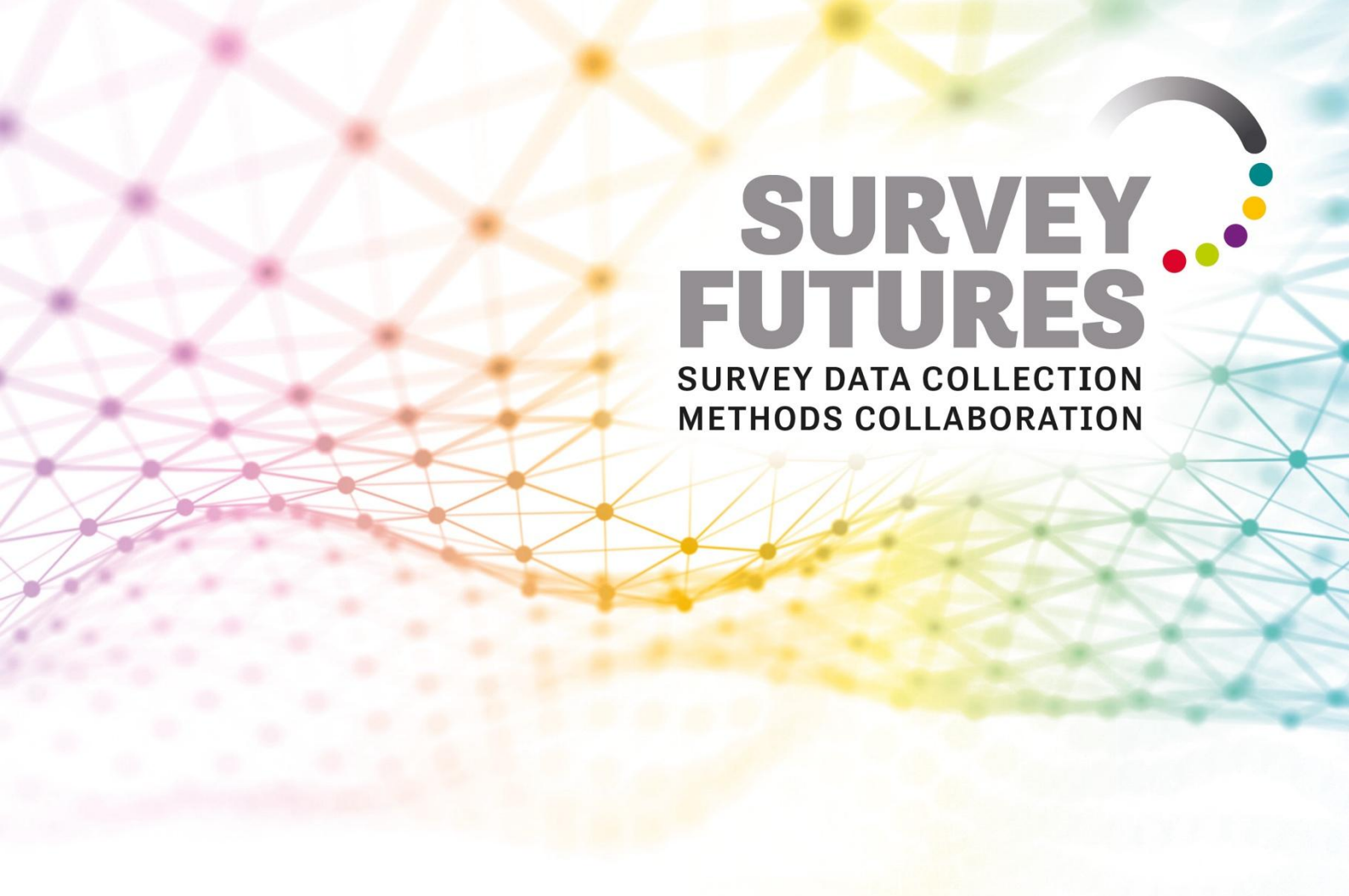




SURVEY FUTURES

**SURVEY DATA COLLECTION
METHODS COLLABORATION**

Report 7: Maintaining face-to-face survey interviewing capacity

**Report on the outcome of deliberative
workshops with stakeholders**

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November 2025

www.surveyfutures.net

Survey Futures is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded initiative (grant ES/X014150/1) aimed at bringing about a step change in survey research to ensure that high quality social survey research can continue in the UK. The initiative brings together social survey researchers, methodologists, commissioners and other stakeholders from across academia, government, private and not-for-profit sectors. Activities include an extensive programme of research, a training and capacity-building (TCB) stream, and dissemination and promotion of good practice. The research programme aims to assess the quality implications of the most important design choices relevant to future UK surveys, with a focus on inclusivity and representativeness, while the TCB stream aims to provide understanding of capacity and skills needs in the survey sector (both interviewers and research professionals), to identify promising ways to improve both, and to take steps towards making those improvements. *Survey Futures* is directed by Professor Peter Lynn, University of Essex, and is a collaboration of twelve organisations, benefitting from additional support from the Office for National Statistics and the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. Further information can be found at www.surveyfutures.net.

The suggested form of citation for this report is:

Cummins C & Collins D (2025) 'Maintaining face-to-face survey interviewing capacity: Report on the outcome of deliberative workshops with stakeholders', *Survey Futures Report* no. 7. Colchester, UK: University of Essex. Available at <https://surveyfutures.net/reports/>.

Contents

1	Background	4
1.1	Workshop process	4
1.2	Stakeholders	5
1.3	Structure of this report.....	5
2	Summary of workshop 1	6
2.1	Introduction.....	6
2.2	Stage one project findings and queries.....	6
2.3	Discussion of challenges	7
2.3.1	Public willingness to participate	7
2.3.2	Interviewer Pay.....	8
2.3.3	Recruitment costs	8
2.3.4	Professionalising the role	9
2.3.5	The work offer	9
2.4	Stakeholders' prioritisation of challenges facing F2F interviewer recruitment and retention.....	9
2.5	Next steps to progress the dialogue	10
3	Summary of workshop 2	12
3.1	Introduction.....	12
3.2	Solutions to challenges of F2F interviewer recruitment and retention.....	12
3.2.1	Declining public willingness to participate in F2F interviews	12
3.2.2	How to better equip F2F interviewers with the skills needed to be successful.....	14
3.2.3	Interviewer pay.....	15
3.2.4	Acceleration to mixed mode.....	16
3.2.5	High F2F interviewer churn increasing recruitment costs.....	16
3.2.6	Summary of proposed solutions.....	18
3.3	Next steps to progress the dialogue	19
4	Summary of workshop 3	20
4.1	Introduction.....	20
4.2	Solutions with low levels of support in the poll	21
	Solution K: Targeted F2F interviewer recruitment strategies to diversify the F2F interviewer pool	21
	Solution L: Raising the profile of F2F survey interviewing as a job through a public awareness-raising campaign.....	21

Solution E: Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do	22
4.3 Solutions with moderate levels of support in the poll	22
Solution A: Macro public awareness-raising campaigns to promote public trust and engage groups that are currently less likely to take part in surveys	22
Solution H: Make the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay	22
Solution I: Forecasting the future demand for F2F surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F interviewing capacity becomes unsustainable	23
Solution B: Further research to inform macro public awareness campaigns	24
Solution D: Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys.....	24
4.4 Outcome of further discussion of low and moderate solutions to be taken forward	24
Solution E: Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do	25
Solution H: Making the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay	25
Solution I: Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F becomes unsustainable	25
Solution D: Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys.....	25
4.5 Solutions with high levels of support in the poll	25
Solution G: Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers.....	25
Solution F: Developing high-level interviewer training on achieving co-operation - particularly from seldom-heard groups - and avoiding refusals, that is open-access and run by a professional body.....	27
Solution J: Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing.....	28
Solution C: Improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public	28
4.6 Summary of solutions stakeholders agreed to take forward	29
References	32
Appendix A - Stakeholder recruitment	33

Executive Summary

In 2023, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), in collaboration with Mervelles Limited, initiated a project under the ESRC's Survey Futures initiative to explore the evolving role of face-to-face (F2F) interviewers in the UK post-pandemic. The first stage of the project highlighted significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of F2F interviewers. A subsequent stage aimed to convene stakeholders from relevant organisations to build shared understanding of these challenges, deliberate solutions, and agree on priorities and responsibilities for action. A series of three online deliberative workshops took place in 2025, moderated by NatCen with contributions from Mervelles Ltd. These workshops involved 17 stakeholders representing nine organisations, including:

- organisations with a F2F interviewer field force who had taken part in stage one of the project;
- commissioners of F2F survey research; and
- professional bodies.

This report summarises the outcomes of these workshops.

Workshop 1: Identifying and Prioritising Challenges

The first workshop focused on understanding the changing role of the F2F interviewer post-pandemic, elaborating on challenges to recruitment and retention identified in stage one:

- An acceleration in the transition to mixed-mode surveys
- Ongoing downward trend in survey response rates
- A shift toward persuasion-focused interviewer roles
- A sharp rise in interviewer retirement
- A more competitive labour market
- A need to raise the profile of the interviewer role

Stakeholders discussed these and additional challenges, focusing on public willingness to participate in surveys, interviewer pay, interviewer recruitment costs, professionalisation of the role, and the employment offer. Stakeholders acknowledged that challenges were inter-related. For example, public willingness to participate was seen as an indirect but significant factor affecting F2F interviewer recruitment and retention, with interviewers having to work harder post pandemic to persuade some groups to take part. This may have made the role more challenging, less attractive, and changed the balance of skills required.

Field agencies lost many interviewers during the pandemic and had to engage in large-scale recruitment exercises. Interviewer recruitment costs have been impacted by large volumes of unsuitable applicants and, indirectly, by fluctuating demand for F2F interviewing affecting the predictability of work. The recruitment and retention of F2F interviewers was also challenged by the greater availability of casual and living-wage-level employment opportunities.

Stakeholders were asked to rank the challenges discussed in order of importance for improving F2F interviewer recruitment and retention.

Workshop 2: Deliberating solutions to challenges

Stakeholders deliberated possible solutions to the top five challenges identified in Workshop 1, assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Stakeholders generally agreed that solutions should focus on challenges directly related to F2F interviewer recruitment and retention while acknowledging indirect industry pressures. The key challenges (emboldened text) and proposed solutions discussed were:

Declining public willingness to participate in surveys

- A. Macro awareness-raising campaigns to improve public trust and engage groups that are currently less likely to take part in surveys.
- B. Further research to inform macro awareness-raising campaigns e.g. understanding why certain groups are less likely to take part in surveys than others.
- C. Improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public e.g. making surveys shorter, adopting respondent-centred design principles.

How to better equip interviewers with the skills needed to be successful

- D. Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys and organisations.
- E. Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do.
- F. Developing high-level interviewer training focused on securing co-operation — particularly from seldom-heard groups — and reducing refusals. This should be open to all interviewers and run by a professional body such as the Market Research Society (MRS) or Social Research Association (SRA).
- G. Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers e.g. through commissioners being more engaged with interviewers.

Improving interviewer pay

- H. Making the case to survey commissioners for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, so as to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay.

Acceleration to mixed mode

- I. Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F becomes unsustainable. This exercise might need to be repeated over time.
- J. Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing.

High interviewer churn increasing recruitment costs

- K. Targeted F2F interviewer recruitment strategies to diversify the interviewer pool e.g. targeting seldom-heard groups, people at different stage of their careers.
- L. Raising the profile of F2F survey interviewing as a job through public awareness-raising campaigns

Workshop 3: Consensus and Actions

Ahead of the third workshop, stakeholders were polled to gauge support for each of the 12 solutions (A-L) generated in Workshop 2. The poll results were shared with stakeholders and discussed to agree on which solutions to take forward and actions to be progressed.

Of the 12 solutions, stakeholders agreed to take forward four. Two of these solutions sought to address the challenge of how to better equip F2F interviewers with the skills needed to be successful in getting people to take part in surveys. These solutions were:

- F. Developing high-level interviewer training focused on securing co-operation — particularly from seldom-heard groups — and reducing refusals.
- G. Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers e.g. through commissioners being more engaged with interviewers

The other two solutions sought to address the challenge of the acceleration to mixed mode surveys, post-pandemic.

- I. Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F becomes unsustainable. This exercise might need to be repeated over time.
- J. Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing.

The following actions were agreed to progress each of these solutions.

Solution Actions	
F	Subgroup to specify training content and share with MRS.
G	Co-ordinate engagement efforts, awards, communications, and produce a summary report to be shared with survey interviewers.
I	Discuss funding possibility with ESRC.
J	Rapid evidence collection and output creation.

Other solutions were not taken forward because of concerns over the costs of developing industry-wide solutions (A, B, and L), and or because they were felt to be better addressed by individual agencies (solutions C and K). Solutions D, E and H were felt to overlap with solutions being taken forward and did not need to be progressed independently. Stakeholders expressed a desire to reconvene in a few months to review progress on agreed actions.

1 Background

In 2023, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), in collaboration with Mervelles Limited, a HR consultancy, began a project as part of the ESRC's Survey Futures initiative to examine the post-pandemic role of face-to-face (F2F) interviewers in the UK. The first stage of this project involved semi-structured interviews and a round table discussion with Field Operational Leads from 11 social and market research organisations and focus groups with F2F survey interviewers. This stage identified several challenges and threats to the future of F2F interviewing in the UK, related to the recruitment and retention of interviewers (Charman et al., 2025). A second stage involved three deliberative workshops with stakeholders who had an interest in the future of the UK's F2F survey interviewing capacity to discuss and agree on actions to safeguard this capacity. The deliberative workshop method was chosen to provide participants with the time, information and dialogic conditions needed to engage with complex and challenging problems to reach agreement on actions (Dageling, 2019).

1.1 Workshop process

A series of three online workshops took place over an extended period, with the following objectives:

- **Workshop 1 (26th February 2025):** Establish a shared understanding of the challenges facing F2F fieldworker recruitment and retention.
- **Workshop 2 (27th March 2025):** Deliberate possible solutions to these challenges, assessing their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Workshop 3 (24th April 2025):** Agree on priority challenges and solutions and establish ownership over actions to follow this process.

The workshops' design followed an established process for effective group decision-making in stakeholder dialogues, involving stakeholders being provided with findings from stage one to inform their views. The workshops were moderated by Debbie Collins (NatCen) using a topic guide, with Chris Charman (Mervelles Ltd) joining the first two workshops to provide information on the findings from the first stage of the research, to answer questions and provide technical input on labour market issues. Each workshop was audio-recorded, with participants' consent, to supplement live notetaking by a member of the NatCen research team. These recordings and notes constitute the data on which this report is based.

Ahead of the first workshop, terms of reference were shared with participants. These terms were reviewed by participants during the first workshop, to ensure that all participants were clear about the workshops' aims, what participation would entail, and what information would be reported, and were accepted.

Following each workshop a summary report was produced by the NatCen research team and shared with stakeholders, who were asked to check it for accuracy and propose any amendments.

1.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholders were identified and invited to take part in the workshops who represented organisations that:

- a) have a face-to-face interviewer field force that undertakes national surveys within the UK; and/or
- b) commission face-to-face survey research, including as part of a mixed-mode survey design in the UK or parts of it.

In addition, representatives of professional bodies that represented a) and or b) were invited. More details on the recruitment process are provided in Appendix A. In total 17 people representing nine organisations took part in one or more workshops. The organisations represented are shown in Figure 1-1. Ipsos UK, NatCen, ONS and Verian participated in the stage one project.

Figure 1-1 Organisations represented in the stakeholder workshops

• Barb (Caroline Baxter, Katherine Page) • Centre for Longitudinal Studies, University College London (Matt Brown, Lisa Calderwood) • Institute for Social & Economic Research, University of Essex (Jonathan Burton) • Ipsos UK (Adele Bearfield, Maria Luther)	• Market Research Society (Debrah Harding) • National Centre for Social Research (Alun Humphrey, Steven Woodland) • Office for National Statistics (ONS) (Nicola Jones, Andrew Phelps) • Scottish Government (Nora Mielke, Joe Rennie, Louise Scott) • Verian (Michelle Lewis, Ed Dunn)
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1.3 Structure of this report

This report provides a comprehensive summary of the discussions and outcomes of each workshop. Chapter 2 summarises the first workshop, highlighting the challenges identified. Chapter 3 summarises the second workshop, focusing on potential solutions to the challenges, with Chapter 4 summarising the third workshop, detailing the consensus reached and the next steps for action.

In reporting on workshops 1 and 2 the authors have used language that qualitatively describes the range of stakeholder views and positions expressed rather than quantifying the extent of agreement or disagreement. This is because of the likelihood that stakeholders' positions were in the process of changing as they engaged in dialogue. However, in reporting on the final workshop (3), stakeholders were asked to respond to a poll and come to conclusive positions and as such levels of support are quantified and discussed.

This report does not attribute specific views to individual attendees but does name individuals who agreed to lead on taking actions forward. Individuals provided their consent to this.

2 Summary of workshop 1

2.1 Introduction

The objectives of the first workshop were to:

1. Gain a shared understanding of the scope and goals of the dialogue process to be used in the workshops.
2. The objective of the first workshop was to build a shared understanding of how the role of F2F survey interviewers has changed since the pandemic, and to explore the challenges of recruiting and retaining F2F fieldworkers, drawing on findings from the stage one report.
3. Elaborate on challenges shared at 2) and surface further challenges.
4. Prioritise challenges discussed.

The workshop started with participants introducing themselves and hearing about the Survey Futures programme and the origins of the role of the F2F interviewing post-pandemic project. The proposed Terms of Reference for the workshops were discussed and agreed. Chris Charman (Mervelles) presented findings from the first stage of the project and answered participants' questions. Participants were asked to consider and elaborate on the challenges to interviewer recruitment and retention identified in Chris's presentation. Participants were also able to suggest and discuss other challenges. This discussion culminated in participants being asked to prioritise the challenges identified - both those identified in the stage one research, and those separately identified in the workshop- using an online poll. The results of the prioritisation were shared with the group and there was some further discussion of them. Before ending the workshop, the facilitator explained the next steps in the dialogue process. This chapter summarises the discussion of challenges and the results of the prioritisation of challenges poll.

2.2 Stage one project findings and queries

The overarching challenges to interviewer recruitment and retention identified by the first stage of the Survey Futures project were presented to stakeholders by Chris Charman, see Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 Challenges to F2F interviewer recruitment and retention identified in the stage one research

- An acceleration in transition to mixed mode surveys
- A shift in the survey interviewer role, to one with a greater focus on persuasion of the public to take part
- A more competitive labour market
- A continuing downward trend in survey response rates
- A sharp rise in interviewer retirement
- Raising the profile of the F2F interviewing role

Chris also explained how the F2F survey interviewing role had changed, post-pandemic. Stakeholders sought clarity on this change and the two types of F2F interviewer role identified by the stage one research - ‘standard’ versus ‘complex’ interviewing roles. The latter reflects the greater shift post-pandemic to mixed-mode survey data collection, increasing survey design complexity, and greater challenges in persuading some members of the public to take part in surveys. This has required a shift in the balance of skills to the pre-pandemic interviewer role (Charman et al., 2024). Stakeholders also sought clarity on what the suggested solution of a central recruitment portal for F2F interviewers could look like. This portal was suggested by Mervelles as a potential means of reducing recruitment costs in a report of the first stage of the project. The portal would, it was suggested, be managed by a third party who could source F2F interviewer labour for surveys (Charman et al., 2024). The example offered by Chris Charman was the website TaskRabbit, with Chris noting that the situation for F2F interviewers cannot be entirely equated with the kind of gig economy work TaskRabbit exemplified. Workshop participants representing agencies were sceptical about the practicalities of implementing any kind of shared recruitment resource.

2.3 Discussion of challenges

Stakeholders were asked to identify challenges they wished to discuss further. These could include challenges not identified by the stage one project. Figure 2-2 lists the challenges discussed, with the remainder of this section summarising the discussion on each challenge.

Figure 2-2 Challenges discussed by workshop participants

- Public willingness to participate
- Interviewer pay
- Professionalising the role
- Recruitment costs
- The work offer

2.3.1 Public willingness to participate

The public’s willingness to participate in interviews was seen as a challenge that indirectly affected interviewer recruitment and retention. In needing to work harder to persuade some groups to participate, the interviewer skillset was changing and the role was becoming a less attractive employment option for some.

While this was an indirect challenge, stakeholders agreed this should be considered in tandem alongside direct challenges; how to incentivise interviewers to do the ‘selling’ of the survey on the doorstep, while also incentivising the public through improved survey design. It was agreed that there was a lot more to understand about public willingness, but there were some clear areas where more could be done. For example, one

stakeholder pointed to an example of a major survey which had not been updated for many years and suggested this could be having an impact on public participation. Furthermore, it was noted that public willingness to participate is a challenge for other modes of data collection too.

One stakeholder offered a broader reflection during the discussion, highlighting that the indirect challenge of public willingness to participate in surveys underscored the need to start from the assumption that face-to-face interviewing should continue. While no stakeholders disagreed with this assumption, some did suggest that low public willingness could mean that, even with improvements to recruitment and retention, F2F interviewing may play a sustained but still diminished role in social research in the future. At the same time, it was noted by multiple stakeholders at this point that, in reference to the earlier discussion of the changing role of the F2F interviewer, even if there was less demand for this mode in the future, it may likely become a more highly skilled role. The implication of this change in the interviewers' role is that F2F interviewing may become reserved for more complex and/or challenging data collection tasks, with simpler surveys moving to other modes.

2.3.2 Interviewer Pay

Stakeholders discussed the piece-rate payment method for interviewers, which is commonly used by fieldwork agencies. In its simplest form, this involves interviewers being paid by results, and it was agreed it remained the right approach. While some interviewers “loved” this system of payment, others wanted greater clarity on expected earnings, finding the piece-rate method “demoralising”. Stakeholders tied this discussion back to the challenge of who was attracted to the role. As one stakeholder put it, “everything is aligned for one potential kind of employee – the challenge is how to open this up” to make the role more attractive to a wider range of people.

Discussion of pay also touched on who bears the financial risk associated with F2F interviewing costs. Historically, some noted, this risk has been on interviewers themselves, with the argument being that a piece-rate model incentivises interviewers to obtain higher response rates. Others observed that financial risk has always been a concern for fieldwork agencies, and that there is a potential for this risk to increase with the introduction of new employment legislation¹. One stakeholder suggested the balance of financial risk borne by agencies was growing so much that some of them may soon be asking if it is economically viable to continue to have F2F field forces. Another suggested these pressures were why there had already been a decline in the number of smaller fieldwork agencies operating in the UK.

2.3.3 Recruitment costs

A further employment challenge surfaced by stakeholders was the increase in recruitment costs experienced by agencies post-pandemic due to steep losses in the existing interviewer panels e.g. due to interviewer retirement and the volume of unsuitable people applying for the role of F2F interviewer. One stakeholder explained that they received thousands of automated applications via websites like Indeed.com

¹ Stakeholders were referring to the Employment Rights Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on 10 October 2024 and its potential impacts on labour costs for employers.

from people who, if recruited, do not stay on in the role as their expectations of it are misaligned with what it actually involves.

Some stakeholders considered a further, indirect challenge to F2F survey interviewing recruitment and retention. They pointed to the “peaks and troughs of commissioned fieldwork” that agencies face, which make it more difficult, in turn, for interviewers to have more predictable opportunities. Others noted growing pressures on public sector commissioning budgets, which have sharpened the challenge of how to justify “very significant” cost increases in running F2F surveys.

2.3.4 Professionalising the role

Stakeholders elaborated on the stage one finding that greater professionalisation of the role of F2F interviewers is needed to attract and retain interviewers. One participant described the efforts their organisation was taking to build a survey interviewing career path, creating localised programmes that support people to move to permanent roles. However, it was noted these efforts were focused on retaining those already working as interviewers, rather than on recruitment. Nonetheless, it was felt that efforts to improve retention could, with time, ease recruitment pressures. This sparked discussion in turn about the challenge of improving perceptions of the role, with people noting a common misconception that F2F interviewing is ‘easy’ when it involves a high degree of skill.

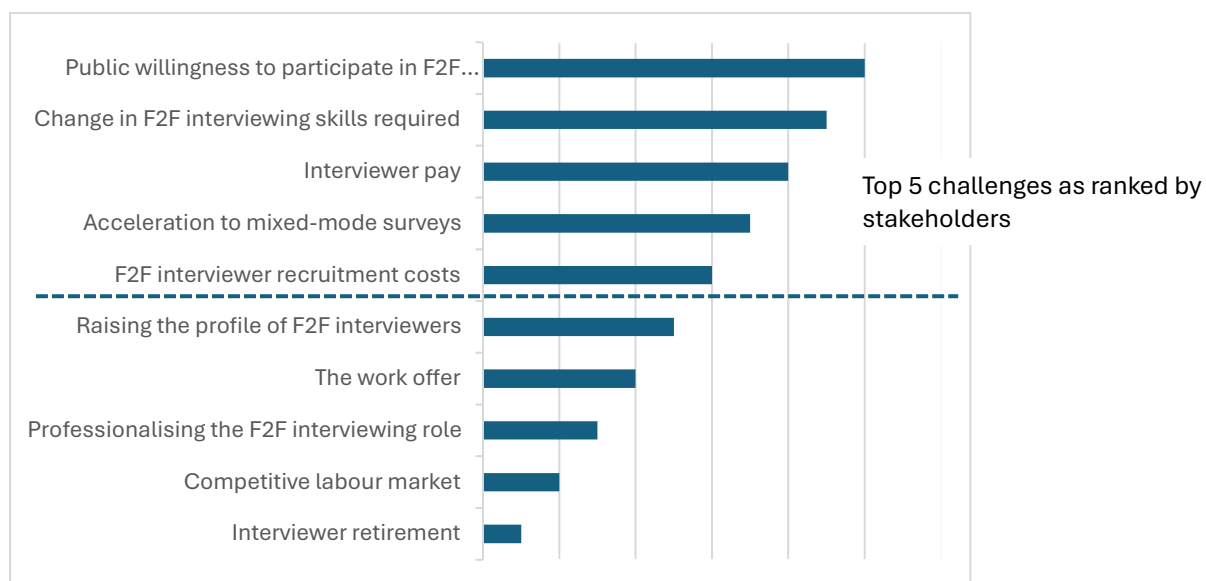
2.3.5 The work offer

One challenge identified at stage one was greater choice in living wage-level work and the greater availability of casual employment opportunities. Some stakeholders discussed this issue in terms of the varying work offers available to people seeking different types of employment. While stakeholders acknowledged this change, there was some discussion about how prevalent a preference for casual work might in fact be among F2F interviewers. One stakeholder emphasised that in their experience people seeking work in F2F interviewing are more heterogeneous in this respect, with some looking for something more permanent, others more casual.

2.4 Stakeholders’ prioritisation of challenges facing F2F interviewer recruitment and retention

In the closing discussion, stakeholders ranked the challenges in the order they felt were most important to improving F2F interviewer recruitment and retention using Mentimeter, an online polling tool. Stakeholders were asked to rank a mixture of challenges identified in stage one of the project (see Figure 2-1) and additional challenges raised in their discussion (see Figure 2-2). The results of this prioritisation are shown in Figure 2-3. Note that these challenges may overlap – something stakeholders acknowledged.

Figure 2-3 Prioritisation of the challenges discussed by workshop participants in maintaining F2F interviewer capacity in the UK



Following this exercise, there was a brief discussion of the results. Stakeholders particularly concentrated on the challenge of interviewer pay, with the discussion identifying two sets of issues. The first related to the cost to survey agencies of any *increases* to interviewer pay. The second focused on the challenge of determining what the right *level(s)* of pay should be. In response to this, one stakeholder noted that, for them, these two considerations ultimately turned on a further indirect challenge, namely what commissioners were willing and able to fund.

2.5 Next steps to progress the dialogue

The moderator recommended the following next steps to progress the dialogue:

1. Stakeholders should agree on the scope of the challenges they wish to address in the next workshop. A distinction was made between challenges directly facing F2F interviewer recruitment and retention, and pressures on the wider industry that indirectly create challenges for recruitment and retention. One option would be to focus the discussion on direct challenges while agreeing an appropriate forum for continued discussion of indirect challenges. An alternative option would be to retain a broader focus within this dialogue, but to limit the number of challenges to be addressed to ensure the scope of discussions did not become too large to cover in the time available. Point 2 below suggests challenges that could be focused on.
2. If stakeholders agree on a preference of focusing on direct challenges, discussions and prioritisation results from this first workshop suggest the key challenges are the role, employment status, and pay of F2F interviewers. If stakeholders prefer to retain coverage of direct and indirect challenges, these could focus on the top five ranked challenges in Figure 2-3.

Stakeholders were asked to provide their preferences by completing an online form, sent after the first workshop. Stakeholders were informed that the second workshop would review the results of the prioritisation exercise to ensure people felt the right challenges and solutions were being taken forward for further discussion.

3 Summary of workshop 2

3.1 Introduction

In the second online workshop, stakeholders deliberated possible solutions to the challenges discussed in workshop 1, assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, stakeholders were asked to:

1. Gain a shared understanding of the key themes to emerge from the first workshop and how these have led to any changes to the challenges and solutions to be discussed in this workshop.
2. Generate solutions to the challenges facing F2F interviewer recruitment and retention identified in workshop 1 and deliberate upon these.

The workshop moderator summarised the discussions from the first workshop and the results of the stakeholder poll, sent after the first workshop, which asked people to express their preferences for which challenges the second workshop should focus on. There was a majority preference for maintaining a broad focus on some direct challenges to the recruitment and retention of F2F survey interviewers and some pressures facing the wider industry that in turn create challenges for recruitment and retention. There was also a majority preference for limiting the specific challenges to be discussed in the workshop to the top five identified in a prioritisation exercise carried out toward the end of workshop 1, see Figure 2-3.

The workshop proceeded through a format in which the moderator introduced a challenge and a solution as a conversation stimulus, invited stakeholders to give initial reflections in the meeting chat before facilitating discussion of the pros and cons of different responses to the challenges. Chris Charman also supported stakeholders' reflections on solutions, drawing on the findings from the first stage of the project and his wider expertise regarding recruitment and retention. The workshop closed with the moderator explaining the next steps in the dialogue process. Section Discussion of challenges3.2 summarises the discussion of solutions.

3.2 Solutions to challenges of F2F interviewer recruitment and retention

3.2.1 Declining public willingness to participate in F2F interviews

In workshop 1, stakeholders discussed how the public's declining willingness to participate in face-to-face interviews was a challenge that made the interviewer's task more difficult, and as such impacted F2F interviewer recruitment and retention.

One proposal was for **public awareness-raising campaigns** that promote the value and importance of participation in surveys and raise the profile of survey interviewing as a job. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study and the last population Census were cited as examples of successful campaigns that raised public awareness of the value of taking part by illustrating how the data collected are used to inform policy decisions. There was some support for an awareness-raising campaign framing participation in different ways, such as a public duty to help our collective understanding of society, or a

way to positively impact particular groups in society. It was also suggested that such angles could be supported through getting discussion of surveys into the national curriculum or into citizenship education specifically, to raise awareness among young people.

A distinction was drawn between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ awareness-raising about survey participation. The former is about promoting *individual* surveys to the public, while the latter is about promoting trust and participation in surveys in general. Micro campaigns rely on members of the survey’s target population engaging with survey materials that are designed to encourage participation, such as information leaflets and videos. However, some stakeholders expressed doubts about the potential success of such campaigns because some sections of the population do not read or watch the material provided. Stakeholders also noted that it can be difficult to demonstrate the positive impact of research participation on government policy, as policy decisions can have negative as well as positive consequences.

Stakeholders agreed macro awareness-raising was generally preferable, in part because the budget available to a single survey for awareness-raising would be much smaller. They also saw macro campaigns as better suited to addressing issues of public trust and engaging groups who are less likely to take part in surveys.

Despite stakeholders seeing the merits of a macro awareness-raising campaign, some questioned how successful it could be. The discussion focused on whether the inclusion of a survey interviewer in a television soap opera might raise public awareness. One stakeholder was concerned that the approach could backfire, if producers portrayed survey research negatively. A further source of doubt was that any campaign could come up against public apathy or antagonism towards the idea of survey participation as a means of contributing to or affecting government policymaking.

Concern about the effectiveness of macro campaigns centred on whether such campaigns would reach and sway those groups that are less likely to take part in surveys. The falling participation of those in social grades C2 D, and E² was raised a particular concern by some stakeholders. There was a suggestion that campaigns could do well to focus on communicating via specific figures or ‘influencers’ who can reach this audience, though stakeholders were unsure who these figures might be. A further suggestion was that campaigns could include actual members of the public talking about their experiences and reasons for taking part in F2F surveys.

Research commissioners expressed a need for **developing the evidence base** on the relationship between public attitudes to survey research and survey research participation to support the development of macro campaigns. The following areas of research were suggested.

² Social grade is a socio-economic classification, typically based on the occupation and employment status of the Chief Income Earner, but sometimes using other characteristics. It is used by the advertising industry and by market researchers. C2 includes skilled manual occupations, DE includes semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.

- The relationship between survey participation and public attitudes to research funders - government and non-government.
- Identifying if there are differences in the reasons for participation and non-participation in F2F surveys undertaken in the social and market research sectors.
- Understanding why those classified in social grades C2, D, and E are less likely to take part in surveys than the general population.

There was some discussion about whether surveys were becoming too long and the benefits of shortening them to encourage greater public participation. The goal here is to make the survey experience more engaging and accessible. In addition to considering the length of the survey, stakeholders emphasised the importance of **good survey design**. Features of good survey design mentioned were:

- incentive strategies;
- clearly worded survey questions that respondents perceive to be relevant to their lives; and
- providing clear guidance to interviewers to secure public cooperation and collect high-quality data.

One stakeholder advocated for the adoption of a respondent-centred approach to survey design (Wilson and Dickinson, 2022).

3.2.2 How to better equip F2F interviewers with the skills needed to be successful

Stakeholders discussed in workshop 1 that a consequence of declining public participation in face-to-face interviews was that it created an indirect challenge to recruitment and retention of interviewers. This is because, in needing to work harder to persuade people to participate, this made the F2F survey interviewer role less attractive or changed the skillset required.

Stakeholders discussed updating interviewer training in several ways. One suggestion was to develop specific training that supported interviewers to be mindful of post-pandemic attitudinal changes in public willingness to let strangers into their homes. This led to a broader discussion about ways to develop sectoral understanding of best practice here through **sharing learning across surveys of what respondent engagement strategies are working**. One suggestion was for interviewers to record **doorstep interactions**, so that data can be gathered on what makes for a good initial approach, what one stakeholder described as the “magic moment”. While it was recognised that current data protection legislation may not allow audio/video recording of the interaction, interviewers could complete a form, coding behaviours.

Although the group agreed on the need for training that takes post-pandemic considerations into account, stakeholders identified a challenge: commercial sensitivity will likely limit the specificity of best practices for F2F interviewing that can be shared between agencies. Nonetheless, it was felt there would be value in developing cross-industry, **high-level training on achieving co-operation and refusal avoidance**. Such training could be provided by the Market Research Society or the Social Research Association, which would be particularly valuable for smaller agencies

that perhaps lack the resources to offer the level of training offered by larger ones. The viability of such training was supported by the fact that, after one stakeholder proposed a set of focus areas that the training could cover, these suggestions received explicit endorsement from the majority of stakeholders. Additionally, some pointed to existing training, such as that provided by the ONS on achieving cooperation and avoiding refusals, which already addressed these areas.

Discussion of accreditation received less focus. One stakeholder highlighted the MRS interviewer accreditation scheme, which included training.

Another solution emphasised the importance of engaging and motivating interviewers after recruitment to ensure their retention, with **survey commissioners playing a greater role** in this process. One stakeholder explained that they found interviewers respond well to having commissioners join briefings, as it emphasises the value and importance of the work. Others agreed and one stakeholder suggested that this can be taken further, by ensuring interviewers hear from commissioners throughout a survey period at key points, to continue to enthuse and excite interviewers about the work even when it is more challenging.

3.2.3 Interviewer pay

In workshop 1, stakeholders discussed the prevailing piece rate system of payment, the ways it impacts new recruits, and the challenges that this can pose for interviewer recruitment and retention.

Some stakeholders suggested that the sector should lobby funders to better acknowledge interviewers' dissatisfaction with pay and to **secure improved funding**. They also noted that part of this effort would involve helping funders understand the broader economic context, such as the likely increase in the cost per interview for F2F interviewing and the possibility that savings from mixed-mode approaches may not be as significant as anticipated. One stakeholder also suggested emphasising to funders the superior quality of F2F interview data compared to other modes.

Despite these considerations in favour of lobbying as a solution, most stakeholders on the call returned to a theme raised in workshop 1: **how to justify the higher cost of F2F interviewing**. Stakeholders emphasised the value of this mode in reaching seldom heard groups. Chris Charman explained to the group that this introduces a key tension when considering interviewer pay. If F2F interviews increasingly focus on seldom heard groups, piece rate incentives become more significant for interviewers because these interviews are harder to obtain. Concurrently, the difficulty in achieving successful interviews increases interviewers' uncertainty about receiving the incentive, thus heightening their desire for a reliable, secure base rate of payment that is not contingent on interview success. While stakeholders were unsure how best to strike a balance, some felt they had a clearer understanding of the limitations of what can be offered. For example, one stakeholder argued that although there is a place for having some salaried interviewers, moving entirely to this approach for the workforce is not feasible due to their lower productivity. Additionally, Chris's reflection led some stakeholders to emphasise the value of involving commissioners more in interviewers' work—perhaps

even getting them "into the field," as one stakeholder suggested—so they can better understand the challenges interviewers face.

Stakeholders fundamentally agreed that lobbying funders for larger survey budgets to improve pay rates F2F interviewers was challenging for the sector. Several reasons were cited for this difficulty. First, although F2F interviews represent a minority of the total number of interviews conducted, they consume most of the data collection budget, making it hard for research commissioners to justify the expense. Additionally, there was a concern that commercial agencies uniting to lobby for larger survey budgets could be accused of collusion. Consequently, stakeholders concluded that a sector-wide solution to pay challenges was impractical, and organisations would need to address these issues individually. Furthermore, stakeholders noted that focusing solely on pay would not resolve the recruitment and retention challenges for F2F interviewers. They suggested that other solutions could indirectly benefit interviewer pay. For instance, one stakeholder proposed that investing in training on how to engage seldom-heard groups could enhance interviewer performance, thereby improving their earnings.

3.2.4 Acceleration to mixed mode

The impact of an acceleration to mixed-mode surveying was identified in workshop 1 as contributing to difficulties in interviewer recruitment and retention because of the increased cost of F2F interviewing and the change in skills required. The move to mixed mode meant F2F interviewers were attempting to engage people who had not responded to previous requests to take part in the survey. This challenge overlapped with issues discussed in relation to the previous challenges. As such, stakeholders had less to note on solutions, however some reflections are given below.

Stakeholders discussed the feasibility of **forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys** and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F becomes unsustainable. Stakeholders felt that any uncertainties affecting demand forecasting could be mitigated by repeating the exercise over time.

Commissioning stakeholders agreed that it was important that the industry get better at selling the value of F2F interviewing and that this needs to be a continual process, as changes in staffing over time mean that new commissioners need to understand its value. **Creating a compelling case for F2F interviewing** would help funders in successfully arguing for bigger survey research budgets.

3.2.5 High F2F interviewer churn increasing recruitment costs

In workshop 1, stakeholders discussed how a high churn of F2F interviewers was putting pressure on the money spent on recruitment. In workshop 2 stakeholders focused their discussions of this topic on the issues created by recruiting less suitable candidates to interviewer roles who then leave.

Stakeholders suggested that existing approaches to interviewer recruitment too often cast a wide net, causing a greater number of candidates to be recruited who turn out to be less suitable to the role. As such, it was suggested **targeted recruitment** could work better. Importantly, there was consensus, in keeping with discussions in workshop 1,

that interviewers are heterogeneous (see section 2.3.2.) Therefore, the focus should be on targeting recruitment across a variety of groups rather than concentrating on just one. Groups to target included those who are looking for different kinds of remuneration, who are at different stages of their careers, who are ex-employees of specific, public-facing industries, or who are from particular demographics, such as from minority ethnic groups. One stakeholder made the case that targeted recruitment costs may not be as expensive when compared to generic recruitment costs as they might first appear. This is because generic recruitment approaches involve a lot of screening to find suitable candidates from among the pool of applicants, which increases costs. Stakeholders agreed too that a benefit of more targeted recruitment was that it offered many possibilities for recruitment routes. Examples given were working to specifically recruit retired police officers, focusing on sectors where large redundancies are occurring, or working with Jobcentres. Linking back to the earlier discussion on public willingness to participate in surveys (section 3.2.1), one stakeholder also suggested it would be valuable to do more targeted recruitment of those from seldom heard groups, as they may be better able to engage people from these communities.

While there was broad agreement for more targeted recruitment, some stakeholders felt that this should not distract from the importance of retaining existing interviewers and ensuring they are more productive and reliable. Furthermore, some suggested that, if it is correct to argue that F2F interviewing is becoming more niche and focused on reaching the seldom heard, efforts to boost recruitment at scale may be counterproductive. It was suggested by Chris Charman that this dynamic may make the solution of a shared labour pool a necessity for the sector, but few stakeholders expressed support for this suggestion because its necessity was too hard to predict, and it would raise difficulties around competition. Some stakeholders pointed to examples of projects where agencies already work together and formally share labour.

In contrast to raising awareness with the public to boost participation in F2F interviews, some stakeholders suggested an **awareness-raising campaign aimed at boosting interviewer recruitment** could be beneficial. There was general agreement about the arguments in favour for this approach. One stakeholder observed that the role is one that they felt most people were unaware of. Others agreed that, in their experience, some churn comes from recruits not fully understanding what the job would involve. It was also agreed that any campaign ought to focus on the positives of the role. As one stakeholder suggested, the role was too often discussed in terms of the difficulties involved, rather than what potential candidates might enjoy, such as the opportunity to have regular conversations with others. Despite support for this solution, some stakeholders expressed reservations about a cross-sector approach to addressing this challenge, as there was a risk that such a campaign, if focused on interviewers working for a particular company might unfairly favour that company's recruitment.

3.2.6 Summary of proposed solutions

The solutions stakeholders generated in their discussions of the five priority challenges facing the recruitment and retention of F2F survey interviewers are summarised in Table

3-1 Summary of stakeholder-generated solutions to challenges of F2F interviewer recruitment and retentionTable 3-1.

Table 3-1 Summary of stakeholder-generated solutions to challenges of F2F interviewer recruitment and retention

Challenges	Proposed solutions
Declining public willingness to participate	A. Macro public awareness-raising campaigns to promote public trust and engage groups that are currently less likely to take part in surveys. B. Further research to inform macro public awareness campaigns e.g. understanding why certain groups are less likely to take part in surveys than others. C. Improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public e.g. making surveys shorter, adopting respondent-centred design principles.
Changing interviewer skills	D. Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys. E. Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do. F. Developing high-level interviewer training on achieving co-operation - particularly from seldom-heard groups - and avoiding refusal. This should be open to all interviewers and run by a professional body, e.g. the MRS or SRA. G. Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers e.g. through commissioners being more engaged with interviewers.
Interviewer Pay	H. Making the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay.
Acceleration to mixed mode	I. Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F interviewing capacity becomes unsustainable. J. Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing.
High F2F interviewer churn increasing recruitment costs	K. Targeted F2F interviewer recruitment strategies to diversify the F2F interviewer pool e.g. from seldom-heard groups, people at different stages of their careers. L. Raising the profile of F2F survey interviewing as a job through public awareness-raising campaigns.

3.3 Next steps to progress the dialogue

The moderator recommended the following steps to progress the dialogue.

1. The third and final workshop should retain a focus on the priority challenges discussed in workshop 2 facing F2F interviewer recruitment and retention.
2. The research team to share a poll with stakeholders ahead of workshop 3 to gauge support for each of the solutions generated in workshop 2.
3. The research team will share the findings of this poll with stakeholders ahead of the final workshop (workshop 3), identifying those solutions garnering unanimous support, rejection or a mix of views.

The results of this poll and the discussions had by stakeholders in workshop 3 are presented in Chapter 4.

4 Summary of workshop 3

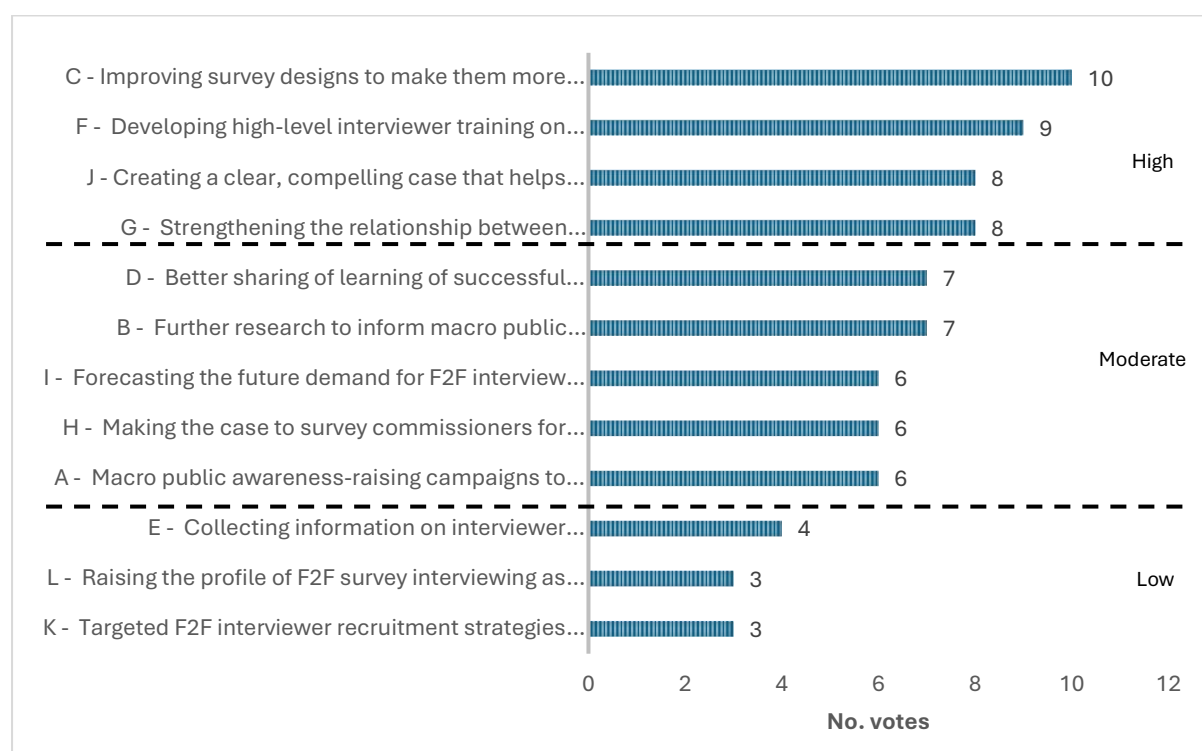
4.1 Introduction

The objectives of the third and final workshop were for those involved to:

1. Discuss where they judge consensus can and cannot be achieved.
2. Where there was consensus, discuss routes forward to progress solutions and the ownership of actions.

The moderator outlined the agenda before recapping the challenges and solutions discussed in workshop 2 (see Table 3-1). The moderator also relayed the levels of support stakeholders expressed for different solutions in response to a poll shared with stakeholders following workshop 2. The results of the poll are shown in Figure 4-1.

Figure 4-1 Results of stakeholder poll indicating levels of support for proposed solutions discussed in workshop 2



The workshop then proceeded through a format in which the moderator introduced the solutions based on the degree of support expressed through the poll, from low to moderate and high levels respectively (see Figure 4-1), before taking reflections from stakeholders. For the solutions with low and moderate support, the discussion focused on hearing from those who *did* support the given solution, in case their argument(s) in favour of it persuaded others to increase their support for it.

Having discussed solutions with low and moderate support, stakeholders discussed the solutions that had received high levels of support. Discussion focused on what is needed to make these solutions happen, who would take ownership of progressing actions, and how best the group felt it should stay in touch about developments

regarding solutions. The workshop closed with the moderator detailing the next steps for this dialogue process.

The rest of this chapter summarises these discussions and the proposed next steps for actioning solutions, including named action owners.

4.2 Solutions with low levels of support in the poll

Solution K: Targeted F2F interviewer recruitment strategies to diversify the F2F interviewer pool

In previous workshop discussions, stakeholders had suggested existing approaches to interviewer recruitment often cast too wide a net, resulting in the recruitment of a greater number of candidates who turn out to be less suitable to the role and who do not stay on. As such, stakeholders had suggested targeted recruitment could better identify candidates who would be easier to retain. In previous discussions stakeholders had agreed that interviewers who stay on are nonetheless heterogeneous, and so targeted recruitment should be directed at a variety of groups. Suggested groups to target included those who are looking for different kinds of remuneration, who are at different stages of their careers, who are ex-employees of specific industries, or who are from particular demographics, such as from minority ethnic groups.

In the poll, this solution received three votes. While stakeholders saw the merit of this solution and spoke of how individual agencies might do this, they felt it was a costly solution and not something to do as an industry-wide action. As such, it was agreed that this solution would not be taken forward.

Solution L: Raising the profile of F2F survey interviewing as a job through a public awareness-raising campaign

In previous workshop discussion, one proposal had been for public awareness-raising campaigns that would promote the value and importance of participation in surveys and potentially raise the profile of survey interviewing as a job. Stakeholders had cited the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study and last Census campaign as examples of doing this successfully. Stakeholders had also drawn a distinction between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ awareness-raising about survey participation. The former being about promoting *particular* surveys to the public, while the latter being concerned with promoting trust and participation in surveys more generally.

In the poll, this solution received three votes. Stakeholders felt that the level of investment required for this solution to have an impact would not be feasible for the industry and efforts would be better targeted elsewhere. As such, it was agreed that this solution would not be taken forward.

Solution E: Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do

In previous workshop discussions, stakeholders had suggested developing sectoral understanding of doorstep best practice through interviewers' recording doorstep interactions via a form. Earlier research had involved the audio recording of doorstep interactions (Morton-Williams, 1993) but stakeholders were uncertain if such an approach would be possible now under data protection legislation.

This solution received four votes in the poll. One stakeholder who had a personal interest in this topic argued in its favour and suggested the ESRC might be a funding source. This stakeholder encouraged others to get in touch if they wanted to explore this idea further. Another stakeholder noted that individual fieldwork agencies may already be observing what their interviewers are doing on the doorstep and updating interviewer training in response to these observations, though not in a systematic way. This was what their organisation was doing. They asked what the industry would gain from undertaking such research: would it be a new set of best practices or an understanding of behaviours that need to be taken into consideration at a later stage in the survey process?

Recognising the concern around cost, a further stakeholder argued this could be a low investment activity for data collection agencies, since they already collect data on reasons for refusal. Responses to these questions could be reviewed and the pre-coded list of reasons for refusal updated. This would not involve any additional data collection and might highlight whether there has been any change in reasons for refusal over time. If more resource was available then a few observation questions could be developed and added to surveys, that ask interviewers to record what sample members say at initial contact. However, it was acknowledged that this approach would not capture what the interviewer was doing. Two further stakeholders who supported the solution agreed with this approach, adding that there could be more efforts made to systematically collect and share this kind of data across surveys.

Given the mixed levels of support for this solution, it was agreed that this would be taken forward for further discussion, as a 'maybe'.

4.3 Solutions with moderate levels of support in the poll

Solution A: Macro public awareness-raising campaigns to promote public trust and engage groups that are currently less likely to take part in surveys

This solution received six votes in the poll. It was agreed this solution overlapped with solution L discussed above, and so the same reasons to not move forward with the option applied here also. The solution was not discussed further, therefore.

Solution H: Make the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay

In previous workshop discussions, commissioner-stakeholders had suggested to the group that it was important that the industry get better at selling the value of F2F

interviewing to commissioners. They also explained that this needs to be a continual process, since changes in staffing over time mean new commissioners are less familiar with the value of F2F interviewing potentially. This led to suggestions that the industry should lobby funders to better acknowledge interviewers' dissatisfaction with pay and to secure improved funding.

This solution received six votes in the poll. One stakeholder argued for the solution on the basis that many in the industry will take the value of F2F interviewing for granted, meaning they do not make the case enough to commissioners. The group agreed with this observation, and one stakeholder suggested that an evidence-based 'one pager' be put together that put across the 'why and when' of doing F2F interviewing and the specific investment value for doing so. Another stakeholder supported this but underlined the need for the one-pager to also acknowledge when F2F data collection is *not* useful, to more precisely illustrate when it is useful.

The group agreed to take this solution forward for further discussion as a 'maybe', albeit without reference to increased pay. This was because some felt it was unrealistic that interviewer pay levels could be increased unilaterally, and because others felt it distracted from the basic need to make the case for F2F interviewing. One stakeholder felt it was less about advocating for a pay increase for interviewers and more about safeguarding the budget for F2F data collection.

Solution I: Forecasting the future demand for F2F surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F interviewing capacity becomes unsustainable

In previous workshops, stakeholders had discussed the possibility of forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F interviewing capacity becomes unsustainable. Moreover, stakeholders had argued that any uncertainties affecting demand forecasting could be mitigated by repeating this forecasting exercise over time.

This solution received six votes in the poll. One stakeholder argued that the importance of undertaking this forecasting exercise would only grow, since the economics of investing in F2F interviewing were becoming increasingly challenging for employers. They pointed to likely rising costs that would result from current changes to employer National Insurance contributions and the incoming Employment Rights Bill. They also argued that this kind of long-term economic prediction was important not only for agencies to understand but for the ESRC too. A further stakeholder suggested that Government Social Research would benefit from these predictions too, on the assumption that this is a main source of demand for F2F interviewing. As this workshop was being carried out while there had been news coverage of the potential closure of the Scunthorpe steelworks, one stakeholder drew a comparison, suggesting that if F2F interviewing became unsustainable, it would be "almost impossible to ramp it back up again in the future." While there was less discussion of what practically this forecasting could involve, one stakeholder did suggest that it could be based on carrying out stakeholder interviews to understand the demand.

The group agreed to take this solution forward for further discussion as a ‘maybe’.

Solution B: Further research to inform macro public awareness campaigns

This solution might include research to understand why certain groups are less likely to take part in survey than others, received seven votes in the poll. The group did not express an interest in discussing this solution further as the solution was felt to be too expensive to take forward, given earlier discussion of solutions A and L.

Solution D: Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys

Although stakeholders raised this solution in the previous workshop, it did not receive explicit, sustained exposition. However, it did receive seven votes in the poll and was expanded upon in this workshop.

One stakeholder suggested that, as a low-investment approach, the industry could make use of existing networks and events to focus more on sharing learning around successful respondent engagement strategies. Stakeholders from public sector and media research industries explained that such efforts were already common, for example, among Scottish Government social researchers. This drew out a contrast with private research agencies, and the group recognised that a balance had to be struck in information sharing that was mindful of commercial sensitivities.

Nonetheless, one commercial agency stakeholder drew attention to the successful approach to information sharing that is carried out by the Market Research Society’s (MRS) engagement with large suppliers. A stakeholder representing the MRS expressed support for further efforts to share learning of successful respondent engagement strategies in this manner, but again recognised the commercial sensitivities will place a limit on what’s possible. One stakeholder suggested that Survey Futures creates a repository of grey literature on the subject. The group were supportive of this option, and as one stakeholder noted, this would have the added value of being able to build on the momentum Survey Futures has established in bringing the industry together to address challenges and the funding it can provide to support evidence-gathering.

It was agreed by the group that this solution should be taken forward for further discussion as a ‘maybe’.

4.4 Outcome of further discussion of low and moderate solutions to be taken forward

Five of the solutions categorised as receiving low and moderate levels of support in the stakeholder poll prior to the third workshop were put in a ‘maybe’ pile for further discussion. These solutions were briefly returned to at the close of the workshop if they

had not already been incorporated into the discussion of another solution. The outcome of these discussions is summarised below, along with any actions agreed.

Solution E: Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep to better understand what successful interviewers do

This was suggested as an activity that might contribute to solution F - interviewer training (see section 4.5) but there was no explicit agreement to take it forward.

Solution H: Making the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay

The first part of this solution – making the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment – was taken forward through solution J (see section 4.5). The securing of additional funding to increase interviewer pay was not taken forward.

Solution I: Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F becomes unsustainable

Deborah Harding (MRS) agreed to speak to the ESRC about the possibility of funding such an activity.

Solution D: Better sharing of learning of successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys

The group agreed that the sharing of successful respondent engagement strategies would support solution F – Development of high-level interviewer training on achieving co-operation and avoiding refusals (see section 4.5). Whilst creating a repository of grey literature on successful respondent engagement strategies across surveys would be valuable, without funding it was unlikely that this could be established.

4.5 Solutions with high levels of support in the poll

Discussion about solutions which had already received high levels of support in the intervening poll between workshops 2 and 3 were not assessed further for their level of support. Instead, the group switched to thinking about the practicalities of implementing these solutions on the assumption that they should be taken forward.

Solution G: Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers

This solution emphasised the importance of engaging and motivating interviewers after recruitment to ensure their retention, with commissioners playing a greater role in this process. Stakeholders had explained that they found interviewers responded well to having commissioners join briefings, as it emphasised the value and importance of the project to the funder. One stakeholder noted in this workshop that this interaction also helps address any concerns or confusion interviewers have about the survey protocol and purpose.

This solution received eight votes in the poll. Stakeholders discussed a range of ways this solution could be carried forward, including commissioners attending F2F and online interviewer briefings. This prompted a suggestion that stakeholders identify other opportunities for interviewer-commissioner engagement that could be beneficial to interviewer morale and success. One stakeholder raised the issue of whether funders that award research grants, such as the ESRC and MRC should be invited to interviewer briefings. Typically, these kinds of commissioners have very little or no interaction with survey interviewers. This suggestion received support from other stakeholders.

A further suggestion was for commissioners to record videos to be shared with interviewers, when costs did not allow for commissioners to attend briefings. Likewise, stakeholders also suggested interviewers themselves could record short videos about their day-to-day work, helping to bring to life their experiences for commissioners, both positive and negative. One stakeholder suggested that such recordings could also help build the connection between interviewers and data analysts, akin to the Survey Link scheme³.

Stakeholders also discussed commissioners communicating with interviewers through written statements, but as one person noted, it's important in this event that it's clear this is coming from the commissioner themselves and not by the agency in question. This discussion led one stakeholder to suggest decoupling commissioner communication with interviewers from specific surveys, so that commissioners instead speak to F2F interviewers more directly in a sector-wide fashion.

Stakeholders also felt the relationship between interviewers and commissioners would be improved by more consistent efforts to refer to interviewers' contributions to research following data collection. One stakeholder referenced Stats Canada, where every press release about the research thanked participants *and* interviewers, as an example of those 'up the chain' acknowledging and showing appreciation for survey interviewers' role in data collection. This discussion led in turn to a suggestion that the MRS create an 'Interviewer of the Year' award. One stakeholder noted that part of the value of showcasing interviewers in this way, was that it would provide a counterbalance to the more negative reports commissioners may hear about interviewers, such as complaints about interviewer behaviour. Another stakeholder agreed about the value of such an award, comparing it to those given to interviewers by individual agencies. There was also agreement from the group that several interviewers could receive the award rather than just one and that the agencies could help shape what the award could look like.

The MRS stakeholder present said they could take this suggestion away and speak to the judges, an independent panel of experts from market research and related industries. A further suggestion for the MRS to consider was that its website could host explanations from commissioners about how the data interviewers collect on surveys is used by commissioners, to further strengthen the relationship between the two. The MRS stakeholder present would be happy to curate this if commissioners and fieldwork

³ The Survey Link Scheme was an initiative that enabled researchers to gain firsthand experience of data collection by accompanying a F2F survey interviewer in the field.

agencies supplied statements. They were optimistic that interviewers would engage with these statements, given their engagement with other content aimed at interviewers on the MRS website.

As a more immediate effort to show that interviewers were valued, one stakeholder noted that the outcomes of this Survey Futures dialogue should be communicated to interviewers. They also felt it should refer to phrases stakeholders have used during the dialogue that illustrate how important they thought interviewers' work was, for example, seeing them as the 'unsung heroes' of the industry. Debbie Collins (NatCen) agreed that, as the dialogue host, she would take this suggestion forward when publicising the work and involve all stakeholders in this process to produce a short report for interviewers. It was also agreed that Survey Futures itself could be the best route forward for industry-wide efforts to convene commissioners to engage with survey interviewers. Adele Bearfield (Ipsos) provisionally agreed to co-ordinate these efforts with the stakeholders involved in this dialogue.

Solution F: Developing high-level interviewer training on achieving co-operation - particularly from seldom-heard groups - and avoiding refusals, that is open-access and run by a professional body

In previous workshops, stakeholders had discussed updating interviewer training and accreditation in several ways. These included developing specific training that supported interviewers to be mindful of post-pandemic attitudinal changes to people's willingness to let people into their homes, as well as developing sectoral understanding of the features of successful interviewer doorstep strategies (see solution E above). This solution received nine votes in the poll.

The MRS stakeholder present explained that the MRS could develop this training if the industry could commit to paying for it, gave a clear specification, and if the group could identify a suitable person to lead the training. It could be a complement to the current MRS Interviewer Development programme, which requires investment from individual agencies and focuses more on mixed-mode, complex surveys. Stakeholders discussed what the proposed (new) MRS training would provide that differed to the internal training agencies currently offer to their interviewers, and how the proposed training would avoid infringing on commercial sensitivities - two considerations raised in the previous workshops. Despite these caveats, it was agreed that pursuing this training would be worthwhile, as it would demonstrate to interviewers that they are valued by the industry.

Nicola Jones (ONS) agreed to lead on taking this solution forward with a sub-group of stakeholders involved in the dialogue. This sub-group would work to determine what the training should cover and what information agencies would be able to share, producing a course specification to be shared with the MRS. The moderator asked stakeholders to consider whether in choosing the MRS to provide interviewer training, this might exclude any face-to-face interviewers and what actions could be taken to mitigate this risk.

Solution J: Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing

This solution received eight votes in the poll. The group agreed that it overlapped with solution H discussed above and felt the focus of solution J – making a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for money for F2F interviewing – was more achievable than trying to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay. Given this, the group agreed to focus on solution J rather than solution H.

One stakeholder suggested that the case made to commissioners needed to be evidence-based, however, some felt this would be costly if it were truly systematic. It was suggested by others that a pragmatic starting point could be to begin with a rapid evidence collection phase, focused on what may be readily available, and then if it appeared to all involved that something more systematic was necessary, this could be returned to. One stakeholder also considered whether, in that event, Survey Futures could provide the funds for a more systematic evidence review. Stakeholders were informed that Survey Futures did not have any further funding available under the current grant.

Katherine Page (freelance consultant specialising in media audience measurement) explained this same suggestion had been discussed recently at the Media Measurements Forum, and that she was happy to begin to pull evidence together. However, she asked that others from the social research side of the sector provide her with evidence. Nora Mielke (Scottish Government) agreed to pull out any evidence on where face-to-face still has the edge over other data collection approaches from its recent review of mixed-mode research. A stakeholder explained there is a separate Survey Futures workstream that is reporting in June on experimental research into the value of F2F interview follow ups to non-responders to Understanding Society on its Innovation Panel, and a working paper should be published sooner. One stakeholder suggested that a position statement on the topic could be put out by Survey Futures on the value and future of F2F interviewing. Lisa Calderwood (UCL) agreed to raise this at the next Survey Futures Senior Leadership Team meeting and to liaise with this group on next steps.

The goal here is to create outputs (text, video etc) that could help commissioners make the case for F2F data collection.

Solution C: Improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public

In previous workshops, stakeholders had discussed whether surveys were becoming too long and the potential benefits of shortening surveys to encourage greater public participation. Further survey design considerations stakeholders had previously discussed covered incentive strategies and question clarity. In the present workshop, stakeholders elaborated further considerations – the limitations imposed by questionnaire software used by agencies on accessibility, the increasing chance of interviews being very long (2½ - 3 hours), and the need to rationalise surveys in the sector, so that they respond to need and avoid duplication.

This solution received ten votes in the poll. One stakeholder noted that while this solution is valuable and there was clear support from the group, there are practical limitations to what changes can be made to surveys. A commissioner stakeholder highlighted that encouraging shorter surveys often goes hand in hand with the move to online data collection. Another stakeholder suggested that the making surveys shorter part of this solution was probably not achievable but that improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public was something that stakeholders were continuously doing and that they could commit to more knowledge sharing activities. It was agreed by the group that this solution was ‘aspirational’ and best addressed by individual agencies and researchers redoubling their efforts to encourage shorter, better designed surveys.

4.6 Summary of solutions stakeholders agreed to take forward

Of the 12 solutions stakeholders generated in workshop 2 aimed at addressing challenges facing the recruitment and retention of F2F interviewing in the UK, the group agreed to take forward four. Table 4-1 lists these four solutions, along with initial actions agreed, and named owners responsible for progressing each solution. Three of these solutions had scored high levels of support among stakeholders in the poll that took place ahead of this third workshop – solutions F, G and J. Solution I had scored a little lower, being placed in the moderate group of solutions. Supporters of this solution convinced colleagues that this was an important industry-level solution to try to take forward. These four solutions addressed challenges concerned with how to better equip interviewers with the skills needed to be successful (solutions F and G), and how to address challenges with the acceleration to mixed mode (solutions I and J).

Table 4-1 Solutions to be taken forward, actions and owners

Solution	Actions	Owner
F Developing high-level interviewer training on achieving co-operation, particularly from seldom-heard groups and avoiding refusals. This should be open to all interviewers and run by a professional body.	Sub-group of stakeholders involved in this dialogue will work to: • determine what the training should cover • what information agencies can share on successful doorstep strategies • develop a course specification for the MRS • ensure that any MRS course is accessible to all survey interviewers	Nicola Jones (ONS)
G Strengthening the relationship between commissioners and interviewers	Co-ordinate industry-wide efforts to convene commissioners to	Adele Bearfield (Ipsos)

	engage with survey interviewers. Efforts discussed: • Commissioner videos aimed at interviewers working on a particular survey • Interviewer vox pops, talking about their field experiences • Consistent thanking of survey interviewers as well as participants in survey comms • New MRS Interviewer(s) of the Year Award • Commissioner explanations of how survey data are used curated on MRS website	Produce a summary report of this stakeholder dialogue for survey interviewers	Debbie Collins (NatCen)
I	Forecasting the future demand for F2F interview surveys and understanding when a tipping point might be reached whereby F2F interviewing capacity becomes unsustainable	Discuss with ESRC possibility of funding this activity	Deborah Harding (MRS)
J	Creating a clear, compelling case that helps survey commissioners successfully argue for more money for F2F interviewing	Rapid collection of available evidence on the impact of F2F data collection on survey data quality	Katherine Page (freelance consultant specialising in media audience measurement), Nora Mielke (Scottish Government)

	Creation of outputs (text, video etc.) that help commissioners make the case for F2F data collection	TBC
	Raise at next Survey Futures Leadership Team meeting possibility of Survey Futures producing a position statement on the value and future of F2F interviewing	Lisa Calderwood (UCL)

The outcomes for the remaining eight solutions discussed are summarised in Table 4-2. Three of these solutions – D, E, H - were felt to overlap to varying degrees with solutions which were being taken forward and did not need to be progressed independently. The others were not taken forward due to costs (solutions A, B and L), and or because the solution was not felt to be one that required an industry-wide response (solutions C and K).

Table 4-2 Summary of solutions not taken forward and reasons why

Solution	Level of support in stakeholder poll	Reason(s) not taken forward
E Collecting information on interviewer behaviours on the doorstep	Low	Could be incorporated within solution 10, but no firm commitment to take forward.
K Targeted F2F interviewer recruitment strategies to diversify the F2F interviewer pool	Low	Cost, not industry-wide activity
L Raising the profile of F2F survey interviewing as a job with the public through a public awareness-raising campaign	Low	Cost: to do well would be expensive
A Macro public awareness-raising campaigns to improve public trust and engage groups that are currently less like to take part in surveys	Moderate	Cost: to do well would be expensive
B Further research to inform macro public awareness campaigns	Moderate	Cost
D Better sharing of learning of successful respondent	Moderate	Overlapped with solution 10, which garnered more votes

Solution		Level of support in stakeholder poll	Reason(s) not taken forward
engagement strategies across surveys			
H	Making the case for F2F interviewing being worth the investment, so as to secure additional funding to increase interviewer pay	Moderate	Overlapped with solution 11, which garnered more votes
C	Improving survey designs to make them more appealing to the public e.g. making survey shorter	High	Individual not industry-wide activity

In addition to the specific solutions discussed, stakeholders agreed to meet again in a few months to review progress, with NatCen agreeing to co-ordinate this.

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Appendix A - Stakeholder recruitment

NatCen created a list of stakeholders to invite based on organisations that:

- a) have a large UK face-to-face interviewer field force that undertakes national surveys, including social surveys; and/or
- b) commission face-to-face survey research, including as part of a mixed-mode survey design in the UK or parts of it.

In addition, professional bodies were identified that represented a) and or b). A) was made up of organisations who had taken part in the first stage of the project.

Having identified organisations, a named contact was identified. In some cases it was not clear who the appropriate person was that should be invited to take part, so we wrote to an initial contact asking for the contact details of a person/people to invite. Reminders were sent but some organisations did not respond to this request.

For those organisations where we had contact information for named individuals, an initial invitation was sent by email. These individuals held senior positions with responsibilities for strategic and financial decisions, such as Chief Executive Officers and directors of research centres. They were asked to indicate their availability to attend online workshops in February, March and April. Invitees were able to nominate other senior colleagues to represent them/ their organisation at the workshops if they wanted to and were asked to forward the invitation to them. Based on the availability of those who responded, dates for each workshop were finalised and calendar invitations sent to all invitees/ nominees. This approach to deciding invitees was chosen because it would bring together people with the authority to agree and take ownership of actions. Table A1 summarises response to the workshop invitation and attendance.

Table A1 Summary of organisations and individuals invited and taking part in first workshop

	No. invited to participate	No. Taking part
Organisations	11	7
Individuals	18	9

Whilst ideally the same individuals would take part in all workshops, in practice this was not possible, with some individuals only being present for one or two of the workshops, see

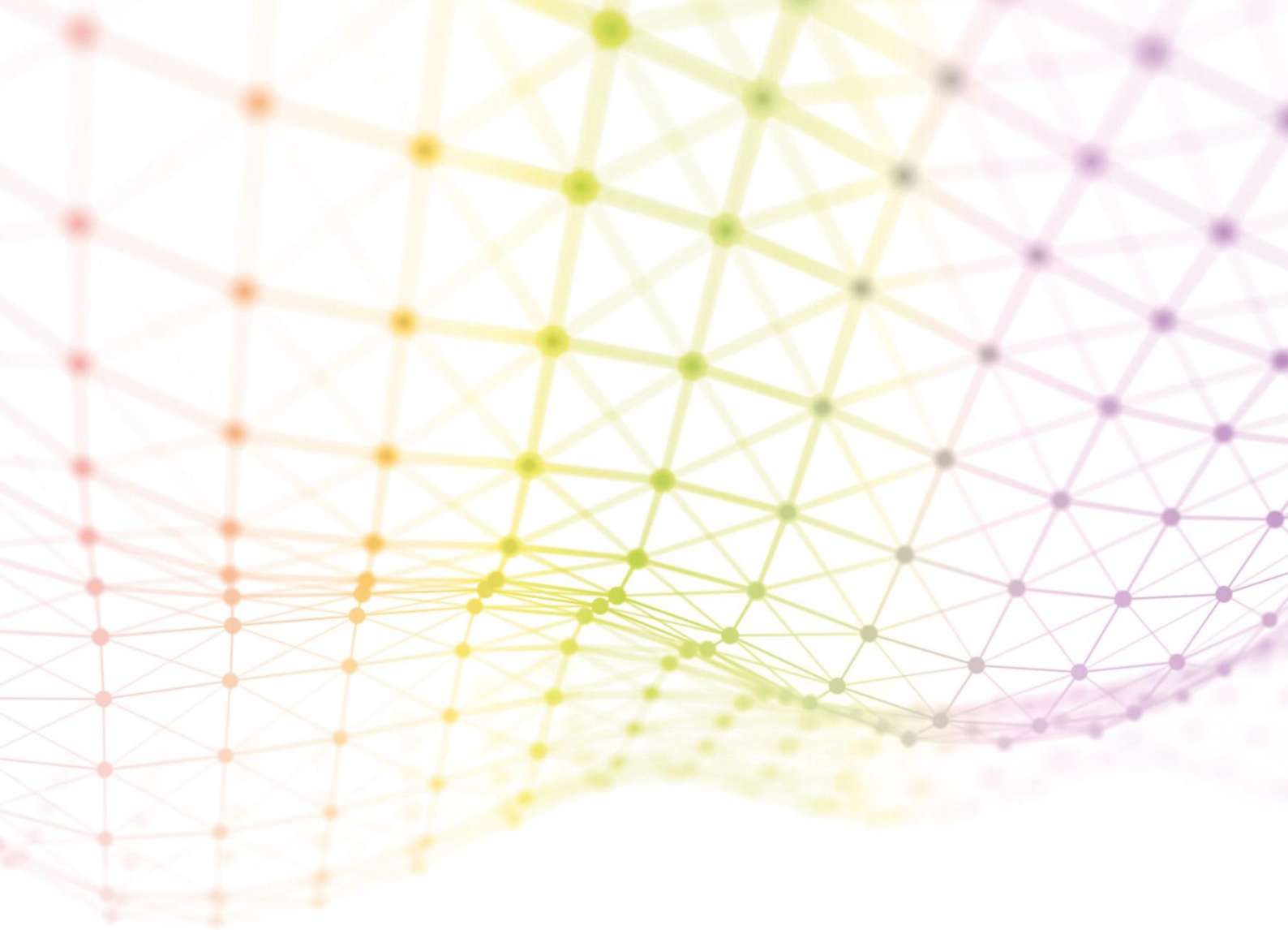
Table A2. To support workshop participants, a summary of the preceding workshop was sent to all participants ahead of workshops 2 and 3, which they were encouraged to read.

Table A2 Summary of individuals attending all, two or one workshops

	No. participants
Attended all 3 workshops	4
Attended 2 workshops	6
Attended 1 workshop	6

NatCen was both the project owner and a stakeholder in the research. The following steps were taken to minimise conflicts of interest.

- Members of the NatCen research team cannot be participants in the workshops
- The recruitment process was standardised and followed for all organisations, including NatCen, with all invitees receiving the same information.
- Ahead of the workshop, terms of reference were shared with participants. These terms were reviewed by participants during the first workshop, to ensure that all participants were clear about the workshops' aims, what participation would entail, and what information would be included in summary reports of workshop discussions.
- Summaries of the workshops were shared with participants to check their accuracy, a process known as member checking (Brit et al, 2016).



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