SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION METHODS COLLABORATION

Survey Practice Workshop:

Recruitment methods for surveys without field interviewers in the United Kingdom

16 March 2026, 13:00 – 14:45

University of Essex

University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

NCRM National Centre for Research Methods · Office for National Statistics · UCL · WARWICK The University of Warwick · MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester · CITY University of London EST 1894 · National Centre for Social Research · LSE The London School of Economics and Political Science · Ulster University · UNIL Université de Lausanne · Ipsos · KANTAR PUBLIC

Survey Futures

- ***Survey Futures*** is a multi-institutional research programme focused on ensuring that high-quality surveys in the UK can innovate and adapt in a fast-changing survey data collection landscape.

  - **Overarching Aim**: To deliver a step-change in survey research to ensure that it will remain possible in the UK to carry out high quality social surveys of the kinds required by the public and academic sectors to monitor and understand society, and to provide an evidence base for policy.

- Survey Futures is a collaboration between nine universities, and three survey agencies (NatCen, Ipsos, and Verian), in partnership with the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

- The programme includes over 50 researchers working across nine research strands, investigating the most significant topics of survey research.

- Visit our website: https://surveyfutures.net/

University of Essex

University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Research Strand 4

- **Research Strand 4** of Survey Futures: **Methods for surveys without field interviewers:**
    1. **Recruitment**
    2. Accessibility and inclusivity for population sub-groups
    3. Targeted procedures
    4. Knock-to nudge
    5. Within household selection of individuals

- An evidence review has been published on the Survey Futures website:
    - https://surveyfutures.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/report-12-recruitment-methods-evidence-review.pdf
- Survey Practice Guide – *work in progress*

What works well when recruiting for self-completion surveys? – <u>Part 1</u>: Literature review

Survey Practice Workshop, 16 March 2026

Nhlanhla Ndebele[1], Cristian Domarchi[2], Rory Fitzgerald[1], Olga Maslovskaya[2], Peter Lynn[3], Ruxandra Comanaru[1]

[1] City St George's, University of London (UK), [2] University of Southampton (UK), [3] University of Essex (UK)
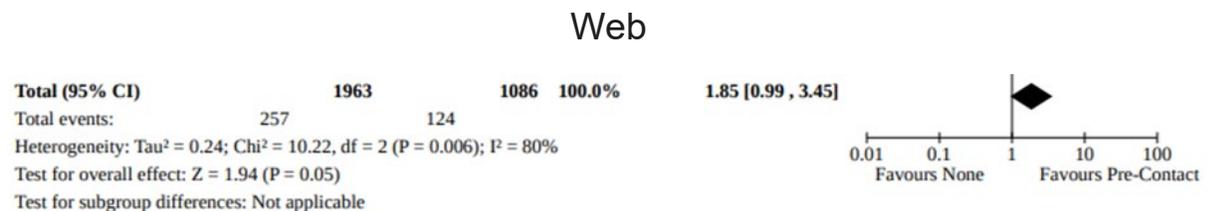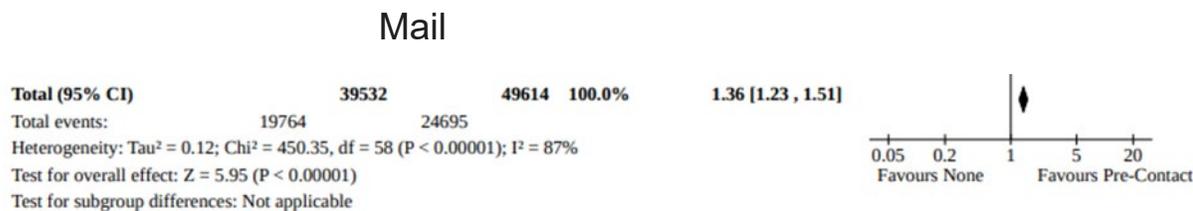
Outline

- Literature search

- Invites and reminders (Prenotifications, invitations and questionnaire access, reminders)

- Response modes (Single-mode and mixed-mode designs)

- Recruitment materials (Survey sponsors, postage, envelopes)

- Incentives (Presence, timing, type, amount)

Literature search

- We conducted a systematic search between January – June 2024 to identify research literature on self-completion surveys:

  - Interested in surveys that used address-based sampling frames.

  - Specifically considered recruitment practices, as well as survey quality indicators such as response rates, representativeness, survey costs.

  - We searched various databases: Web of Science, Scopus, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, APA PsycInfo, and Academic Search Ultimate.

- We found a wide range of literature that included:

  - A Cochrane review, systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

  - Experimental studies, reports and some grey literature.

Invites and reminders: Prenotifications

- While **prenotification** may **increase** the likelihood of responding to a survey compared with **no prenotification**, they may not always be a **cost-effective strategy** in some circumstances:
  - Preference of an additional reminder when recipients have the questionnaire in hand.

- Evidence suggested that **prenotifications** continue to be **more effective** than **no prenotifications** in **mail** and **web** surveys (5% and 10% significant levels, respectively) (Edwards et al. 2023).
  - **Response rates** were **higher** when a **prenotice** was used than when **not** (Edwards et al. 2023; Wu et al. 2022).
  - Impact was particularly **strong** among **older (50+)** respondents in **mail surveys** (Anhang Price et al. 2022).

Mail

Web

Total (95% CI)	39532	49614	100.0%	1.36 [1.23 , 1.51]
Total events:	19764	24695		
Heterogeneity: Tau² = 0.12; Chi² = 450.35, df = 58 (P < 0.00001); I² = 87%				
Test for overall effect: Z = 5.95 (P < 0.00001)				
Test for subgroup differences: Not applicable				

0.05 0.2 1 5 20
Favours None   Favours Pre-Contact

Total (95% CI)	1963	1086	100.0%	1.85 [0.99 , 3.45]
Total events:	257	124		
Heterogeneity: Tau² = 0.24; Chi² = 10.22, df = 2 (P = 0.006); I² = 80%				
Test for overall effect: Z = 1.94 (P = 0.05)				
Test for subgroup differences: Not applicable				

0.01 0.1 1 10 100
Favours None   Favours Pre-Contact

(Edwards et al. 2023:688)

Invites and reminders: Prenotifications

- The ONS (2018) investigated the impact of **different letter combinations** to an online survey and tested three experimental conditions:

  - A prenotification letter, an invitation letter, and a first reminder

  - An invitation letter and a first reminder

  - An invitation letter, a first reminder, and a second reminder

- There was **no significant difference** in response rates when a **prenotice** was used instead of a **second reminder.**

Invites and reminders: Invitations and questionnaire access

- Mode of contact is influenced by the information available from the sampling frame:

  - Mail is the most used in address-based sampling frames (Olson et al. 2019).

  - In some circumstances (e.g. longitudinal surveys) other information may be available.

- In mailed push-to-web invitations, offering **multiple methods** of accessing the questionnaire improved response rates (Endres et al. 2023; Marlar and Schreiner 2024; Maslovskaya et al. 2024):

  - Including a **QR code**, in addition to a **URL** modestly improved response rates than a **URL only**.

  - **QR codes** led to increased **completion of questionnaires online**, and via **mobile devices**.

- Where information was available, **text messages** with a survey link:

  - Led respondents being more likely to complete the survey on a **smartphone** rather than a **PC, laptop or tablet** (Cabrera-Álvarez and Lynn 2024).

Invites and reminders: Reminders

- Follow-up reminders are one of the most effective determinants of high survey response for self-completion surveys (Daikeler et al. 2020; Dillman et al. 2014; Edwards et al. 2023):

  - A strategy with **at least two reminders** achieved the greatest benefit compared to **one reminder**.

  - **No significant difference** in the response rate between **two** and **three or more** reminders (Jia et al. 2023; Sun et al. 2020).

  - Other studies found **significant differences** with **more reminders** but with **small effects** (Newberry III and Israel 2017).

Table 1 Meta-regression assessing the impact of reminders in the response rate

	With monetary incentive		Without monetary incentive	
	Coefficient (95% CI)	P value	Coefficient (95% CI)	P value
1 round of reminder	0		0	
2 rounds of reminders	0.16 (0.03–0.29)	0.021	0.16 (0.02–0.29)	0.028
3+ rounds of reminders	0.18 (0.04–0.32)	0.015	0.15 (0.01–0.29)	0.042

(Jia et al. 2023:506)

- **Two or three reminders** appear to be the **optimum** number of reminders.

Invites and reminders: Reminders

- Intervals between reminders:

  - Strategies with **shorter intervals** between reminders (higher frequency: **1.5 – 3 weeks**) resulted in

    increased odds of response than those with **longer intervals** (lower frequency: **3 – 6 weeks**)

    (Edwards et al. 2023).

Total (95% CI)		3274	4246	100.0%	1.13 [1.02 , 1.25]

Total events: 1226 1431
Heterogeneity: Tau² = 0.00; Chi² = 4.17, df = 5 (P = 0.52); I² = 0%
Test for overall effect: Z = 2.43 (P = 0.02)
Test for subgroup differences: Not applicable

Favours Lower frequency   Favours Higher frequency
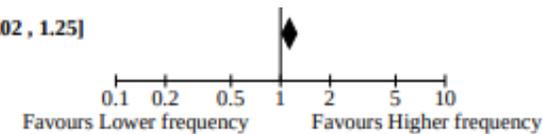
(Edwards et al. 2023:695)

Response modes: Factors affecting mail and web survey response

| Factor	Mail Surveys	Web Surveys
Visual design	High-quality printing, formatting, and paper boost credibility.	Responsive design increases engagement, especially on mobile.
Personalisation	Handwritten or personalised letters significantly improve response.	Personalised emails (e.g., name, tailored message) increase open / click rates.
Ease of completion	Requires physical effort (writing, mailing); can deter some respondents.	Can be completed quickly with clicks; easier for those comfortable with technology
Anonymity and privacy	Often perceived as more private / trustworthy.	Concerns about tracking and data security can deter participation.
Demographics	Older, rural, and less computer literate individuals are more responsive.	Younger, urban, and computer literate individuals respond more often.
Device compatibility	N/a.	Questionnaire optimised for mobile devices will encourage response.

Adapted from Callegaro et al. (2015) and Dillman et al. (2014)

University of Essex

University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Response modes: Single-mode and mixed-mode designs

- Among single-mode designs, evidence suggested that the **web mode** consistently yielded **lower response rates** than **other modes** (Anhang Price et al. 2022; Daikeler et al. 2020; Weigold et al. 2019):

  - **Web mode** increased response rates among sample members with the **highest levels of education**, while this had **no effect** among those with the **lowest levels of education** (Heimel et al. 2024).

  - **Mail mode** enhanced survey response among those with **lower levels of education** as well as **older respondents** (Kelfve et al. 2020).

- **Mixed-mode** designs yielded **higher response rates** and **more representative samples** than **single-mode** designs (Anhang Price et al. 2022; Cornesse and Bošnjak 2018):

  - Likely due to offering respondents different modes of responding to the survey.

Response modes: Mixed-mode designs

- Sequential versus concurrent designs:
  - Experimental evidence is **inconclusive** in terms of the most effective design.
  - **No significant difference** in response rates between **sequential web-mail** and **concurrent web or mail** (choice) designs (Edwards et al. 2023; Heimel et al. 2024; Suzer-Gurtekin et al. 2019).
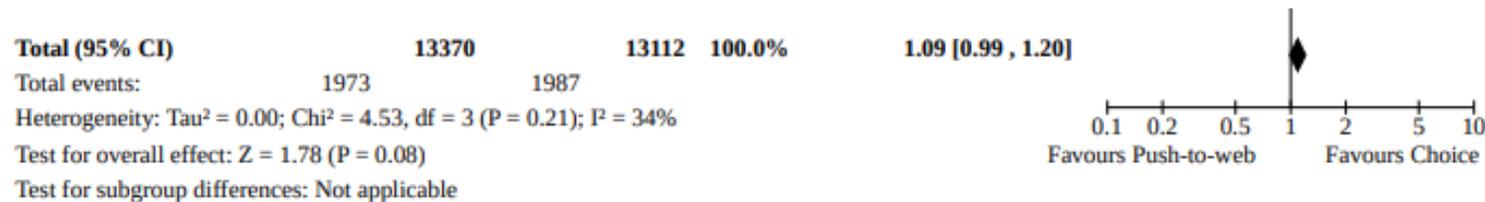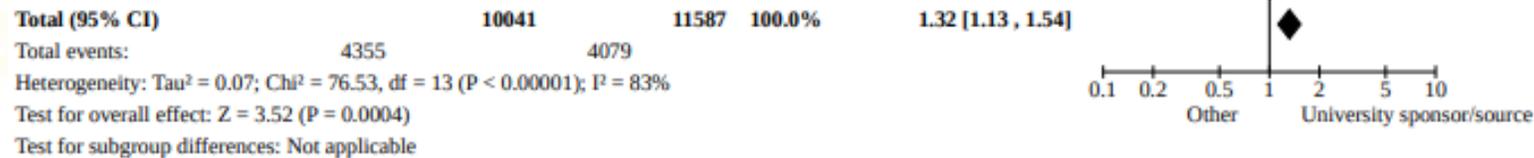

(Edwards et al. 2023:705)

- **Sequential web-mail** design resulted in higher percentages of **web responses** than the **concurrent web or mail** design (Heimel et al. 2024; Suzer-Gurtekin et al. 2019).

- **Cost per response** was lower for the **sequential web-mail** design than the **concurrent web or mail** design (Heimel et al. 2024).
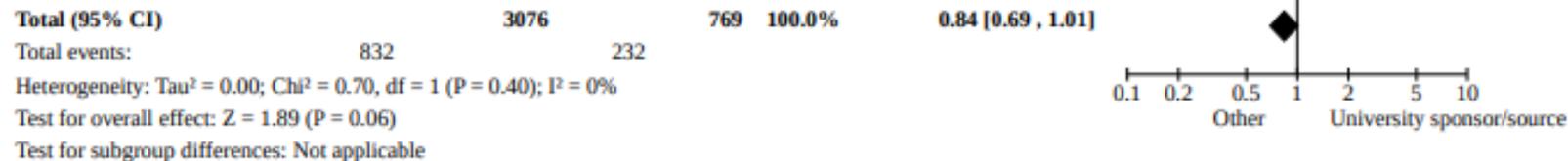
Recruitment materials: Survey sponsorship

- **Mail questionnaires** originating from **universities** were associated with higher odds of response compared to those from **other sponsors** (government departments or commercial organisations):

(Edwards et al. 2023:723)

- This was not the case for **web questionnaires,** the difference was **not significant**:

(Edwards et al. 2023:724)

Recruitment materials: Postage

- Outgoing mailing:

  - **First-class** postage yielded greater odds of response than **second-class mailing.**

  - While response rates for **first-class** and **priority mail** (faster and provides tracking services) were **not significantly** different, **first-class mail** was **more cost-effective** (DeBell et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2023).

  - **Special delivery** (recorded, registered, or certified delivery) led to significantly higher response odds compared to **standard delivery** (Edwards et al. 2023).

- Return mailing:

  - **Stamped return envelopes** were associated with greater odds of response compared to **prepaid business** or **franked reply envelopes**.

  - **Multiple stamps** on return envelopes increased the odds of response compared to using a **single stamp**.

  - The choice between **first-class** and **second-class** stamps on return envelopes had **no significant effect** on the odds of response.

(Edwards et al. 2023)

Recruitment materials: Envelopes

- In self-completion surveys, the design and presentation of the envelope or mailer are critical in influencing whether it will be opened (Lavrakas et al. 2018).

- Envelope colour:
  - **Brown envelopes** had a slightly higher response rate compared to **white envelopes**, but the difference was **not significant** (Edwards et al. 2023; ONS 2018).

- Envelope size:
  - **No significant difference** in overall response rates between **larger non-standard** size envelope (6×9) and **standard size** envelope (4.125×9.5) (Endres et al. 2023).

- Envelope branding:
  - The ONS (2018) investigated the effect of branded envelopes, **featuring regionalised material**, and found **no significant difference** in response rates between **branded** and **unbranded envelopes**.

Incentives

- Presence:

  - **Presence of incentives** led to increased response rates compared to **no incentives** (Abdelazeem et al. 2023; Anhang Price et al. 2022; Edwards et al. 2023).

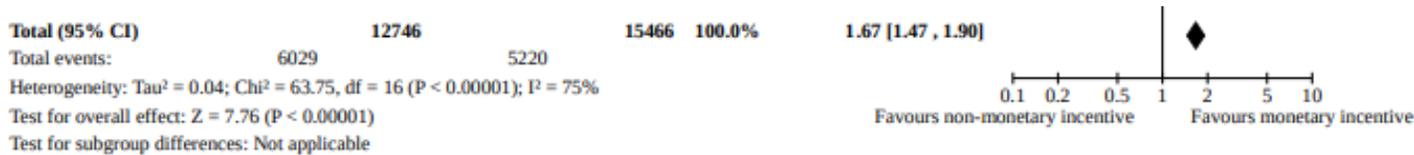 - This was regardless of whether the incentives were **monetary** or **non-monetary**.

- Timing:

  - **Unconditional (or prepaid)** incentives were more effective at improving survey response than **conditional (or promised)** incentives (Abdelazeem et al. 2023; Anhang Price et al. 2022).

    - Even if the **monetary value** of the **unconditional** incentive was **lower** (Smith et al. 2019).

  - Incentives provided with the **initial invitation** resulted in higher response rates than those offered in **subsequent mailing** (Anhang Price et al. 2022; Edwards et al. 2023).

  - Strategies **combining unconditional and conditional** incentives were **more effective** than either **unconditional** or **conditional incentives** alone (Abdelazeem et al. 2023; Edwards et al. 2023; Sammut et al. 2021).

Incentives

- Types:
  - **Cash incentives** were **more effective** at improving response rates than **vouchers / gift cards** (Abdelazeem et al. 2023).

  - **Monetary incentives** (cash or vouchers) yielded higher response rates than **non-monetary incentives** (Abdelazeem et al. 2023; Anhang Price et al. 2022; Edwards et al. 2023).

Total (95% CI)	12746	15466	100.0%	1.67 [1.47 , 1.90]
Total events:	6029	5220		

Heterogeneity: Tau² = 0.04; Chi² = 63.75, df = 16 (P < 0.00001); I² = 75%

Test for overall effect: Z = 7.76 (P < 0.00001)

Test for subgroup differences: Not applicable

0.1 0.2   0.5   1   2   5   10

Favours non-monetary incentive   Favours monetary incentive   (Edwards et al. 2023:610)

  - A strategy offering a **£5 gift voucher (unconditional)** with a **£10 conditional gift voucher** was more effective than **unconditional £5 gift voucher** or **tote bag** (ONS 2018).

  - **Small value guaranteed gift cards** resulted in higher response rates than **high-payout prize draw** (Dykema et al. 2024).

Incentives

- Amount:

  - There was **no clear correlation** between the **value of incentives** and **response rates** (Abdelazeem et al. 2023).

  - **Larger incentives** tend to be more effective than **smaller ones** (Edwards et al. 2023), although evidence suggests there are diminishing returns.

  - Jia et al. (2021) found an **optimal amount** of between **US$5** and **US$15**, but the **increase** in response rates was at a **declining rate**.

  - In the UK, incentive amounts of **£5** or **£10** were typically offered (Booth et al. 2024).
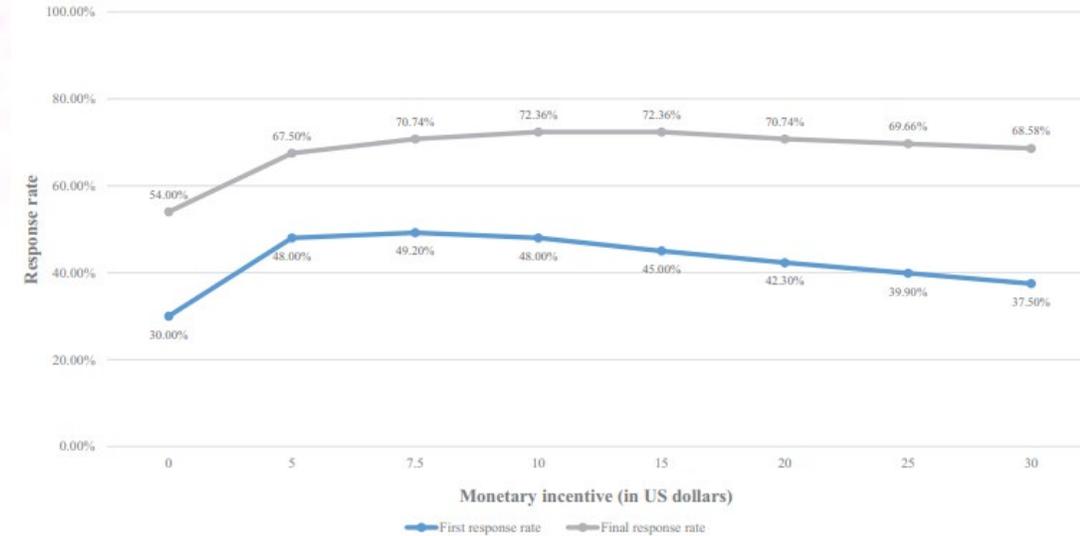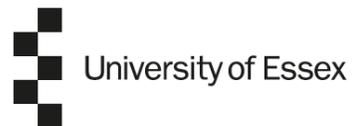

(Jia et al. 2021:506)

SURVEY FUTURES
SURVEY DATA COLLECTION METHODS COLLABORATION

What works well when recruiting for self-completion surveys? – <u>Part 2</u>: Survey practice review

Survey Practice Workshop, 16 March 2026

Cristian Domarchi[1], Olga Maslovskaya[1], Nhlanhla Ndebele[2], Rory Fitzgerald[2], Peter Lynn[3], Ruxandra Comanaru[2]

[1] University of Southampton (UK), [2] City St George's, University of London (UK), [3] University of Essex (UK)

University of Essex   University of Southampton   UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

NCRM NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH METHODS   Office for National Statistics   UCL   WARWICK THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK   MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester   CITY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON EST 1894   National Centre for Social Research   LSE THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE   Ulster University   UNIL Université de Lausanne   Ipsos   KANTAR PUBLIC

Aim and objectives

- **Research Strand 4 of Survey Futures ("Surveys without field interviewers")** studies the challenges associated with self-completion general population surveys in both cross-sectional and longitudinal settings.

- One of the main components is the study of recruitment practices, aiming to identify methods for optimising design characteristics and achieving more representative samples.

- We carried out a review of technical reports of self-completion surveys conducted in the UK between 2018 and 2024.

Information request

- **February 2024**: We approached several survey agencies and government organisations to request information about high-quality large-scale probability-based surveys in the UK.

- The request covered:
  - All mixed-mode surveys with online/paper modes only.
  - All mixed-mode surveys that offer interviewer-administered modes, provided that a large proportion of responses are provided in self-administered modes.
  - All online-only surveys.
  - Cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys (for mixed mode surveys, we focus on self-completion stages only).
  - Data collected in the 2018–2024 period.
  - General population surveys, although surveys covering different age ranges or smaller geographical areas could be included if they comply with the main criteria.

Information request

- After discarding repeated cases, we received information about 88 different surveys.

Agency	Abbreviation	# Surveys
UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies	CLS	9
Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex	ISER	4
IPSOS	IPSOS	13
National Centre for Social Research	NatCen	22
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency	NISRA	5
Office for National Statistics	ONS	21
Scottish Government	ScotGov	4
Verian (formerly Kantar Public)	Verian	9
Welsh Government	WelshGov	1
Total number of surveys (excluding duplicates)		**88**

- **Note**: Several repeat cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys include more than one record (wave/year/instance).

Information request

- Final list of surveys (49):
  - 14 are one-time surveys (one instance).
  - 36 are repeated (more than one instance).
  - Total of instances = 106

Organisation Abbrev.	Code	Name	# Instances	Period
CLS	CLS05	Cross-cohort COVID-19 Web surveys	3	2020–2021
	CLS06	COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study	2	2022–2023
Ipsos	IPS01	Active Lives Survey	5	2020–2022
	IPS02	Food and You 2	7	2020–2022
	IPS03	REal-time Assessment of Community Transmission	2	2021–2022
	IPS04	GP Patient Survey	6	2019–2023
	IPS05	PAMCo–Audience Measurement for Publishers	3	2021–2023
	IPS06	Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey	4	2020–2023
	IPS07	My Life in the Highlands and Islands	1	2022
	IPS08	Childcare and early years survey of parents 2019: push-to-web trial	1	2019
ISER	USS01	Understanding Society	6	2018–2023
	USS03	Understanding Society [Innovation Panel]	6	2018–2023
NatCen	NAT05	Survey for Londoners	4	2019–2022
	NAT08	British Social Attitudes	3	2020–2022
	NAT09	Bike Life Survey/The Walking and Cycling Index	2	2019–2023
	NAT10	Financial Lives Survey	2	2020–2022
	NAT11	Public Confidence in Official Statistics	2	2021–2023
	NAT12	Generations and Gender Survey	1	2023–2023
	NAT13	Gambling Survey for Great Britain	2	2023–2023
	NAT14	Gambling Participation and the Prevalence of Problem Gambling–Experimental Statistics	1	2023
	NAT15	The Health Survey for England 2020/2021 Feasibility study	1	2022–2022
	NAT16	Adult Oral Health Survey 2019	1	2019
	NAT18	National Travel Attitudes Study	1	2019
	NAT19	NatCen Opinion Panel	3	No reports

| Organisation Abbrev.	Code	Name	# Instances	Period
Verian	ONS06	Opinions and Lifestyle Survey	3	2021–2023
	ONS12	Winter Coronavirus Infection Study	1	2024
	ONS13	Census 2021	1	2021
	ONS15	Census Coverage Survey	1	2021
	ONS16	Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey	2	2021–2022
	ONS17	Trust in Government Survey	2	2022–2023
	ONS21	Over 50s Lifestyle Study	1	2022
ScotGov	SCO01	Health and Care Experience	3	2020–2024
	SCO02	Scottish Cancer Patient Experience Survey	1	2018
	SCO03	Maternity Care Survey	1	2018
	SCO04	Inpatient Experience Survey	1	2018
Verian	VER01	Community Life Survey	4	2020–2022
	VER02	Participation Survey	1	2022
	VER03	Individuals, Small Business and Agents Customer Survey	5	2018–2022
	VER04	Survey on Attitudes to the Environment	1	2022
	VER06	DENZ/BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker	2	2022–2023
	VER07	High Street Action Zones Survey	1	2021
	VER08	Empowering Places	1	2023
	VER09	Public Voice Recruitment Survey	3	2020–2021
	VER10	Attitudes to Mental Illness	1	2023
Total number of instances			106	2018–2024

Indicators

1. **Characteristics**. General description of each survey, including agency, data collection organisation, time and place, sampling design and method, and type of report.

2. **Survey design**. Contact and response modes, communication strategies.

3. **Materials**. All the available survey materials – including initial letters, reminder letters and postcards, informative leaflets, and knock-to-nudge cards – were reviewed in detail in a separate spreadsheet.

4. **Incentives**. Type, timing and mode of delivery of the incentives, as well as the amount provided in each case.

5. **Outcomes**. Response rates (either at the household or the individual level, or both), as well as the achieved sample size for each survey.
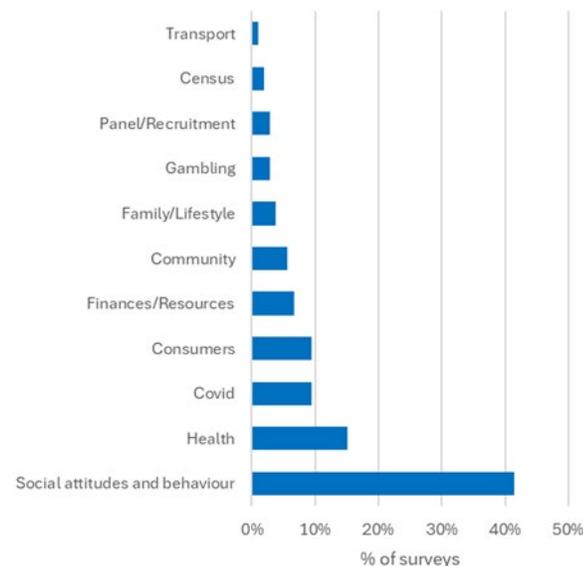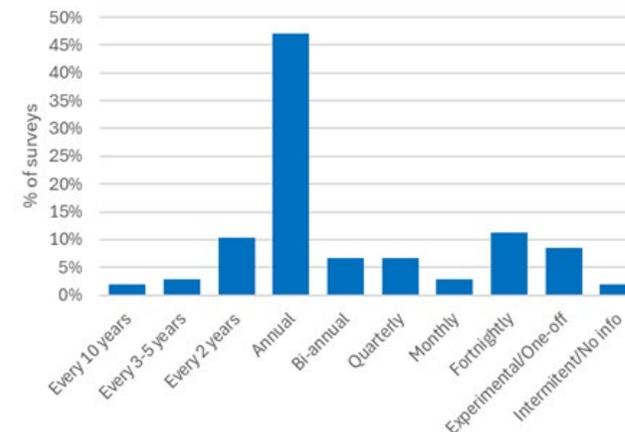
Characteristics

- Breakdown of survey instances by:

  - Final year of data collection:
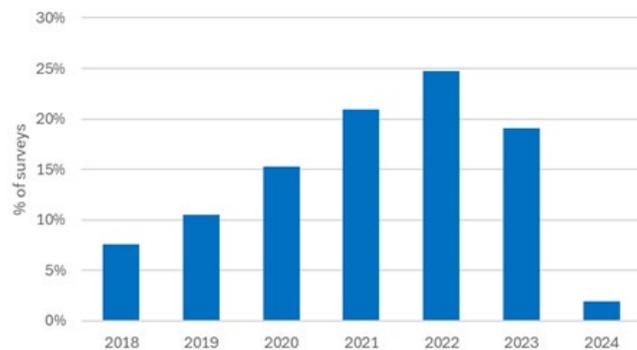
  - Survey topic:

  - Periodicity:

Characteristics

- Summary of other survey characteristics:

Variable	Value	# Instances	% of total
Target population	Individuals aged 16 or over	62	58
	Individuals aged 18 or over	18	17
	Others (more restricted)	26	25
Sampling frames	PAF (Households)	57	54
	Other address files (Households)	3	3
	Previous participants (Households)	12	11
	Named sampling frame (Individuals)	17	16
	Previous participants (Individuals)	13	12
	No information provided (Missing)	4	4
Sampling design	Cross-sectional	17	16
	Repeat cross-sectional	66	62
	Longitudinal	21	20
	Repeat cross-sectional/Longitudinal	1	1
	No information provided (Missing)	1	1
Sampling method	Simple random sample	10	9
	Systematic	7	7
	Stratified (*Clustered*)	17	16
	Stratified (*Unclustered*)	56	53
	Multi-stage	10	10
	No sampling (aims at full coverage)	5	5
	No information provided (Missing)	1	1

Variable	Value	# Instances	% of total
Within-household selection	One adult	7	9
	Up to two	27	36
	Up to three	8	11
	Up to four	6	8
	All adults	20	26
	Everyone in the household	3	4
	No information provided (Missing)	5	7
Method for within household-selection (when used, n = 57)	All adults or everyone in the household	25	35
	Any adult	36	51
	Next birthday	6	8
	Most recent birthday	2	3
	Grid	2	3
Median completion times	Less than 20 minutes	20	19
	20 minutes or more	30	33
	No information provided (Missing)	56	68
Mean completion times	Less than 20 minutes	5	5
	20 minutes or more	21	20
	No information provided (Missing)	80	75
Targeted procedures implemented	Yes	31	29
	No	75	71
Experiments reported	Yes	32	30
	No	74	70

Mode design

- Contact mode (surveys can use more than one mode):

Contact mode	Details	# instances	% of surveys
Post only	–	80	75
Post (combined with other contact modes)	Post, Face-to-face (knock-to-nudge)	4	4
	Post, Email	13	12
	Post, Email, Telephone	2	2
Email only	–	2	2
No information (Missing)	–	5	5

- Response mode:

Response mode	Details	# instances	% of instances
Web	–	11	10
Mixed mode	Paper, Web	61	58
	Paper, Web, Face-to-face	1	1
	Paper, Web, Telephone	3	3
	Web, Face-to-face	3	3
	Web, Face-to-face, Telephone	12	11
	Web, Telephone	13	12
No information (Missing)	–	2	2
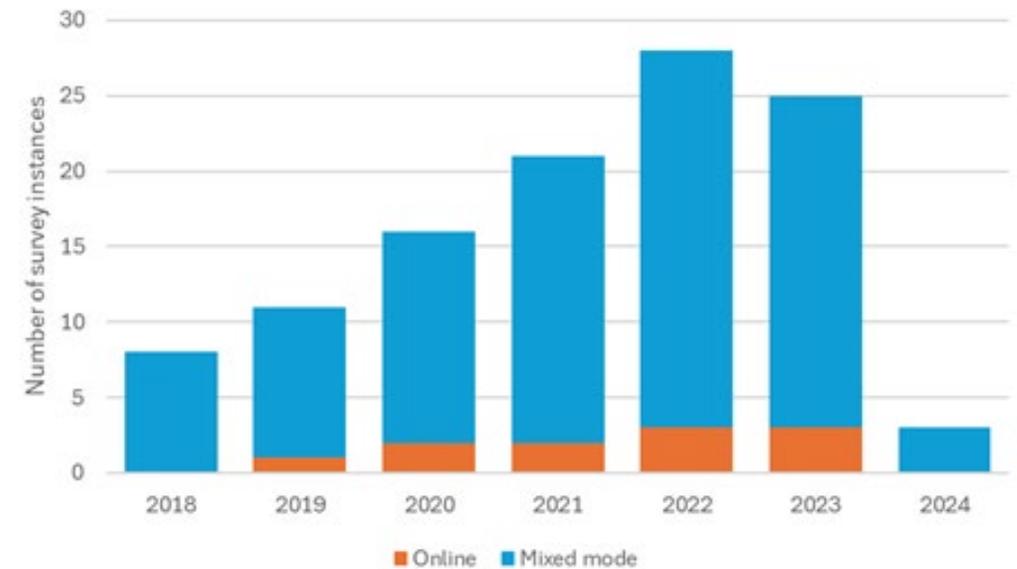
Materials

- Technical reports of **90** survey instances mentioned **349** documents (letters, emails, postcards).

- We obtained **217** of these documents (62%) which are associated with **52** instances (60.0%).

- Some agencies did not provide these materials as part of their technical reports.

- Types of documents available:

  - 56 invitation letters (26%).
  - 114 reminder letters (53%)
  - 4 other types of letters (2%).

  - 30 invitation/reminder emails (14%).
  - 4 invitation/reminder postcards (2%).
  - 9 SMS reminders (4%).

- Some notable features:

  - Most surveys (42%) send 2 reminders. 25% send 3, while 8% do not send any.
  - 63% mixed-mode surveys use a sequential strategy, 37% offer all modes concurrently.
 - Most used colours in letters (other than black): green (38%) and blue (21%).

Incentives

- We have information on incentives for 97 survey instances (92%):
  - 17 survey instances state that they gave no incentives.
  - These are the main types of incentives:

Type of incentives	# Instances	%
Unconditional only	12	12
Conditional only	60	62
Combination (Unconditional + Conditional)	4	4
No specifics (Missing details)	4	4
No incentives provided	**17**	**18**
Total	**97**	**100**

University of Essex

University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Incentives

- **Most unconditional** incentives (95%) were monetary:
  - £10 given in 25% of the cases.
  - £5 given in 10% of the cases.
  - The rest (65%) offer other amounts (between £5 and £30), varying according to experimental or response conditions (e.g. new or old sample in longitudinal studies).
  - Only 1 instance trialled a tote bag as an unconditional incentive in one of their experimental groups (the rest of the sample received £5).

- **All conditional** incentives were monetary:
  - £10 given in 52% of the cases.
  - £5 given in 28% of the cases.
  - £15 or £20 given in 12% of the cases.
  - The rest (8%) offer variable amounts between £5 and £30.

Response rates
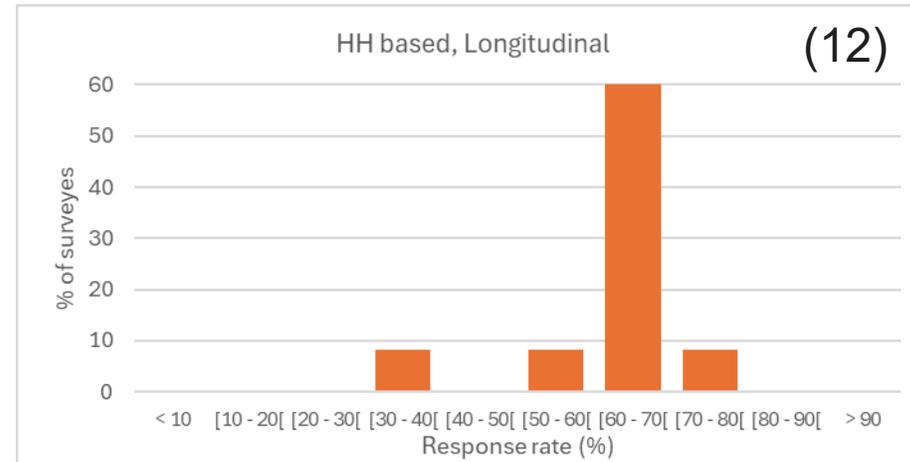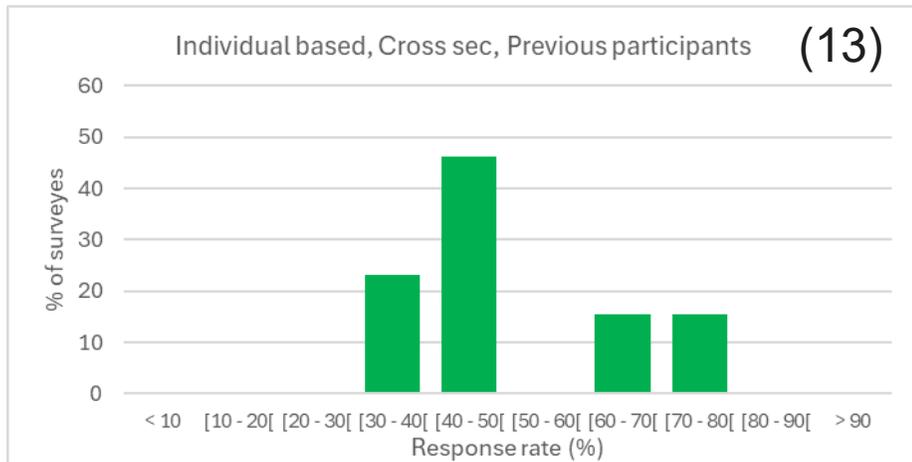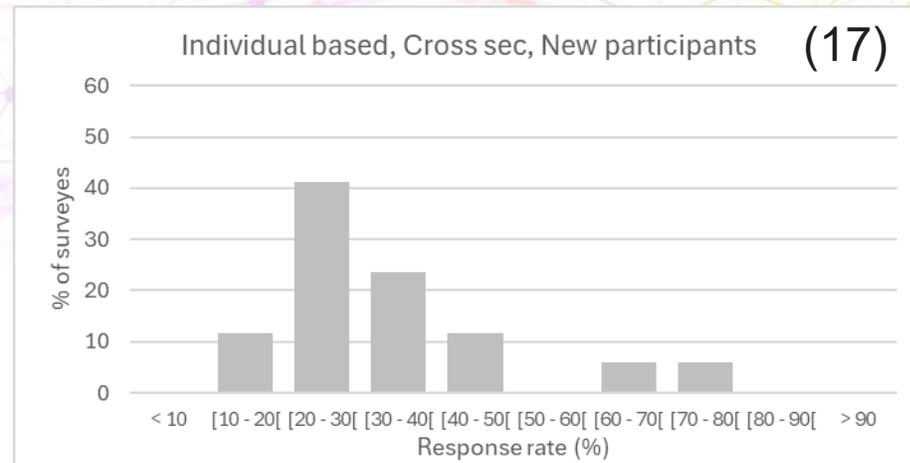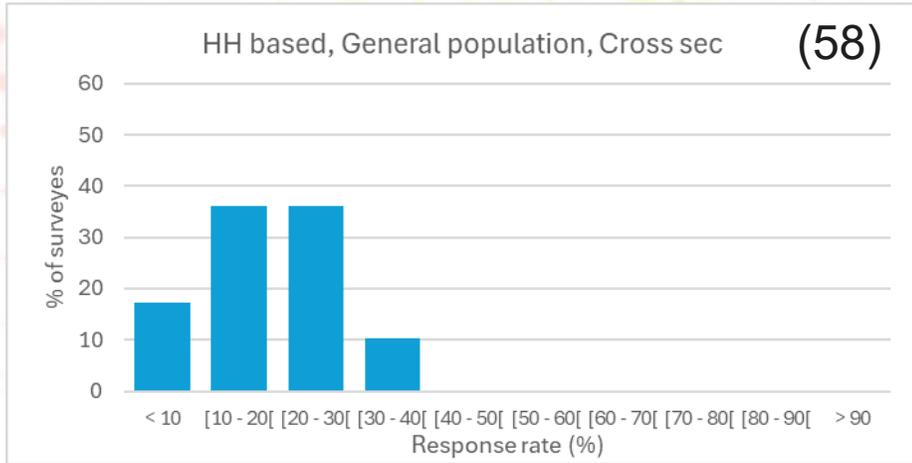
Response rates

- Response rates by survey type:
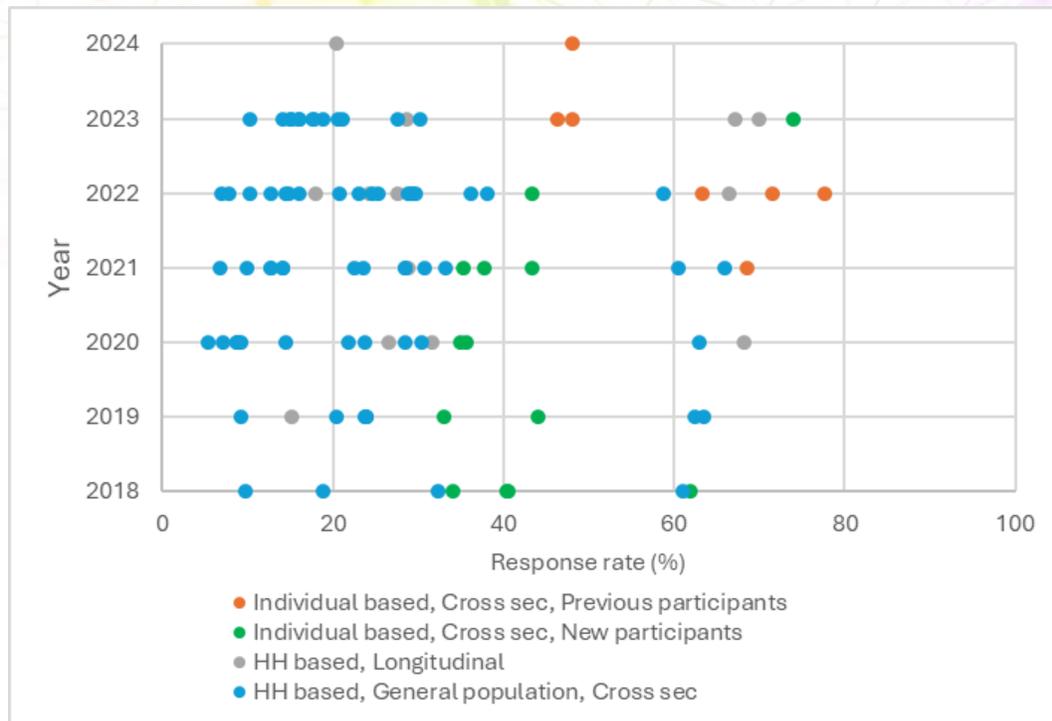
Responses per mode

- Proportion of responses per mode:

Variable	Year	All surveys					Mixed-mode surveys only				
		Face-to-face	Paper	Web	Phone	# instances	Face-to-face	Paper	Web	Phone	# instances
Share of responses per mode	2018	2%	79%	20%	0%	8	1%	76%	23%	0%	8
	2019	1%	76%	23%	0%	9	1%	63%	36%	0%	8
	2020	1%	61%	38%	0%	15	0%	53%	47%	1%	13
	2021	0%	27%	72%	0%	16	0%	47%	53%	0%	14
	2022	0%	14%	86%	0%	23	1%	50%	49%	0%	20
	2023–24	1%	46%	53%	0%	18	1%	49%	50%	0%	16
	Average	0%	38%	62%	0%	90	1%	60%	39%	0%	79
	No info	-	-	-	-	*14*	-	-	-	-	*13*
	Total	-	-	-	-	**104**	-	-	-	-	**92**

Experiments

- Survey methodology experiments are embedded in **32** survey instances in the dataset.

- They are implemented concurrently with the main survey data collection.

- Main topics tested include:
    - Communication materials (letter size, layout, aspect, contents): **14** experiments.
    - Incentivisation strategies: **11**
    - Mixed-mode strategies: **6**
    - Fieldwork procedures: **2**
    - Questionnaire design and question wording: **10**
    - Substantive survey information: **5**
    - Consent to data linkage: **6**
    - Others: within-household selection, interviewing methods, targeted procedures: **3**

Report quality

- Qualitative (and very subjective) classification:

Rating	Amount of information	Materials	Access	# Instances	% Surveys
Very good	All information is available	All included	Easy to find	34	32
Good	Most information is available, with some less important details missing	Most included	Easy to find	32	30
Fair	Most information is available, with some important information missing	Sometimes included	Mostly easy to find	27	26
Poor	Key information (e.g. response rates or fieldwork procedures) missing	Not included	Difficult to find	13	12

- Only 31% of reports provide any assessment of sample representativeness. Most of them compare sample composition with population targets.

University of Essex   University of Southampton   UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Report quality

- Proportion of survey instances which do not include information on key indicators:

Dimension	Indicator	% of survey instances without information
Sampling	Sampling frame	4
	Sampling design	1
	Sampling method	1
Survey mode(s)	Contact	5
	Administration	2
Fieldwork design	Communication strategies	15
	Incentivisation strategies	5
Response	Proportion of responses per mode	13
	Response rates	5
	Questionnaire completion times	68

- When included, not all indicators are reported in the same way (e.g. different methods to calculate response rates).

Conclusions

- The most frequent recruitment protocols for surveys without field interviewers in the UK involve:
  - Recruitment by post, with up to two reminder letters.
  - Conditional monetary incentives.
  - Sequential approach to mixed-mode surveys (one mode offered from the onset, with alternative modes offered with subsequent mailings).
- Some interesting recruitment practices and experiments can go unnoticed by the survey methodology community, as they are "hidden" in technical reports.
- Research Strand 4 of Survey Futures is currently working on a position statement about technical report contents.

Part 3: **Good survey practices for recruitment in self-completion surveys**

Survey Practice Workshop, 16 March 2026

Nhlanhla Ndebele[1], Cristian Domarchi[2], Rory Fitzgerald[1], Olga Maslovskaya[2], Peter Lynn[3], Ruxandra Comanaru[1]

[1] City St George's, University of London (UK), [2] University of Southampton (UK), [3] University of Essex (UK)

Mode of survey administration: Recommendations

- **Single-mode designs**

- Primary modes of administration are **mail** and **web** questionnaires, and recruitment practices should aim to **maximise response** and **representation** within each **mode**:

- Mail surveys:
  - Use **high-quality paper**, **printing**, and **professional formatting**.
  - Design paper questionnaires to **minimise the physical effort** required to complete them.
  - Mail surveys likely to **attract older**, **rural**, and **less digitally literate** sample members.

- Web surveys:
  - Use a **responsive visual design** that increases engagement and **optimise** the questionnaire for **mobile devices**.
  - Ensure the questionnaire is **simple to complete** using **clicks or taps**.
  - Web surveys are more likely to attract **younger**, **urban**, and **more digitally literate** sample members.

Mode of survey administration: Recommendations

- **Mixed-mode designs**

- Recruitment for mixed-mode surveys (e.g., web and mail) should be designed to **maximise response** while **minimising mode-related bias** and **costs**:
  - Clearly define the **mode strategy**, whether **sequential** or **concurrent**.
  - Minimise mode effects by ensuring **questionnaires** are as **similar as possible across modes** and carefully adapted where necessary.
  - Monitor **mode-specific response patterns**, including response rates by mode and demographic differences in mode choice.

Communication strategies: Recommendations

- **Communication approaches:**
- Follow principles from the **tailored design method**, based on **social exchange theory** which

  emphasises the importance of:
  - Maximising trust.
  - Perceived benefits of participation.
  - Minimise respondent burden.

- **Questionnaire access:**
- Provide sample members with **multiple methods** of **accessing the questionnaire**:
  - Include a **QR code** alongside the **URL** in mailed push-to-web invitations.
  - Where additional contact information is available, send **text** message or **email** invitations containing a **survey link**.
  - Where applicable, a **paper questionnaire** should be provided either with the **invitation**, or a follow-up **reminder** (typically the second reminder).

Communication strategies: Recommendations

- **Number and frequency of reminders:**

- Use **multiple reminders** to maximise participation:
  - Typically, up to **three reminders** should be sent.
  - First reminder should be sent **seven days** after the **initial invitation**, with the **second and third reminders** sent at **14-day intervals** thereafter.
  - Reminders should be sent **only** to **sampled addresses** that have **not** responded at the time the reminder is issued.

- **Types of reminders:**

- Where additional contact information is available, other types of reminders should be considered:
  - **SMS** reminders **outperform email, mail**, and other reminder types in **boosting response rates**.
  - Use **personalised SMS** reminders, as they are more effective than standard ones..

Recruitment materials: Recommendations

- **Branding and appearance:**

- Survey materials should be **branded** with **logos** from **trusted institutions or sponsors**:
  - Materials branded with **university logos** are more likely to **achieve higher response rates** than those branded by other sponsors, such as **government departments** or **commercial organisations**.

- **Postage and mailing days:**

- Outgoing mail
  - **First-class** post should be used rather than **second-class** post.

- Return mailing:
  - **Second-class** post should be used rather than **first-class** post.

- Mail scheduling:
  - Schedule mailings to **arrive** toward the **end of the week** rather than the beginning, as recipients may be more likely to access and begin the survey when materials arrive later in the week.

Incentive strategies: Recommendations

- **Presence of incentives:**
- An **incentive** should be **offered**; this increases the likelihood of response and can reduce nonresponse error compared with not offering an incentive, regardless of the type of incentive:
  - Consider responsive designs that incorporate incentives for groups with low response propensities.
  - Consider differential incentives where groups with a low propensity to participate are offered higher incentives than those with a higher propensity.
  - Consider early-bird incentives where sampled members are offered a higher incentive for early completions than for responses received later in the fieldwork period.

Incentive strategies: Recommendations

- **Timing of incentives:**
- Offer **unconditional incentives** as these are **more effective** than **conditional incentives**; however, unconditional incentives may not be practical for large-scale surveys due to costs:
    - **Conditional incentives** are **more cost-effective** than **unconditional incentives** in terms of the cost of achieving an additional percentage point increase in the response rate.
    - Strategies that **combine unconditional and conditional incentives** are **more effective** at encouraging response than **either unconditional or conditional incentives alone**.
        - A strategy that offers a **small unconditional incentive** followed by a **larger conditional incentive** can be used.

University of Essex

University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Incentive strategies: Recommendations

- **Types of incentives:**
- Provide an incentive type that **minimises the effort** required for respondents to **redeem**:
  - **Cash incentives** should be offered as they are **more effective**, although they are rarely used in the UK.
  - **Monetary incentives** (cash or vouchers) are more effective at increasing response rates than **non-monetary incentives**, even when their value is lower.
- **Incentive amount:**
- **Larger incentives** are **more effective** than **smaller ones**, although diminishing returns mean that very large incentives may **not** always be **cost-effective** or **feasible**:
  - Incentive amounts of **£5 or £10** are typically offered in the UK.

Thank you!

Questions and comments.