



# The role of face-to-face interviewers in a post-pandemic UK

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# Background

- Face-to-face interviewing long seen to be the gold standard
- Changing participation rates and shortage of skilled interviewers
- Changes exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

# Research aims

## Main objective:

- Provide an understanding of the skills and capacity needs of the sector
- Improve understanding of the ways in which the role of the face-to-face fieldworker is changing in response to societal, commercial, technological, and methodological trends.
- Identify the key skills and attributes needed by the face-to-face fieldworker today and how this is likely to change in the future.
- Identify the implication of sourcing and retaining skilled face-to-face fieldworkers.

# Methods

- Interviews with Heads of Field (or equivalent)
  - Research organisations with an in-person field force
  - Cross England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland
  - Interview covering:
    - Experiences before the pandemic
    - Changes since the pandemic: company strategy, research design.
    - Reason for changes and sustainability
    - Role of the interviewer in 5 years' time, implications of the role.
- Round table with all Heads of Field (or equivalent)
  - Confirming the findings of the interviews
- Focus groups with interviewers
  - Sub-set of participating organisations
  - £30 incentive
  - Focus group composition based on experience level, mix of urban and rural
  - Focus groups covering:
    - Attraction to interviewing work
    - Work now and then
    - Barriers to working more
    - What employers could do

# Landscape pre-COVID

- Large scale social survey use of mixed-mode had been steadily growing.
- Long-standing interviewers:
  - Retired/ pre-retired
  - Wants interesting work
  - Remain working
  - Additional but not sole income



# The role pre-COVID

## Key accountabilities:

- Engage with people
- Gain their cooperation
- Understand the participant eligibility
- Organise their own schedule

## Skills:

- Interviewing
- Basic IT
- Driving license
- Basic methods knowledge
- Good communication
- *Sale and persuasion*
- Empathetic and emotionally intelligent
- Resilience and resourcefulness
- Taking ownership in work

# Impact of COVID

- Acceleration in mix-mode transition
  - Prior funding
  - Sequential mix-mode
- Face-to-face interviewing is seen as much harder
  - General downwards trend in response rates
  - Social aversion
  - Trust in the government
  - GDPR concerns
  - Decline in skilled interviewers
- Changing demands
  - More “nudging”
  - Reduced social interaction and *satisfaction*
  - Interviewer demand is greater than other competing roles



# Impact of COVID

- Organisation trails
  - Multi-skilled interviewers
  - Contract interviewer vs “piece work model”
- Recruitment challenges
  - Apparent flexibility in the role has decreased
  - Not meeting basic requirements
  - High drop out rate
- Recruiting from the same pool
  - Looking beyond this pool
- Challenge in appetite from survey designers



# The role post-COVID

## Key accountabilities:

- **Specialised**
  - Nudging
  - CAVI
- Engage with people
  - Persuading
- Gain their cooperation
  - Building trust
  - Relationships
- Collect the survey data
- Understand the participant eligibility
- Organise their own schedule

## Skills:

- Interviewing
- Basic IT
- Driving license
- Basic methods knowledge
- Good communication
- *Sale and persuasion*
- Empathetic and emotionally intelligent
- Resilience and resourcefulness
  - Change readiness
- Taking ownership in work
  - Choice of more satisfying bits of work

# Looking forward

- The role will become more dynamic
  - Multiskilled
  - Hard to read groups
  - Persistent rejection
  - Complex technology and methods
- Reward and retention
  - Core group of permeant contractors
- Collective response
  - Socials and Marketing
  - Centralised pool
  - Accreditation



# Next Steps

Whether there is a need for a collective, sector-wide response to the F2F interviewer recruitment and retention challenges identified, in addition to actions individual survey organisations may take.

Bringing survey research stakeholders together:

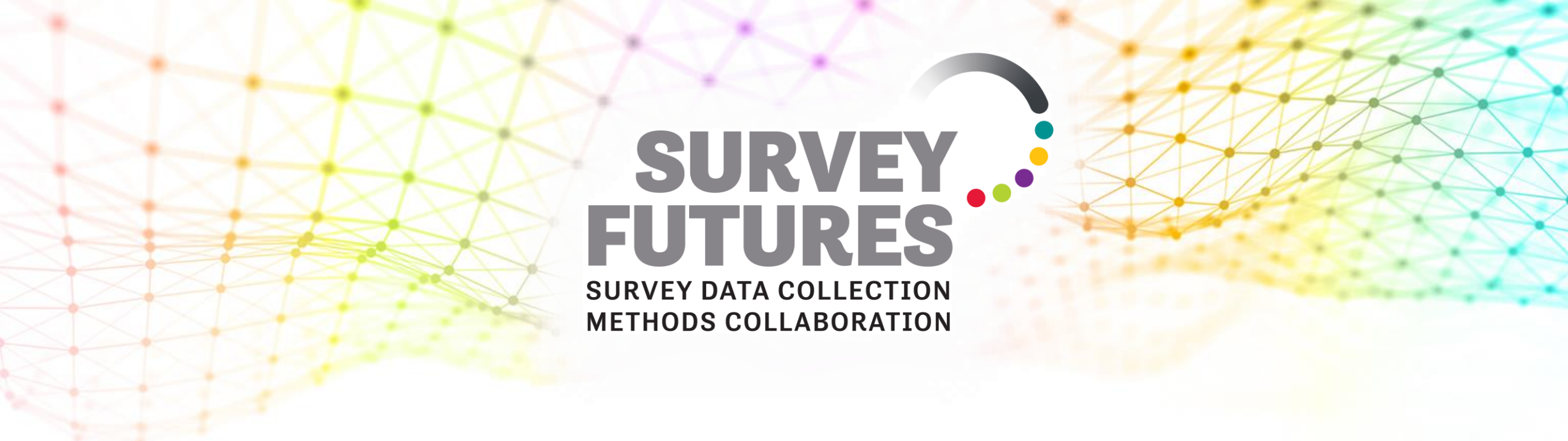
- Consider the questions
- Consider questions raised by other stakeholders
- Identify priorities
- (possibly) develop an action plan

1. How can we (the survey research sector) improve the public's perception of the survey interviewer (and so make the survey interviewing task a little easier)?
2. Is there any value in more active management of the labour pool e.g. through a virtual labour network?
3. How would any collective response be actioned or owned?

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# SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION  
METHODS COLLABORATION

## Thank you

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