



SURVEY FUTURES

**SURVEY DATA COLLECTION
METHODS COLLABORATION**

2nd Survey Futures Early Career Researchers Conference

Book of abstracts

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Index

Session I	3
<i>Recruitment methods for surveys without field interviewers: Literature review (Nhlanhla Ndebele*, Cristian Domarchi, Rory Fitzgerald, Olga Maslovskaya, Peter Lynn, Ruxandra Comanaru)</i>	3
<i>Assessing methods for within-household selection in self-administered push-to-web surveys: an experimental comparison (Nathan Reece*, Peter Lynn)</i>	4
Session II	5
<i>Knock-to-nudge methods to improve survey participation in the UK (Cristian Domarchi*, Olga Maslovskaya, Peter W.F. Smith)</i>	5
<i>Ensuring the Voices of Young People Are Heard: An Innovative Application of Respondent-Driven Sampling with Probability-Based Seeds in the NatCen Panel (Luciano Perfetti Villa*, Olga Maslovskaya, Carina Cornesse, Curtis Jessop)</i>	6
<i>Mode differences in the composition of consenters to requests for data linkage (Jim Vine*, Annette Jaeckle, Jonathan Burton, Mick P Couper)</i>	7
<i>Targeted response inducement strategies for self-completion surveys with address-based sample frames (Viktor Sladka*, Peter Lynn)</i>	8
Panel session	9
<i>The Survey Futures legacy: Impact and next steps (Olga Maslovskaya, Sarah Henry, Gerry Nicolaas, Joel Williams, Eileen Irvin, Pablo Cabrera-Alvarez)</i>	9
Session III	10
<i>An evaluation of the look-up approach to occupation coding (Helena Koerber*, Matt Brown, Lisa Calderwood)</i>	10
<i>Viewing mode effects through the lens of causal directed acyclic graphs (Georgia D Tomova, Richard J Silverwood, Peter WG Tennant, Liam Wright)</i>	11
<i>Using integrated non-survey data for monitoring and intervening in survey data collection (Peter Barlow*, Alexandru Cernat, Nikos Tzavidis, Natalie Shlomo, Joseph Sakshaug, Thomas O'Toole)</i>	12
<i>Are we stepping into the future? Exploring the representativeness of web-only surveys of the general population (Pablo Cabrera Alvarez*, Annette Jaeckle, Jamie C Moore, Gabriele Durrant, Jonathan Burton, Peter WF Smith)</i>	13

Session I

Recruitment methods for surveys without field interviewers: Literature review

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Abstract

This literature review examined key methodological components of self-administered surveys and synthesised evidence on design strategies that influence participation, representativeness, data quality, and cost. The design strategies considered included participant contact strategies, such as prenotifications, invitations, questionnaire access, and reminders, as well as response modes, survey materials, and incentives.

Evidence indicated that prenotifications were associated with higher response rates, particularly mailed notices for older respondents, while two to three reminders delivered at shorter intervals were most effective. Mixed-mode designs were typically found to outperform single-mode designs in terms of response rates and sample representativeness, with sequential web-mail approaches offering greater cost efficiency than concurrent designs. Regarding recruitment materials, evidence indicated that university sponsorship, first-class postage, selective use of special delivery, and stamped return envelopes resulted in higher response rates.

Incentives substantially increased participation and reduced nonresponse bias, with monetary incentives outperforming non-monetary alternatives. Evidence suggested that unconditional incentives were more effective for recruitment, while conditional incentives were more cost-efficient. Strategies combining both unconditional and conditional incentives outperformed either approach alone. Lastly, evidence indicated that shorter questionnaires were associated with higher response rates but resulted in information loss, suggesting that simplifying questionnaire complexity was a more effective means of reducing respondent burden.

Keywords: self-administered surveys, contact strategies, mixed-mode, recruitment materials, incentives

[Return to index](#)

Assessing methods for within-household selection in self-administered push-to-web surveys: an experimental comparison

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Abstract

For self-administered postal push-to-web surveys in countries such as the UK, where only address frames are available, it is challenging to devise a method for within-household respondent selection that has both desirable statistical properties and high compliance levels. Several methods are currently used, with no consensus about their relative merits. The aim of this research is to provide much-needed evidence about the relative effectiveness of alternative methods of within-household selection in the absence of an interviewer.

Two common approaches, the any two method (non-random with potential cost advantages) and the next-birthday method (quasi-random), are compared via an experimental design. Each is believed to be the most practical of its kind. A factorial experiment was incorporated into the experimental design comparing two common frameworks for the design of invitation letters, which could have an impact on the implementation of both within-household selection methods. Research questions address differences between the methods in response rates, population representation, precision of estimation, survey estimates, and costs.

Key words: Within-household selection, self-administered survey, experimental comparison

[Return to index](#)

Session II

Knock-to-nudge methods to improve survey participation in the UK

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Abstract

Knock-to-nudge (KtN) is an innovative method of household contact, first introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face interviewing was not possible. In this approach, interviewers visit households and encourage sampled units to participate in a survey through a remote survey mode (either web or telephone) at a later date. Interviewers also can collect contact information, such as telephone numbers or email addresses, or conduct within-household selection of individuals on the doorstep if required. This approach continued to be used post-pandemic in a number of surveys, but there remains a knowledge gap regarding its advantages and limitations. It is still unclear whether KtN leads to improvements in sample composition and data quality. We analysed data from two UK surveys: the National Readership Survey (PAMCo) and the National Survey for Wales (NSW), each of which employed different versions of the KtN approach. Our aim was to determine whether this method improves survey participation and sample composition, and to assess how incorporating participants recruited via knock-to-nudge impacts on data quality and responses to substantive questions. We investigate these effects using descriptive analyses, statistical tests, and logistic regression models. Our findings demonstrate that KtN is associated with: (1) a significant increase in response rates, (2) improved sample composition, (3) higher item non-response, and (4) significant differences in responses to substantive survey questions. These results indicate that, when carefully designed and implemented, KtN can enhance recruitment efforts and improve sample composition of the resulting samples in surveys. However, its viability as a universal solution for mixed-mode surveys depends on whether these methodological benefits outweigh the potential compromises in data quality and the additional implementation costs.

Keywords: Knock-to-nudge methods, self-completion surveys, sample composition, response rate, data quality

[Return to index](#)

Ensuring the Voices of Young People Are Heard: An Innovative Application of Respondent-Driven Sampling with Probability-Based Seeds in the NatCen Panel

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Abstract

Certain population sub-groups are consistently under-represented or excluded from survey samples, or they may appear in insufficient frequencies. In the UK, where a named sample frame is often unavailable, current strategies for boosting samples can be prohibitively costly or impractical, particularly in self-completion survey formats. To address this gap, we used respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to recruit young adults aged 18 to 24 from the NatCen online probability-based panel. Panel members were invited to complete a short online questionnaire and could recruit up to five peers using unique digital referral codes, with participation and recruitment incentives provided. The multi-wave recruitment process targeted approximately 1,500 participants and enabled evaluation of recruitment cooperation, chain progression, and network characteristics within a self-completion survey context.

We analysed patterns and predictors of recruitment cooperation, assessing non-response at successive stages and examining how socio-demographic and network features shaped recruitment success. Intra-chain correlations indicated strong clustering by ethnicity, while gender and other variables exhibited weaker associations. The composition of initial seeds also influenced recruitment outcomes, highlighting the methodological importance of seed selection and the implications of violating core RDS assumptions for the validity of inferences. Interestingly, including seeds from outside the target group facilitated the recruitment of a substantial number of young adults, suggesting potential flexibility in the method's application.

By integrating empirical findings with methodological diagnostics, this study strengthens the evidence base for RDS as a tool for survey data collection in the UK and beyond. It introduces a practical and scalable means of amplifying the voices of young people—a demographic often under-represented in social research—thus contributing to more inclusive and methodologically robust survey practices.

Keywords: Respondent-driven sampling, probability-based panel, recruitment, under-represented subgroups

[Return to index](#)

Mode differences in the composition of consenters to requests for data linkage

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Abstract

Many surveys link to administrative records, with respondent consent, and many surveys now use web as a primary mode of data collection. However, respondents are generally less likely to consent when asked online than in person. Respondents who consent to these requests may differ importantly from non-consenters.

In this paper we examine the research question: Are web consenters just a smaller set or also a different set of respondents than face-to-face consenters?

We analyse data from consent requests made in different modes in a major UK household panel survey (the Innovation Panel of *Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study*). We compare the composition of the two groups (face-to-face consenters and web-consenters), conditional on consenting. We also investigate the extent to which these differences are explained by differences in the composition of respondents to the two modes vs. differences in propensity to consent conditional on responding in a given mode.

Our initial findings highlight characteristics where the composition of web respondents does indeed differ from that of face-to-face respondents. In addition, we will present findings suggesting at least some of this difference is associated with differential propensity to consent conditional on responding in a mode, not just by mode differences in the pool of respondents.

Keywords: Consent, data linkage, mode differences

[Return to index](#)

Targeted response inducement strategies for self-completion surveys with address-based sample frames

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Abstract

Targeted response inducement strategies have become increasingly popular in recent years. A number of studies have shown that such strategies can be a cost-effective way to bring about a useful improvement in response rate and/or sample balance. However, the design and implementation of targeted strategies depends on prior information about sample members, for example from an informative sampling frame, to identify groups to target. Furthermore, many of the successful implementations of targeted methods have been on interviewer-administered surveys, where the interviewers can be the conduit of the targeted procedures. The design of targeted procedures is therefore particularly challenging in the case of self-completion surveys with address-based sample frames, as there is neither an informative sampling frame nor are there interviewers who can behave in targeted ways. We attempt to identify promising approaches to targeted design in this situation, as well as a research agenda which could lead to better-informed survey design and hence more effective survey data collection by self-completion in future.

[Return to index](#)

Panel session

The *Survey Futures* legacy: Impact and next steps

Panellists: Olga Maslovskaya¹, Sarah Henry², Gerry Nicolaas³, Joel Williams⁴, Eileen Irvin⁵

Moderator: Pablo Cabrera-Alvarez

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⁵*Ipsos*

This panel session brings together experts from academia, the Office for National Statistics, and major survey agencies (Verian, Ipsos, NatCen) to reflect on the impact of the Survey Futures programme. As the project nears its conclusion, we will explore its tangible legacy for the survey research sector. The discussion will assess the project's concrete impacts, opportunities for knowledge transfer, and the challenges of implementing research-based innovations within ongoing data collection programmes. The panel will also address the future of the collaborative network fostered by Survey Futures, alongside the most pressing methodological challenges for the field in the years ahead.

[Return to index](#)

Session III

An evaluation of the look-up approach to occupation coding

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Abstract

Occupation is a central measure in social survey research. However, it is notoriously difficult to measure accurately due to the large number of distinct occupations. The traditional approach to occupation coding is post-interview office coding. In this approach, participants provide open-text job descriptions which are then coded by trained office coders to a standard classification framework such as the UK Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). While this approach is widely regarded as the gold standard, it is time-consuming and costly. An emerging alternative is the look-up tool, which enables respondents to self-code their occupation during the survey by entering job titles and keywords and selecting a suggested SOC code. This method has the potential to reduce costs and speed up data processing. This presentation reports preliminary findings from a research project using experimental data from a methodological study conducted with a sample of 20–40-year-olds living in England. The study included two waves conducted two weeks apart, with random mode allocation (web, video, or in-person) at each time point. Occupation was collected in both waves using both look-up coding during the interview and the collection of open text for subsequent office coding. We assess performance across four quality indicators: respondents' ability to select a code (coding success), their subjective assessment of code accuracy, agreement with the gold standard of office coding, and consistency of both look-up coding and office coding across the two survey waves for respondents who did not change jobs, including the impact of mode-switching. Results indicate that most respondents successfully selected a job code with the look up tool and the majority rated their selected code as describing their job well. However, agreement with office coding was only moderate. Consistency over time was weaker than expected for both look-up and office coding and affected by mode switching. Overall, these results highlight both the promise and the limitations of the look-up approach for large-scale surveys.

Keywords: Occupation coding, mode experiment, look-up coding

[Return to index](#)

Viewing mode effects through the lens of causal directed acyclic graphs

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Abstract

Surveys are increasingly adopting mixed-mode methodologies, whereby data are collected by some combination of face-to-face, telephone, web and video. This introduces two key challenges. First, individuals may respond differently to the same question depending on the mode; these differences due to measurement are known as ‘mode effects’. Second, different individuals may participate via different modes; these differences in sample composition between modes are known as ‘mode selection’.

Where recognised, mode effects are often handled by approaches such as statistical adjustment or imputation, but these rely on the assumption that selection into mode can be fully controlled for with available data. The plausibility of this assumption may, however, be questioned as selection factors may be unknown, unmeasured (especially in cross-sectional studies), measured poorly, or subject to mode effects themselves. When mode selection is present, statistically controlling for mode can increase, rather than decrease, bias.

In this talk, we place the problem of mode effects within the simple and intuitive framework of causal directed acyclic graph (DAGs). Using this framework, we explore a range of different possible scenarios, we discuss the suitability and implications of using common approaches for handling mode effects, and outline the advantages of quantitative bias analysis as an alternative.

Keywords: Mode effects, mode selection, directed acyclic graphs, causal inference

[Return to index](#)

Using integrated non-survey data for monitoring and intervening in survey data collection

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Abstract

Falling response rates in surveys have raised considerable issues for survey practitioners. To address rising non-response, rising costs, and increasing budgetary pressures, survey practitioners exploit auxiliary data to inform targeting of hard-to-capture groups within survey designs. Key sources for this auxiliary data include linked geo-spatial, administrative and commercial data. The aim of the 3rd Practitioner Guide under work stream 7: Data Integration is to provide a foundational blueprint for practitioners to use when designing and implementing a survey that utilises linked datasets to target and treat particular subgroups. First, the key concepts that underpin Adaptive Survey Designs are outlined. Then, the Practitioner Guide characterises the availability of different linkable datasets in the UK and explains their applicability to responsive and adaptive survey designs. It also outlines the possible benefits from different types of data and the different opportunities where different types of data may be more appropriate. The advantages and disadvantages of implementing different styles of adaptive design are considered in the context of the UK data landscape. Based on this analysis, recommendations are set forth regarding the approach to take in linking data with the goal of improving data collection in the UK. This culminates in a conclusion regarding the best practice for evaluating non-response and intervening in data collection to address non-response based on different types of linked data.

Keywords: Adaptive Survey Designs, Responsive Survey Designs, Linked data, Non-response

[Return to index](#)

Are we stepping into the future? Exploring the representativeness of web-only surveys of the general population

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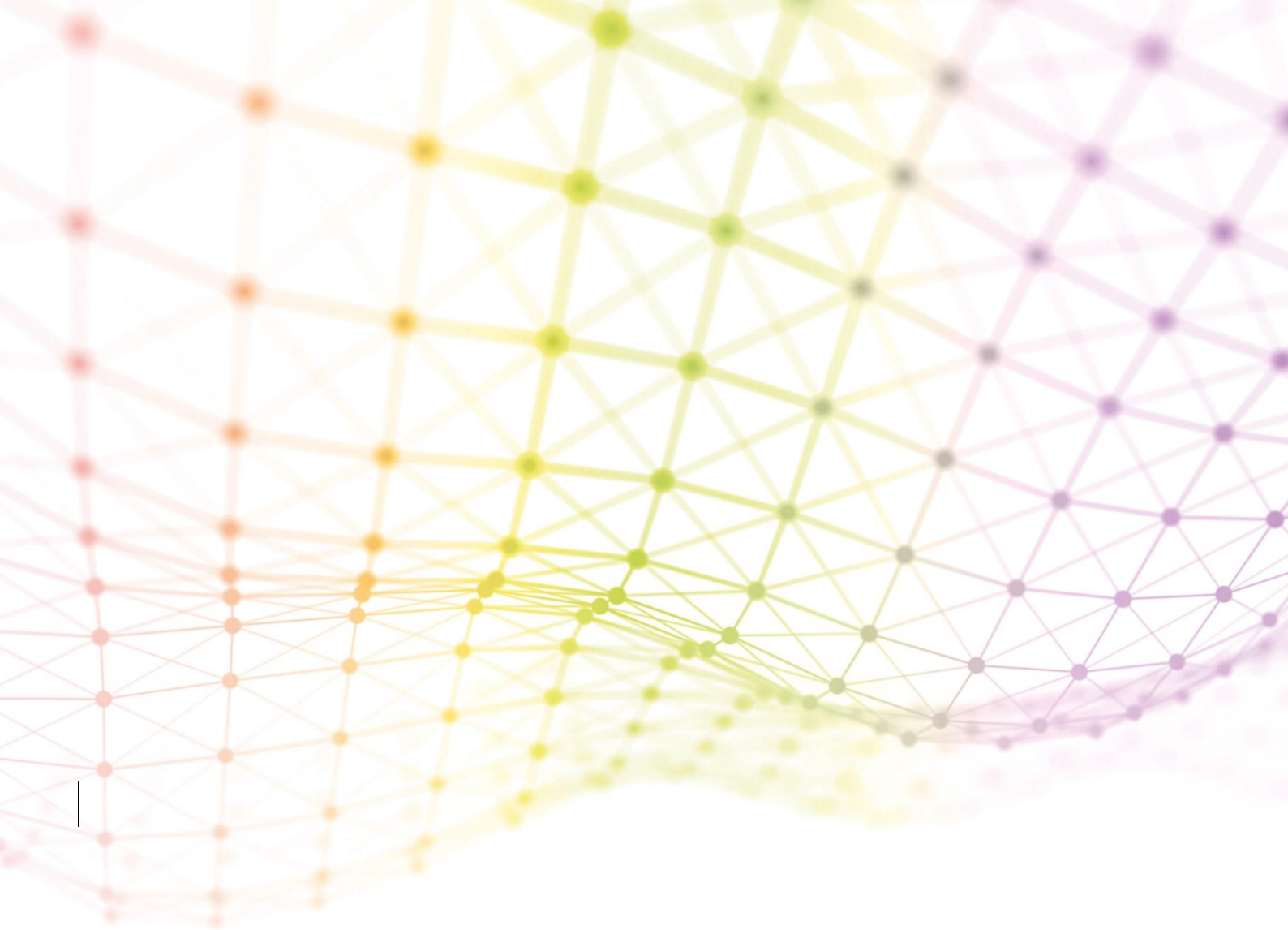
**Presenting author*

Author

The last decade has seen some high-quality surveys adopt the web as the primary mode of data collection, a trend accelerated by the pandemic. To reach segments of the population without internet access, most high-quality surveys employ mixed-mode designs, pairing web surveys with an interviewer-administered mode such as face-to-face or telephone. However, mixed-mode designs incur higher fixed costs than a web-only survey and may introduce measurement differences that affect data comparability. As internet access has expanded across nearly the entire UK population and digital literacy has significantly improved, a key question is whether it is now feasible to conduct web-only surveys of the general population without affecting representativeness.

This presentation will present the analysis to answer two research questions: (1) How have the characteristics of the internet users and non-users evolved over time? And (2) How does the representativeness of web respondents compare to the representativeness of different groups of internet users? This analysis aims to disentangle the bias due to the offline population from the bias produced by the rest of the web non-respondents. The analysis uses data from the Innovation Panel and the main study of *Understanding Society*, the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). The results show a significant reduction in internet exclusion. Internet users have become increasingly representative of the general population, though some gaps persist among older adults and those less educated, and other disadvantaged groups. Web survey respondents have also become more representative of the general population over the last decade, but they are still systematically less representative than internet users.

[Return to index](#)



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