential mixed mode design of IP5 and the initial invitation to take part by web.

Summary

Understanding Society's Innovation Panel (IP) runs separately from the main survey, each year, providing the opportunity to conduct experiments and test out new ways of collecting survey data. Last year IP5 experimented with a sequential mixed mode design involving web followed by CAPI to assess, among other things, the impact of a change in data collection method on response rates. Results from IP5 suggested that offering a mixed mode approach affects response rates both at the household and individual level. A small qualitative follow up study was funded and undertaken by NatCen Social Research to understand the role that mode played in panel members' decisions about whether to continue to take part and in particular the role of the web instrument in this process. Specifically we wanted to answer two questions of particular interest to the scientific leadership team at ISER.

- Why are respondents in the mixed mode sample group who do not respond by web then refusing at a higher rate to CAPI?

- Why are members of households where one other person has completed by web less willing to complete in CAPI?

In exploring these issues, however, the research also sought to find practical and effective actions that would improve the implementation of a mixed mode design at IP6.

This report presents findings from the qualitative study, which involved face-to-face and telephone depth interviews with 22 members of the IP panel who had been randomly allocated to the mixed mode (web then CAPI) data collection group. Specifically we spoke to: (i) individuals in households where no one took part in either web or CAPI; (ii) individuals who responded by web but where at least one other household member did not take part by web or CAPI; and (iii) individuals who did not respond in web or CAPI but where at least one other member of their household responded by web. Interviews were recorded, with respondent consent and summarised into an analytical framework by the interviewer subsequently reviewing the recording.

Factors affecting participation in IP5

A range of factors were found to influence IP5 panel members' decisions to continue to take part in the study. Some factors were 'generic' (see section 2.1.1) – whether respondents felt valued and unique, incentivised, had a positive past experience, had a strong relationship with the interviewer, had changed circumstances – and reflected the sorts of factors identified in an earlier qualitative study by NatCen, which followed up Understanding Society panel members (see Mitchell et al, 2012). However there were other factors that were specific to the sequential mixed mode design of IP5 and the initial

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invitation to take part by web (see section 2.1.2). These mixed mode-specific factors were related to:

Availability of a working computer and or an internet connection when the request to take part arrived.

Convenience or perceived convenience offered by the web as a means of taking part compared to a face-to-face (CAPI) interview. Convenience interacted with importance.

Importance or perceived importance of panel members' contribution to the survey and their continued participation as conveyed by the invitation to take part by web. Two things had an influence here: how committed they were to the survey and motivated to overcome any barriers to participation they might face; and the importance they placed on human interaction and their relationship with the survey interviewer.

Experience of others in the household of completing or attempting to complete the survey online and the impact this had on others' decisions.

Generic and specific factors combined in different ways to influence individuals' decisions to participate or not.

Why are respondents in the mixed mode sample group who do not respond by web, then refusing at a higher rate to CAPI?

This study identified two types of non responder among those panel members first approached to take part by web who did not take part in IP5 (see section 2.3).

Wavering idealists – these were people who were attracted to the idea of taking part by web but in practice could not or were not able to take advantage of this opportunity. There was a mismatch between their preference for web and their ability to take part by that mode, which combined with a waning commitment to the survey and personal circumstances led to non-participation.

Non-refusers – these were people who were committed to the survey. They would have taken part but circumstances conspired to mean this did not happen. Among this group there were those who felt that they had missed out on taking part by web, which they liked the sound of.

Why are members of households where one other person has completed by web less willing to complete by CAPI?

These two types of non responder – wavering idealists and non-refusers – were also found among panel members who lived with others who had completed online. However there were additional factors at play in some cases: the experience of others in the household in trying to complete the web questionnaire, household dynamics and communication (see section 2.4).

Key lessons for IP6 and beyond

Building a sense of commitment to the survey through communication with panel members using advance materials and the participants' website to share survey findings and news of how they are being used is important. This study found that among those who did not take part commitment to the study had started to wane. IP6 included an experiment to assess the impact of tailoring advance materials, email and reminders to specific types of panel member.

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This study highlights the importance of making it as easy as possible for panel members to log on and complete the web questionnaire. If panel members encountered difficulties then information on what to do and who to contact should be easily accessible. No evidence was found that suggested that the web questionnaire was difficult to navigate or complete but there was the odd panel member who had difficulties logging in or submitting the questionnaire and who was not sure who to contact in these circumstances. IP6 included an easier logon procedure and clearer signposting of the help and support available if people encounter problems.

This study also highlights the important role the interviewer plays in securing participation in a mixed mode survey. Interviewers need to feel confident that they have up-to-date information about the status of individual cases, i.e. whether a web questionnaire has been completed fully or in part at the point they make contact. They need to know how to deal with people who say that they are planning to take part by web and those that say they have submitted it but where no questionnaire has been received. Further tools and support for interviewers were put in place for IP6 (section 2.3.2).

There are also some wider issues raised by this study. These relate to:
- the importance of collecting good quality email addresses for panel members. IP6 attempted to do this but it will be important that this happens on the main Understanding Society survey.
- the ability for people who use tablets, and potentially smartphones, to be able to take part in the web survey if they want to. Use of tablets and smartphones to access the internet is increasing and ignoring devices may reduce participation
- minimising the burden of participation on panel members and thinking about whether the current length of the questionnaire is sustainable in a mixed mode design; and
- thinking further about what the criteria that should be used to determine which Understanding Society panel members are allocated to mixed mode. If a participant has expressed a preference to be interviewed face-to-face, for example, at a previous round how should this information be used?

These issues are discussed further in section 2.6.

1   Background, aims and methods

1.1   Background

Understanding Society is a large, longitudinal survey following the lives of individuals in private households in the UK involving around 100,000 individuals. Its size makes it an expensive survey to run and the Economic and Social Research Council, having had its budget cut in 2010, asked the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) to find savings. An obvious way to save money it to reduce the costs of data collection by adopting a sequential mixed mode approach to data collection, whereby the cheapest mode is offered first with more expensive mode(s) being used to obtain the same data from non-responders. However any reduction is costs should not be at the expense of response rates.

Understanding Society has an Innovation Panel (IP) that is separate from the main study and provides an opportunity to test out new methods of collecting data and assess risks that might be associated with such changes. At IP2 an experiment was conducted involving a sequential mixed mode design involving telephone (CATI) followed by face-to-face (CAPI) data collection of non-responders to CATI. At IP5 a second sequential mixed mode experiment was conducted, this time involving first web and then face-to-face data collection for non-responders to the web. This report is concerned with this second experiment.

1.2   IP5 mixed mode experiment

The IP5 sample consisted of a core sample and the IP4 refreshment sample. The refreshment sample was drawn to boost the overall IP sample size, which had fallen due to higher than anticipated attrition. Among the core sample adamant refusals and households which had not responded for the last two waves were removed from the sample included at IP5. All households in the refreshment sample that were productive in IP4 were included in the IP5 sample.

The sample issued for IP5 totalled 1,622 households - 1,132 core sample households and 490 refreshment sample households - which were randomly allocated to either a face-to-face (F2F) only or web then CAPI (mixed mode MM) group. This random allocation was done to assess the impact of adopting a sequential mixed mode design on response rates.

The size of the issued F2F sample was 513 households. The F2F group was visited by an interviewer and interviews were carried out using CAPI: the web was not used at any stage. The size of the issued MM sample was 1,022 households. The MM group was invited to complete the survey online 14 days before the start of the face-to-face CAPI fieldwork. Any cases where the web questionnaire had not been completed before the start of the face-to-face fieldwork were transferred to CAPI, although the web questionnaire remained open.

Of those in the MM group who took part, 23% completed the survey via the web, 30% completed via a CAPI interview, and 13% started online and then completed with an interviewer in person. There were only a small number of cases (six households) where

the household questionnaire was partially completed on the web and the partial interview was transferred to an interviewer.

1.3 Aims of this study

IP5 results showed a difference in response rates between the MM (web then CAPI) and F2F only groups, with individual and household response rates being lower among the MM group overall. For example, as shown in Figure 1.1 the household response rate among the MM group was slightly lower than among the F2F only group – 74% compared to 78%.

Figure 1.1 Comparison of household response rates by mode

MM group	F2F group
74% hhld response rate	**78%** hhld response rate
17% Hhld refusal rate	**13%** Hhld refusal rate

Figure 1.1 also shows that the household refusal rate was higher in the MM group than the F2F only group: 17% compared with 13%[1]. This higher refusal rate among the MM group is a cause for concern and this research sought to explore why that might be the case, providing qualitative data in relation to two specific questions that ISER had:

1. why are respondents in the mixed mode sample group who do not respond to web survey, then refusing at a higher rate to CAPI?

2. why are members of households where one other person has completed by web less willing to complete in CAPI?

This research also provided the opportunity to gain insights about the usability of the questionnaire, effectiveness of the web survey invitation process and the training of interviewers that would be valuable for IP6.

1.4 Methodology

This study was entirely qualitative and involved face-to-face and telephone depth interviews with three types of panel member whose household had been assigned to the MM group at IP5. These panel members were contacted about this follow up study by letter and then telephone and invited to take part.

Group 1 Individuals in households where no one took part either by web or CAPI

Group 2 Individuals who responded in web but where at one other household member did not take part, either by web or CAPI

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[1] The refusal rate calculations shown are based on response rate data presented in Tables 8.2 and 8.5 in Parutis, V., Agur, M., Toomse, M. (2012) *Understanding Society Innovation Panel Wave 5: Technical Report*. NatCen Social Research, and assume the same level of eligibility is found among cases with unknown eligibility as was found in the contacted cases where eligibility was established.

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Group 3 Individuals who did not take part (in either web or CAPI) but where at least one other member of their household responded by web

It was made clear during recruitment for the study that taking part was voluntary and that this qualitative study was a separate one-off exercise. We also emphasised that this study was being conducted by a separate research team to those carrying out the survey.

Interviews were kept highly focused on key issues to reflect the difficulty of engaging some participants and to minimise impact on subsequent engagement with the survey. They typically lasted between 20-45 minutes depending on how much time participants were willing to give and how much they could remember about the invitation to take part in IP5. IP5 survey fieldwork ran from the 11th May to 31st August 2012. Follow up qualitative interviews were conducted during November 2012. To aide recall respondents were presented with visual stimulus material (a screen shot of the IP5 questionnaire login screen and a question asking about receipt of state benefits and tax credits). A topic guide was used for each group, which was agreed with ISER.

Interviews were recorded, with respondent consent and summarised into an analytical framework by researchers subsequently reviewing the recordings. A thematic analysis was undertaken by members of the study's research team and this report is based on those findings

1.5 Sample

A total of 22 interviews were carried out with three types of panel member, as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Number of interviews for groups on respondents		
Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
Individuals in households where no one took part in either web or CAPI	Individuals who responded in web but where at least one other household member did not take part (in either web or CAPI).	Individuals who did not take part (in either web or CAPI) but where at least one other member of their household responded by web.
7 interviews	**8 interviews**	**7 interviews**

Group 1 included panel members living alone or with other adults at the time of IP5 fieldwork. Groups 2 and 3 were panel members living with other adults. Within groups 2 and 3 we interviewed some people who were members of the same household so that we could explore the role of household dynamics in decision making about whether to take part in IP5 in more detail. Four paired interviews were undertaken.

Groups 1 and 3 provided data that were used to answer question 1 and Groups 2 and 3 provided data that were used to answer question 2. Group 2 also allowed us to understand more about what motivated people to take part by web.

Within each group we aimed for diversity in terms of age, sex, and ethnicity of panel members, and the size and type of their household, see table 1.2. Moreover we only selected MM panel members who were regular internet users, or where at least one other person in their household was so described.

Table 1.2	Characteristics of those interviewed		
Age	**16-25**	**26-50**	**50+**
	7	7	8
Sex	**Female**		**Male**
	10		12
Ethnicity	**White British**	**Asian/ A British**	**Black/ B British**
	17	3	2
Household size	**4+ people**	**2-3 people**	**1 person**
	12	9	1
Interviews with two people who were members of the same hhld	**Yes**[2]		**No**
	8		14

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[2] One 'paired' interview took place with siblings who were, at the time of IP5, listed as being members of the same household. However the follow up qualitative interviews found that one of them had left home and was living in student accommodation when IP5 fieldwork took place.

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2 Findings

Here we present explore factors affecting participation in IP5, investigate why those in the mixed mode sample group who do not respond by web did not take part in CAPI and the role that household dynamics plays in participation. We also report on participants' views on initial contact at IP5 and the experiences of those who attempted to complete the web questionnaire. Key learning points are highlighted and actions taken in IP6 are summarised. Finally we reflect on future challenges.

2.1 Factors affecting participation

We identified two sets of factors that affected participation in IP5. The first set was related to features of the survey more generally and the respondent's relationship with it. The second set was related to the change in mode and the invitation to take part in IP5 by web.

2.1.1 General features of IP and their influence on participation

Back in the summer of 2012 NatCen Social Research carried out a qualitative study with members of the Understanding Society panel. This research identified a number of factors that affected people's decisions about whether to continue to take part or drop out of the study[3]. A similar set of factors were mentioned by the IP5 sample members we spoke to in this study and these factors combined for people in different ways.

The value of the survey – some participants had initially taken part in IP because they hoped that sharing their experiences and views might benefit others – people like them – or society more generally. However others had begun to question whether the survey findings were making a difference. Respondents wanted more feedback and evidence of how the research findings were being used and on the impact they were having. NatCen and ISER are already working together to improve communication materials with panel members, building on the findings from earlier qualitative research (op cit).

Personal reward and incentives - IP5 included an incentives experiment, which was a continuation of a series of experiments run on previous waves of the IP. It aimed to assess the impact of incentives on response rates, efficiency of fieldwork and costs. Incentives were sent in the advance mailing. On IP5, sample members received £5, £10, £20, or £30 with a sub-group of the MM sample receiving an additional £5 if all adults in the household took part online. For most households this was the same level of incentive as at IP4. However two groups that were in the £5-£10 incentive condition at the previous wave were, at IP5, randomly assigned to receive £5 or £10. Its worth noting that those in the refreshment sample have received a higher incentive at IP4 and IP5 than those in the core sample: receiving £10, £20 or £30 per person interviewed.

- As was found in earlier research we conducted with Understanding Society panel members, the value of the financial incentive was important to some IP panel members we spoke to and was a reason for their continued participation.
- The incentive experiments run on IP over a number of rounds meant that some participants had received a lower incentive at IP5 than at earlier rounds. For those for

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[3] Mitchell, M., Brown, A., Collins, D (2012) *Factors affecting participation in Understanding Society: Qualitative study with participants* . Reported prepared for ISER & the ESRC.

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whom the financial incentive was an important factor in their continued participation, this drop in its value made some question whether their continued participation was worthwhile.

- The additional £5 for early completion by web in IP5 had a positive influence on some participants, who completed the web questionnaire early.
- Others expressed annoyance and frustration that although they had completed the web questionnaire by the given date other members of their household did not. They felt deprived of a reward.
- And there were those for whom the value of the incentive was not important or where its value was too small to have any impact on their decision to take part.

These findings may help shed some light on why IP5 data suggest that different incentive levels may play a bigger role in motivating respondents to take part in a single mode F2F survey compared to those who complete a questionnaire online as part of a mixed mode survey[4].

Interviewer –interviewer continuity was important; participants felt that they had built up relationships of trust and rapport with interviewers over time, which they valued. Participants variously talked about the personal touch, the ability to have a conversation with an interviewer and wanting to see the person who was collecting their data as a matter of politeness or courtesy. They also said that if they made a pre-arranged appointment with an interviewer they would make every effort to stick to it. Although some participants were happy with new interviewers, for others a change of interviewer was a reason to drop out at the CAPI follow up of web non-responders.

Changed circumstances for participants – changed circumstances meant that some participants felt that they no longer had the time to take part or the window of opportunity for participation was smaller than at previous waves. Examples included a man who had now returned to work after a period of 'garden leave' for a health condition and a young woman who had started 'A' levels which she said now left her little time for anything else.

Household dynamics – earlier qualitative research with Understanding Society panel members revealed different forms of decision-making within households, including collective consent to take part, consent with encouragement from a parent or partner, and consent given by one householder on behalf of others. We found the same household dynamics at play in this study and the influence of others in the household on individuals' decisions about whether to participate occurred behind closed doors, outside of the contact the interviewer had with individual household members. In some cases those we spoke to felt that others in their household had initially decided that they would take part despite interviewers' best efforts to ensure everyone had consented equally to participation. This included young people who said they only started taking part because their mum or dad had suggested they should and partners who said their husband or wife had said yes to them taking part in the survey and they had gone along with it.

Past IP experience – this focused on questionnaire content. The repetitive nature of the questions left some feeling that they were giving the same answers every year and that their contribution was getting *"stale"*.

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[4] The IP5 technical report presents household response rate data for the MM and F2F mode groups by value of incentive. Data suggest that varying the value of the incentive over the life of the panel may affect response rates, but the impact is more noticeable in F2F than mixed mode. Parutis, V., Agur, M., Toomse, M. (2012) *Understanding Society Innovation Panel Wave 5: Technical Report*. NatCen Social Research.

2.1.2 Factors related to the mixed mode design of IP5

In addition to these broad factors affecting participation there were factors that influenced people's decisions to take part that were related to the mixed mode design at IP5 and web completion. Three main factors emerged:

- perceptions of the convenience of web completion compared to a face-to-face interview;
- perceptions of the value of panel members' continuing participation in the survey conveyed in the initial request to take part by web; and
- the experiences of other people in their household in trying to take part by web.

Convenience – some participants anticipated that web completion would be more convenient for than a face-to-face interview. They welcomed the opportunity to complete online because they saw it as an acknowledgement that they had busy, unpredictable lives that made keeping appointments difficult. They especially liked the flexibility that web completion offered around the timing of the interview and the fact that they were in control of when the interview took place.

> "You have the freedom to choose which evening you're going to do it, as opposed to arranging an appointment with an interviewer that's fixed once you've made it, you're committed to that point in time".
>
> Male, aged 26-50, Group 2 (partial completion)

The ability to complete the survey in stages, as and when they had time, was also seen as a positive development.

Importance of the respondent and the survey – perceptions of the importance of the respondent and the survey conveyed by the offer of completing by web varied according to perceived convenience, views on the value of human interaction, and whether or not there was a perceived deadline to complete the survey.

There were three ways in which mode of completion interacted with views about the importance or value of participants to the survey.

- **More important** - Those who interpreted the invitation to take part by web as a deliberate attempt to make it easier for people like them, with busy lives, to take part felt valued.
- **Less important** - Those who felt the survey had become less important tended value human interaction and saw the invitation to take part in by web as 'impersonal'. Less human contact via web completion was seen to devalue the contribution of the respondent. Some people in this group had completed Understanding Society IP5 by web but found the process isolating, which discouraged them from wanting to do it in this way again. They suggested that there should remain the option of doing it face-to-face.
- **No difference** - where no difference in the importance of participants' to the study was perceived this was because participants felt that mode had no affect on the questions being asked.

The importance of the survey itself was also conveyed in terms of a perceived deadline for completion. An interviewer calling and making an appointment provided a deadline when the interview would take place, which was harder to miss. No one in the sample thought that email contact and/ or web completion put them under more pressure to take part in Understanding Society. The reverse was true in that without the deadline of an

appointment with an interviewer some participants said they felt they were under less pressure and put off doing the survey indefinitely. In effect, the survey could seem less important because respondents were being asked to impose their own deadline.

Availability
Availability of a computer and or an Internet connection when the request to take part arrived also affected participants' ability to complete by web. In some cases people's computer had broken or their internet connection had been temporarily cut off due to non-payment of bills, which meant they weren't able to respond. Availability also related to who in the house had control of a shared computer or who had better computer skills.

Experiences of others in the household - whether or not a household member experienced difficulties when completing the survey online affected the decision of others about whether to complete by this mode.

2.2   Initial contact

All adults received an advance letter, which included an unconditional incentive. The MM group were sent an advance letter and, where we had an email address, an advance email. This advance correspondence to the MM households contained an invitation to complete the survey online and included respondents' log-in details: a URL link to the survey and a unique identification code. The IP5 advance mailing was subject to a number of experimental conditions to assess the impact of timing of mailings and wording on response. One such wording experiment involved individuals allocated to the MM group receiving an advance letter, the wording of which varied depending on whether the respondent was a regular internet user or not, where this was known. Individuals known not to be regular internet users received a letter that mentioned that they would have the opportunity to participate in the face-to-face survey with an interviewer, if they were not able to complete the survey by web. Where individuals were known to be regular internet users (regardless of whether we had an email address for them or not), the letter did not mention that the interviewer might visit. Two reminder emails were sent to non-respondents after two and four days. In addition, a reminder letter was sent around one week after the initial mailing.

Participants tended to recall seeing the initial advance letter but not the initial email invitation, although this was by no means universal. There were a number of reasons why the initial email may not have been seen.

- **Spamming** – participants thought that it was likely that emails were 'spammed out'.
- **Use of shared computers** - some members of households had greater use of a shared computer than others, making it more difficult for other household members to access their emails regularly. This included younger people but also partners and spouses, depending on who had the greater IT skills or monopolised the home computer.
- **Regularity of checking emails** – there was a wide variation in how regularly respondents checked their emails. Being able to access email easily, through a smartphone or tablet, was a factor and we discuss this further in 2.2.2.
- **Changes in email addresses** - changes in email addresses between wave 4 and wave 5 that were not notified to NatCen, including moves to new email addresses accessed on smartphones.

- **Temporary interruption to email and Internet access** - such as a change in internet provider, services being stopped due to non-payment to the provider or the need to buy a new computer or smartphone.

2.2.1 Legitimacy

Participants who recalled seeing the initial email invitation recognised it as being about Understanding Society because it contained the survey logo. Nonetheless, one participant still thought that it was important to have some way of verifying that email contact was legitimate and not part of a 'scam'. The participant website may be one means of providing reassurance about the legitimacy of the request.

2.2.2 Accessibility

There was an expectation among some participants who used a tablet or smartphone to access the internet that they would be able to take part using this device. Not being able to complete the questionnaire using this device affected their ability to take, either because this was their only means of accessing the internet or because they were not confident in using a traditional computer.

2.3   Why are respondents who do not respond by web then refusing to take part in CAPI?

A key issue in relation to response rates is that participants who did not complete in web then failed to take part in a face-to-face interview when they were subsequently contacted by an interviewer. Based on findings from this study we identify two types of non-responder: wavering idealists and non-refusers.

2.3.1 Wavering idealists

This group's initial response to being invited to take part by web was positive. Web was seen as being a more convenient way to take part in the survey than a CAPI interview: it offered greater flexibility and autonomy over when the interview takes place, which is appealing to those with busy and or unpredictable lives. However whilst the *idea* of taking part by web is attractive, in practice those in this group could not or were not able to take advantage of the opportunity. There are several reasons for this.

- A mismatch between mode preference (web) and the ability to take part in that mode. Within this group are panel members who did not have a (working) computer and or internet access, lack confidence in using a computer or the motivation to go online and complete the questionnaire.

- A waning commitment to the survey. These participants had intermittent participation histories - having taken part twice before – and were beginning to question whether their participation is still needed. None in this group knew how the survey data are being used.

These reasons, combined with personal circumstances, led to panel members not taking part in IP5. Sometimes this was a conscious decision. In one case a woman who lived alone and had an unpredictable health condition decided that if she could not take part by web she would not take part at all. She decided she would …

"…wait until the gentleman [interviewer] comes and say, "No thanks", I don't have a computer and I would rather not do it.'

Female, 50+, group 1

In other cases the window of opportunity closed. One older woman with her own computer, who used it regularly to keep in touch with family and friends, was frustrated by the fact that her computer had broken down during the fieldwork period. She hoped it would get fixed, and sent the interviewer away saying she would complete online. However the computer was not repaired in time. In another case a young man never got round to completing by web and when the interviewer came his computer had a problem and he couldn't do the interview. There was not time to rearrange.

The move to a mixed mode design, involving first web and then CAPI requires interviewers to develop new skills to be able to deal with these situations.

Improvements for IP6
- Interviewer briefings included discussion of scenarios found in this study that can lead to non-response and strategies to deal with these.

2.3.2 Non-refusers

This group feel the survey is worthwhile and want to take part; however circumstances meant that they did not complete by web or face-to-face in the time frame available. Figure 2.1 summarises the reasons for non-participation and we discuss these in more detail below.

Figure 2.1 Reasons for not taking part in web and CAPI

No participation in web	No participation in CAPI
• Invitation not received	• No interviewer visit (recalled)
• Equipment	• Circumstances
o Lack of working equipment – computer not working, internet not working	o Couldn't find convenient time
	o Illness
o Not able to complete using a tablet	
• Motivation	• Change in interviewer
o Never got round to completing it	
o Didn't want to do it by web	
• Put off by bad experience of someone else in the household	• Communication difficulties

No participation by web

No invitation – there was a group of primarily young people who did not recall receiving an advance letter and email inviting them to take part in IP5 by web (one mother also said she did not receive any correspondence). This is not to say that invitations were not sent. In some cases young people said that they had not informed the survey team about

their new address and they suspected correspondence was, at that time, going to their parental home (one was a student, another had moved out of home and had lived in a number of different places). All lived independent lives – either inside or outside the parental home.

Equipment – web completion was only possible if panel members had access to the internet. Where computers were broken, internet connections were slow or erratic this was a barrier to participation. In one case a participant only used a tablet to access the internet: she found the interface much easier to use than a PC. However her husband had found it difficult to complete the questionnaire using a tablet and he reverted to completing it on his laptop. Not being confident using that device she did not try to complete online.

Motivation was needed to get on and complete the questionnaire and some panel members either forgot or kept putting it off because they were busy studying for exams, juggling work and family, or did not want to take part by web.

Other household members' experience could put participants off taking part by web if they had experienced problems. This is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.

No participation in CAPI

No interviewer visit – there were a number of participants who did not recall an interviewer visiting. This does not necessarily mean that an interviewer did not attempt to make contact. The length of time between IP5 fieldwork and follow up interviews taking place may have been a factor. However there were some problems with interviewers receiving up-to-date sample information during the IP5 fieldwork period. A Sample Update report was produced every day. Interviewers had to dial in to collect it. Some interviewers had difficulties dialling in and did not collect sample updates as regularly as they should. In addition, there were some cases where the wrong web outcome code was assigned, and cases where the web questionnaire was still outstanding were wrongly coded as having been received[5]. This may explain why some panel members we spoke to did not recall an interviewer visit.

Circumstances meant that panel members were not able to take part in the CAPI interview. The length of the field work period available in which the interview could be carried out was a factor here. If respondents were busy or ill then there was little scope for manoeuvre in terms of rescheduling and in some cases interviews could not be (re)arranged within the time available.

Change in interviewer, on occasion, was mentioned as one of a number of factors influencing panel members' decisions about whether to take part. In these circumstances people had built a relationship with the interviewer: they trusted and therefore felt comfortable talking to them, and took part because of the interviewer. A change of interviewer was a wrench: one of the reasons for taking part had been removed.

Communication difficulties - There was one case where there appeared to be a lack of clarity about whether a panel member's web submission had been successful because her Internet connection was lost just at the point that she tried to submit her data. Although she did not blame NatCen for this she felt it was unclear whether she needed to take part in an interview when the interviewer called. It's possible that the interviewer may have been reluctant to ask her to complete the interview again when she had already tried to complete it online. It's also possible the interviewer was unsure how to

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[5] These problems are detailed in section 4.4 of the IP5 Technical Report.

respond in such a situation. The participant said that the interviewer had told her she would get back to her but she did not hear anything further. This case highlights the need for interviewers to have up-to-date, reliable information on the status of respondents' submissions and better training on what to do if a panel member has tried to submit online but failed. We've taken steps at IP6 to improve the information interviewers receive out in the field.

Improvements for IP6
- Improved information for field interviewers on the status of individual's response by web, specifically:
  o Interviewers were provided with up-to-date information on the status of each individual case when they log in each day.
  o Live information on cases where the questionnaire has been completed by web was made available to interviewers in the field, who could call the office for an up-date
  o Interviewers also received text messages informing them of changes in the status of cases (a web questionnaire being completed, for example), helping to improve their confidence about the status of individuals' responses via web
- Clearer demarcation of web and CAPI stages of fieldwork.
  o The web questionnaire was shut down 3 weeks before the end of main CAPI fieldwork, to make it clearer that the only option panel members now have is to take part by CAPI. Interviewers were told of this change in approach.

2.4 Why are members of households where at least one person has completed by web less willing to complete by CAPI?

In looking to answer this question we drew on data from interviews with those in groups 2 and 3. The topic guide included a section which explored the role of household dynamics and in addition, we were able to compare the accounts of four responder- non responder pairs; each pair being members of the same household. These household pairs were interviewed together or separately, depending on what worked best for participants. In the rest of this section we discuss the findings.

In three cases we interviewed someone in group 2 where the non-responder in their household was someone who had never taken part in IP – because they had "no interest" in the survey - or had not taken part in the last two waves because they were too busy. In all other cases those who did not take part had taken part in the previous round.

The same sorts of factors that influenced panel members' decisions not to take part in either web or CAPI, discussed in section 2.3, were in evidence again. Panel members' commitment to the survey, their mode preferences, whether they received an invitation to take part, technical problems, whether an interviewer was able to make contact and the respondent's circumstances at the time of contact combined in different ways to

influence individual's decisions about participation. However there were additional factors at play in some cases: the experiences of others in the household in trying to complete the web questionnaire; and household dynamics and communication between household members. These factors are discussed in more details in the rest of this section.

Experience of others in the household

If someone else in the household had completed or attempted to complete the web questionnaire and had difficulties this put participants off taking part in that mode. This, as it turned out, was a lost opportunity because they did not go on to take part in a CAPI interview. In one case a husband saw that his wife had problems as a result of being timed-out as she tried to complete the survey in-between baking. She had to enter her information again. Her husband, who had witnessed the problems his wife experienced, and heard her cursing and swearing, commented:

> "She said to me, 'it's your turn'. I said you stand no chance. I ain't going through that. It would have really wound me up, especially if you get as far as she did – three-quarters the way through – and then it went."
>
> Male, aged 50+, Group 3.

He had been willing to give web completion a try up until that point. When the interviewer visited to try to make an appointment he was *"busy"*. The interviewer visit had occurred towards the end of fieldwork, as the couple had left it until *"the last minute"* to fill in the questionnaire online.

In another case a wife had seen her husband having difficulties trying to complete the questionnaire using his ipad, which was the only device she could use to access the internet. She decided not to take part by web, and instead waited for the interviewer to visit. Unfortunately she and her husband, who had partially completed by web, were not able to keep their appointment with the interviewer because their daughter broke her leg and they did not want to make another appointment at that time.

Household dynamics and communication

The role of household dynamics and communication between household members played a role in participation in various ways. In some cases a household member could act as a facilitator or as a barrier to the participation of others.

Facilitators encouraged participation by reminding others to complete the questionnaire or helping others to participate by filling in the questionnaire on their behalf. Problems arose when the facilitator was no longer present to provide motivation or where there was confusion over whether the facilitator was actually going to complete the questionnaire on behalf of someone else.

We interviewed two siblings: one had taken part by web the other had not taken part. In the case of the latter, he was a student living away from home, who did not recall receiving an invitation to take part (by letter or email) or an interviewer visit. He indicated that he would have taken part by web but would have been too busy to take part in a face-to-face interview. He thought 'head office' did not have his address at that time. His sister said that it was their mum who encouraged them to take part initially and kept reminding her to fill in her web questionnaire this time. If her brother had been living at

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home it's possible that he may have taken part by web because even if he hadn't seen the invitation he would have had other family members reminding him to take part.

Confusion about who would complete the web questionnaire arose on occasion. In one case a busy working mother of two, who took part by web, felt her husband wasn't interested in the survey and was too busy to do it this time: he had taken part in IP4. She offered to enter his responses for him:

> *"By the time he got home it was probably the last thing [he needed].. It wasn't important to him to complete it. I did remind him a few times and it got to the point where I thought do you want to tell me and I'll type it in but it just didn't work out in the end."*
>
> Group 2, Female, 26-50

Although, we did not speak directly to the husband, the wife thought that her offer to type in his responses for him may have led him to believe he had taken part. He would not have taken part in a face-to-face interview because he would not have wanted to give up an evening and his wife told the interviewer this when the interviewer made contact.

In another case a husband and father of two thought his wife may have completed the web questionnaire on his behalf. He did not like using computers and tried to have nothing to do with them. He did not recall an interviewer getting in touch but his wife, who we did not interview, partially completed online and both cases were coded as a 'refusal before interview' suggesting that the interviewer may have made contact with his wife, who refused on his behalf.

Barriers either directly or indirectly made the participation of someone else more difficult. In this study the participation of young people was, in some cases, hindered by their parents not passing on the survey invitation or informing the interviewer of their child's whereabouts. There were several cases where young people had moved out of the parental home and did not recall receiving an invitation to take part in the survey, either by post, email or an interviewer calling. These young people did not think that 'head office' knew their new address and thought correspondence had been sent to the parental home. It appears that this was not passed on and they felt that they had missed out on the opportunity to take part.

Parents act as gatekeepers and although interviewers try to make contact with individuals to gain co-operation, we know from our earlier qualitative work with Understanding Society panel members and interviewers that parents can refuse on behalf of a child. In this study there was a case of a young woman living at home with her family who was studying for her A/S levels, who was recorded as having refused prior to the interviewer visiting. She did not recall an interviewer making contact and said she would have taken part if she had been contacted. She thought it possible that one of her parents had told the interviewer not bother her as she was busy with exams. Improving direct communication with all panel members, increasing the frequency of inter-wave mailings so providing more opportunities for people to report a change of address and tailoring communications to specific groups, such as young people may help ameliorate some of these factors.

2.5   Participant feedback on the web questionnaire

Participants discussed aspects of the web questionnaire that they thought worked well and made suggestions for improvements in some cases. The aspects raised were:

Logging in – participants were asked to enter a unique password, which was included in the advance letter. Participants did not report any problems with the log on process and this finding is supported by findings from usability test, which assessed among other things the login screen[6]. However one participant had lost her login details and was not sure what to do. She suggested that it would be useful to include information on what to do if you lost your login details on the login screen.

Helpline and support
Participants noted that help and support were available but:
- they were unsure whether the helpline would be available outside office hours. Since online completion especially appealed to busy participants (some of whom said they would complete the survey online late in the evening) they felt it was important to have help and support available as much as possible with clear times when they could access it; and
- the helpline number appeared only on the front page and if not noted down at that point, was not remembered later on when needed.

Making the logon process as straightforward as possible and providing clearly signposted help and support is important, and we made improvements to these elements for IP6.

Improvements implemented at IP6
- Panel members were issued with a unique URL that took respondents straight into the questionnaire – to the landing pages.
- The helpline number and email address was available on the landing screen, advance letter and email as part of the FAQs.
- The helpline number appeared on every page of the web questionnaire so that the information was always available, if needed.
- FAQs were available on the web questionnaire landing pages.

Speed of completion online – perceptions of how long it took to complete the survey online varied widely. In some cases web completion made the process faster but there were also instances where participants were disappointed that their expectations that online completion would be faster were not met. Participants accepted that this was often because they did not have a fast Internet connection, meaning pages took a while to load: participants reported times of between 5 seconds and 20 minutes. Collecting paradata on web completion times is useful and IP6 collected this information.

Saving and submitting data - Some participants experienced problems saving and submitting data meaning they had to input their data again or they gave up, which could result in either non-completion or partial response. In one case a panel member was timed out of the survey and was frustrated that no warning had been given that this would happen if she was away for more than x minutes. Better signposting of help, implemented at IP6 will help. However there were very few partially completed web questionnaires at IP5, suggesting that overall the saving and submitting of data worked well.

Privacy and security – participants were specifically asked during the interviews if they had concerns about the security of information submitted online. They thought that this issue had been addressed well and participants who completed via the web survey said they trusted NatCen to keep their data safe.

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[6] D'Ardenne, J and Lepps, H (2012) IP5 Usability Testing: Summary Report.

Tablets and smartphones – Some participants wanted to complete the survey on a tablet or smartphone because this was the technology they had or felt most comfortable with but were unable to do so: they could not logon or having logged on, in one case, were unable to complete it. We discuss this issue further in the next section.

2.6   Future challenges

Tackling 'wavering commitment'

There are a group of respondents whose commitment to the survey is wavering, in part because they do not feel valued. This issue was identified in the earlier study we undertook with Understanding Society sample members, and NatCen and ISER are working together on improving advance materials and the content and frequency of inter-wave mailings. IP6 contained some experiments on the impact of tailoring advance letters on response rates. However, this is but one of a number of factors that can combine to affect people's decisions about whether to continue to take part. The incentive is another way in which we can make people feel valued, and IP5 found that response rates were improved when a higher prepaid incentive was offered. IP6 included further incentive experiments.

Improving initial contact by email

Improving the proportion of the sample for which we have an email address, and making sure that it is correct, is important. So too is ensuring that the title of the email is engaging, and will attract attention in a full in-box. These actions may go some way to minimising missed opportunities to get people to complete by web. Some work took place on IP6 to improve the invitation emails but further work may be required.

Strategy for tablets and smartphones

The use of tablets and smartphones is growing. Developing a version of the web questionnaire that can be used on a tablet (or smartphone) should be considered as a means of driving up online participation.

Reducing respondent burden

There were panel members who commented on the length of previous interviews and on how long it took them to complete by web this time. There are two issues here: internet speed and perceptions of interview length. Internet speeds vary across the country. We can't do anything about that. We also know that people access the internet in different ways: through Wifi, 3/4G and cable connections, which affect speed and reliability. A slow internet connection can add to perceptions that the interview is lengthy. This could act as a disincentive to continue to take part at later waves.

For those in multi person households, the first person in the household to complete on-line typically has a longer interview, as they undertake the household enumeration, possibly answer questions about the household as well as doing their own individual interview. Others in the household may therefore think that their interview will be longer than it will actually be. Again this may act as a disincentive to participation.
There were also comments from those we spoke to who took part by web that it took longer than they thought it would take. We don't know what impact this experience (of

completing by web at IP5) will have on future participation. That is something that IP6 will explore.

IP6 will include paradata on web completion times, and this will allow analysis of response rates by interview length. However it may also be valuable to look at whether interview length at IP6 has any impact on participation at IP7 and on in which mode people take part. The qualitative data suggest it might, but in practice people may be more resilient to longer web interviews than they think.

Smarter allocation to mixed mode
IP5 and IP6 contained experiments to look at the impact of mixed mode data collection on response rates. However on Understanding Society itself the allocation of individuals within households to mode will not be random: criteria will be used. This study provides some evidence to suggest that mode preference may be an important factor. Further work is clearly needed to identify the characteristics of those households most likely to take part by web.

Regular internet user question

Finally it's worth flagging that there was some evidence from this study that the question on regularity of web use may not be measuring what we think its measuring. All of those in this study were people who had described themselves as regular web users (bar a few cases where the data were missing). However in practice there were clearly participants who used the internet much less frequently than others, who only accessed it through a particular devices such as a smartphone or tablet, or who relied on others to log them in or provide them with the equipment. Regularity may mean different things to different people and even if someone is a regular web user they may not have the equipment or confidence to be able to complete an on-line questionnaire.

Postscript

Findings from this study were presented at AAPOR in May 2013 and will be presented at the Non-Response Workshop in September 2013.

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