



# SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION  
METHODS COLLABORATION

## Recruitment for surveys without field Interviewers: Improving representativeness, accessibility and inclusivity

Cristian Domarchi<sup>1</sup> • Nhlanhla Ndebele<sup>2</sup> • Olga Maslovskaya<sup>1</sup> • Rory Fitzgerald<sup>2</sup> • Peter Lynn<sup>3</sup> • Ruxandra Cumanaru<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Southampton, UK; <sup>2</sup>ESS/City St George's University of London; <sup>3</sup>ISER/University of Essex

**Survey Futures International Conference • London • 17-18 June 2026**



University of Essex



University of  
Southampton



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council



# Context

- Social surveys are shifting from face-to-face to online data collection due to falling response rates and rising fieldwork costs
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition. However, many surveys reverted to in-person interviewing when possible
- The challenges of self-completion surveys are associated with:
  - The absence of field interviewers to facilitate recruitment and retention of participants
  - The absence of a sampling frame of named individuals
- **Research Strand 4** of Survey Futures focused on
  - Challenges in self-completion surveys for cross-sectional and longitudinal populations
  - Ways to optimise design to achieve more representative samples

# Sub-projects

1

Recruitment

2

Targeted procedures

3

Population sub-groups

4

Knock-to-nudge

5

Within-household selection

# Sub-projects

1

Recruitment

2

Targeted procedures

3

Population sub-groups

4

Knock-to-nudge

5

Within-household selection



# Subproject 1: Aim and activities

- This subproject aimed to:
  - Summarise evidence on methods used to recruit samples for self-completion surveys
  - Identify methods that achieve good cooperation rates and more representative samples of the general population
- Two reviews were conducted:
  - A **review of the academic literature**, focused on UK surveys, but also including evidence from other countries that used address-based sampling
  - A **review of UK survey practice**, based primarily on analysis of information contained in technical reports of self-completion surveys conducted between 2019 and 2024

# Subproject 1: Main findings

- **Communication strategy:**

- Pre-notifications, two or three reminders, and shorter intervals between contacts are effective
- Messages based on social exchange theory (emphasising legitimacy and low burden) outperform personal appeals
- University logos are more effective than government or commercial

- **Materials and access:**

- Envelope design has limited impact, except for windowed envelopes displaying a cash incentive
- Although URL-based access is common in UK practice, offering multiple questionnaire access options (including QR codes) can improve response

# Subproject 1: Main findings

- **Survey mode:**

- Mixed-mode designs can improve response rates, increase representativeness, and reduce survey costs compared to single-mode surveys

- **Incentives:**

- Incentives aid response and improve representativeness
- Monetary incentives (e-vouchers) most common in UK practice
- Conditional incentives often preferred but unconditional more effective; a combination of both is optimal
- Differential and early-bird incentives can successfully engage harder-to-reach groups

# Subproject 1: Future challenges

- **Implementation gap:**
  - UK practitioners generally follow evidence-based guidelines, but real-world implementation faces budget and time constraints
  - Recruitment strategies should balance methodological rigour with fieldwork feasibility
- **Further research:**
  - Further research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative recruitment methods including targeted approaches for harder-to-reach groups, alternative questionnaire access and response options, and differential incentives
- **Reporting:**
  - Technical reports are a key resource for researchers and data users. Standardisation in reporting across surveys is required
  - Position statement in progress

# Subproject 1: Outputs

- Evidence review:

## Report 12: Recruitment methods for surveys without field interviewers in the UK: Evidence review

Cristian Domarchi<sup>1</sup>, Nhlanhla Ndebele<sup>2</sup>, Olga Maslovskaya<sup>1</sup>,  
Rory Fitzgerald<sup>2</sup>, Peter Lynn<sup>3</sup>, Ruxandra Comanaru<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Southampton; <sup>2</sup>City St George's, University  
of London; <sup>3</sup>University of Essex



Download from: <https://surveyfutures.net/reports/>

# Subproject 1: Outputs

- Online workshop on 16 March 2026.
  - Full recording:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3MKQec48Qw&t>

- Slides:



<https://surveyfutures.net/events/>

- Survey practice guide coming up soon

# Sub-projects

1

Recruitment

2

Targeted procedures

3

Population sub-groups

4

Knock-to-nudge

5

Within-household selection

# Subproject 3: Aim and activities

- Inclusivity and accessibility are increasingly recognised as essential goals for survey research
  - **Inclusivity** involves enabling “*the full range of human diversity to be included and reflected in research, considering, and learning from people of all backgrounds and perspectives*”
  - **Accessibility** is a component of inclusivity that focuses on ensuring individual’s functional capacity and the functional demands of survey participations are matched
- Beyond the moral, ethical, and political imperatives for inclusivity and accessibility, significant trade-offs exist between these goals and practical feasibility

# Subproject 3: Aims and activities

- We investigated recruitment practices (in the UK and abroad) to favour the inclusion of population sub-groups with barriers to participation in social survey research:
  - **Individuals with disabilities and impairments**, including visual impairments, hearing loss or deafness, motor control dexterity impairments, mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions
  - **Literacy and language limitations**, including low literacy and language limitations in linguistic minorities. *Note: 18% of adults in England have low proficiency in literacy*
  - **Digital exclusion**, including issues with technology access, along with lower digital access, literacy and assimilation

# Subproject 3: Findings

- A substantial amount of qualitative work on inclusivity in surveys has been produced; however, more quantitative evidence is required
- The choice of inclusivity measures depends on survey objectives, scope, scale, and budget:
  - Basic measures
  - Higher-cost measures
  - Specialised measures
- Including populations with participation barriers requires offering alternatives in both recruitment and administration

# Subproject 3: Findings

- **Basic measures** should be prioritised in all surveys:
  - Accessible questionnaire design and content
  - Easy read/simple language (average reading age in the UK is nine)
  - Short and concise materials
- **Higher-cost measures** may be needed where excluding certain groups is a significant concern:
  - Offering an interviewer-led mode in mixed-mode designs (to aid those with visual impairments, some neurodevelopmental conditions, or low literacy)
  - Providing professionally translated materials (for linguistic minorities)

# Subproject 3: Findings

- **Specialised measures** may benefit specific groups but can be prohibitively expensive and may not noticeably reduce total survey error. They include:
  - Audio questionnaires
  - Video surveys
  - Tailored apps
- Their use should be reserved for when these groups are a priority

# Subproject 3: Recommendations

- **Impact:**
  - Further research is needed on how inclusivity measures affect non-response bias, sample composition, data quality, and costs
- **Cost-effectiveness:**
  - Inclusivity measures should be evaluated: trade-offs within constrained budgets
- **Decision-making frameworks:**
  - Explore how to prioritise inclusivity efforts (e.g., which groups) and how to balance inclusivity against precision when budgets are limited
- **Further research is required on:**
  - How best to engage low-literacy groups in self-completion surveys
  - The long-term effects of inclusive design on retention, trust, and data quality in longitudinal studies

# Subproject 3: Outputs

- Our evidence review has been published:

## **Report 14: Accessibility and inclusivity in self-completion surveys: Evidence review**

Cristian Domarchi<sup>1</sup>, Nhlanhla Ndebele<sup>2</sup>, Olga Maslovskaya<sup>1</sup>, Rory Fitzgerald<sup>2</sup>, Peter Lynn<sup>3</sup>, Ruxandra Comanaru<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Southampton; <sup>2</sup>ESS/City St George's, University of London; <sup>3</sup>ISER/University of Essex



# Subproject 3: Outputs

- Online workshop on 16 March 2026.
  - Full recording:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg4nGwtn1RY>

- Slides:



<https://surveyfutures.net/events/>

- Survey practice guide also coming up soon

# Conclusion

- Self-completion surveys are viable for UK probability-based general population surveys
- UK practitioners generally adhere to evidence-based guidelines based on academic evidence; however, there is still scope for improvement in terms of response rates, sample composition and recruitment
- Innovative recruitment practices exist across the survey landscape in the UK; further research is required to determine their effectiveness
- Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in social survey research is an imperative. While some measures are costly, other basic measures can be readily implemented to include groups with barriers to participation. More quantitative research is needed



# SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION  
METHODS COLLABORATION

## Recruitment for surveys without field Interviewers: Improving representativeness, accessibility and inclusivity

Cristian Domarchi<sup>1</sup> • Nhlanhla Ndebele<sup>2</sup> • Olga Maslovskaya<sup>1</sup> • Rory Fitzgerald<sup>2</sup> • Peter Lynn<sup>3</sup> • Ruxandra Cumanaru<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Southampton, UK; <sup>2</sup>ESS/City St George's University of London; <sup>3</sup>ISER/University of Essex

**Survey Futures International Conference • London • 17-18 June 2026**



University of Essex



University of  
Southampton



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council

