



**SURVEY
FUTURES**
SURVEY DATA COLLECTION
METHODS COLLABORATION

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



Acknowledgements



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Face-to-face survey interviewers

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Why does face-to-face interviewing capacity matter?

- **Reaches the hardest to reach** — marginalised and vulnerable groups who won't respond by other modes
- **Supports data quality** — complex procedures, cognitive assessments, random within-household selection, probing for official classifications
- **Builds trust and secures participation** — especially for complex topics, long commitments, and longitudinal studies

About the project

Aim: Understand the capacity and skills needs of face-to-face survey interviewers — and what needs to happen to sustain them

Two stages of research

Stage	What	Who	When
Stage 1a	Interviews with Field Operations Leads	11 managers across 11 UK organisations	Late 2023–early 2024
Stage 1b	Focus groups with F2F interviewers	27 interviewers across 4 online groups	June 2024
Stage 2	Deliberative stakeholder workshops	17 stakeholders representing 9 organisations	2025

What COVID-19 Did to Face-to-Face Interviewing – the views of field managers

- Lockdowns paused in-person fieldwork
- **Widespread loss of experienced interviewers** — proving difficult to replace
- Nature of F2F interviewer work changing —now involves more follow ups of **non-responders** to initial requests to take part online
- These non-responders are among the **hardest to persuade**
- Falling response rates linked to:
 - Public unwillingness to engage with strangers
 - Distrust in government
 - GDPR concerns
 - Blurring of home and work life



F2F interviewer perspectives

- **What they value:**
 - Pride in the social value of their work
 - Satisfaction from engaging with the public
- **What they find hard:**
 - Persuading an increasingly reluctant public — and feeling under-equipped to do so
 - Slow, cumbersome technology hindering their work
 - Newer interviewers: piecework pay feels unfair when you're still building skills
- **What they want:**
 - Researchers and commissioners to understand the realities on the doorstep
 - Shorter, more engaging surveys
 - More feedback loops and involvement in survey design
 - Better mentorship and peer support — especially for newer interviewers

The deliberative workshops

- 3 deliberative workshops in 2025 with 17 stakeholders from 9 organisations – government, industry, third sector focused on F2F interviewer recruitment and retention
- Workshop 1 → **Prioritised the challenges** Workshop 2 → **Generated and discussed solutions** Workshop 3 → **Agreed what to take forward**
- Challenges prioritised:
 - Declining public willingness to participate in F2F surveys
 - Changing F2F interviewing skills required
 - Interviewer pay
 - Acceleration to mixed mode
 - F2F interviewer recruitment costs

Stakeholder-generated solutions to challenges of F2F interviewer recruitment & retention

Declining public willingness to participate in F2F surveys

- 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 F2F interviewing skills required

- 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.

F2F interviewer 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.

Solutions stakeholders agreed to take forward

-  **Strengthen commissioner–interviewer relationships** — boosting commissioners understanding fieldwork realities, improving recognition of interviewers’ work
-  **Develop open-access, high-level interviewer training** — focused on co-operation from seldom-heard groups; run by a professional body (e.g. MRS)
-  **Build a compelling business case for F2F** — to help commissioners argue for appropriate investment
-  **Forecasting future F2F demand** — when does capacity become unsustainable?

Implications and next steps: building on the findings from this research

The bigger picture: capacity at risk



A Position statement – a call to action



Survey Futures Position Statement on the Future of Face-to-Face Interviewing

- *Developed with a cross-industry group of social researchers — to be published 2026*

Core message:

- Face-to-face interviewing is critical national data infrastructure. It must be actively sustained.

For funders and budget holders:

- Recognise F2F as critical infrastructure
- Ensure budgets reflect the **true cost** of maintaining a skilled, professional workforce and the systems that support them

For survey commissioners and designers:

- Use F2F **strategically** — for the tasks it is uniquely placed to perform
- Fully consider the strengths and limitations of **all modes** in survey design

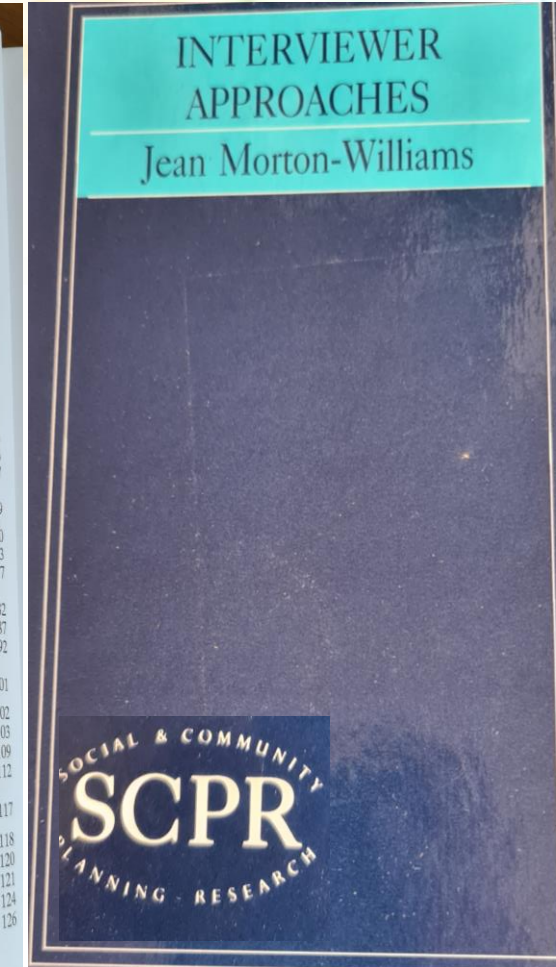
Underpinning all of this:

- If investment concentrates on online alone, we create **an unbalanced system** that cannot deliver the representative evidence policy demands

What next? My thoughts

- Better understanding of public attitudes to taking part in surveys and to F2F interaction
- Research into what happens on the doorstep, perhaps repeating Jean Morton-Williams' work
- Work together to create an evidence base that demonstrates the value of F2F interviewing as part of a balanced data collection national infrastructure

INTERVIEWER APPROACHES	
vi	
3. THE INTERVIEWER'S TASKS IN OBTAINING INTERVIEWS	39
Initial preparation	40
The first visit to the interviewing area	43
Finding addresses	44
Establishing eligibility of the address	44
Making contact at the address	45
The respondent selection procedure	47
Other types of contacting work	51
4. FIELD MANAGEMENT OPTIONS	53
Number of calls and calling patterns	54
Reissuing noncontacts and refusals to another interviewer	58
Letters to respondents: in advance or at the time of the interview?	60
Telephone appointments	62
Monetary incentives	63
Reducing respondent burden	64
Interviewer motivation	65
Length of fieldwork period	66
Piloting	66
Monitoring progress	67
5. THE FIRST CONTACT	69
Tape recorded doorstep introductions	70
The model of the doorstep situation	73
Putting the message over	77
The experiment in scripting interviewers' survey introductions	82
Response to the interviewers' approach	87
The dynamics of persuasion	92
6. WHY DO PEOPLE AGREE TO BE INTERVIEWED?	101
Helping behaviour	102
The respondent's decision process	103
Goals and motives	109
Why do people refuse to be interviewed?	112
7. INTERVIEWER DOORSTEP STRATEGIES	117
Situational analysis	118
1 Identifying the goals	120
2 The rules governing the doorstep interaction	121
3 Establishing the roles of interviewer and respondent	124
4 The repertoire of behavioural elements	126



Find out more

-  Reports 6 & 7: surveyfutures.net/reports
-  Position Statement: forthcoming available through surveyfutures.net
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Thank you — I'm happy to take questions.