

# **Challenging Behaviour: Using behavioural science in ONS**

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Office for National Statistics

# The Office for National Statistics:

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- collects and publishes statistics about the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels.
- conducts the census in England and Wales every 10 years; in 2017 it carried out a *Census Test* to prepare for 2021.
- conducts surveys of businesses, households and individuals: participation in the census and business surveys is compulsory; participation in social surveys is voluntary.
- employs over 1,000 social survey interviewers, who work face-to-face, on the telephone and at ports and airports.
- collects data for core social surveys like the Labour Force Survey, and wins competitive tenders to run externally-funded surveys, such as the National Survey for Wales.

# What is Behavioural Science?

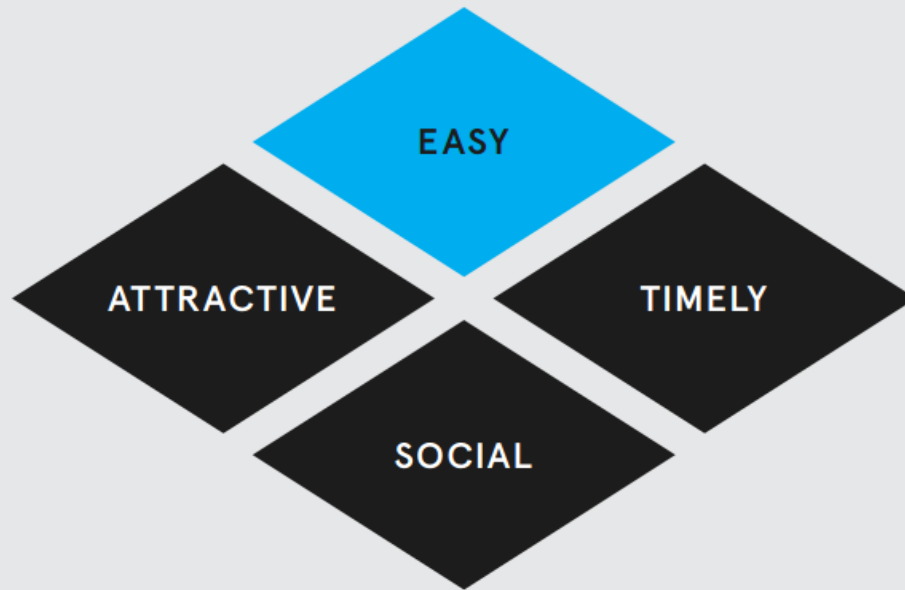
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Most of us believe that we are highly rational, making decisions on the basis of logic and evidence.

Psychological research shows that our actions and behaviour are influenced as much by automatic reactions as by our cognitive processing.

**Behavioural science** is about designing services and interventions to reflect the ways people really behave, rather than the ways theory or logic suggests they should rationally behave.

# The Behavioural Insights Team



**EAST**

Four simple ways to  
apply behavioural insights

THE  
BEHAVIOURAL  
INSIGHTS TEAM.

# TEST

**T = target**

**E = explore**

**S = solution**

**T = trial**

# Six 'pilot' projects

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## 2017 Census Test

- Behaviourally-informed invitation and reminder letters  
CENSUS TEST LETTERS
- Behaviourally-informed calling cards, at no contact addresses  
CENSUS TEST CALLING CARDS

## Social Surveys

- A behaviourally informed advance letter for the Labour Force Survey  
LFS LETTER
- An email intervention to build resilience in telephone interviewers  
TELEPHONE INTERVIEWERS

## Engagement

- Networking to build staff engagement in ONS headquarters  
STAFF ENGAGEMENT
- Influencing stakeholders' engagement with the Office for Statistics Regulation  
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

# 2017 Census Test

## CENSUS TEST LETTERS

Invitation to participate online, but no field follow-up.

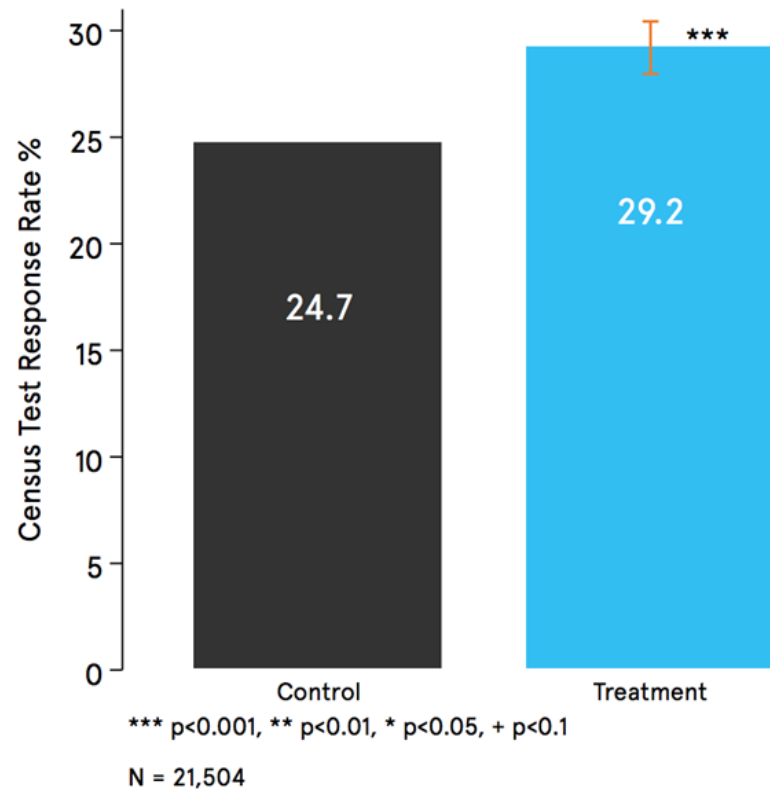
BIT created versions of invitation and reminder letters, drawing on principles of:

- social norms
- endowed progress
- general costs.

The reminder letters:

- used deadlines to invoke scarcity
- conveyed monitoring of non-response

Response to Census Test  
(with invitation and three reminders)



# 2017 Census Test

## CENSUS TEST CALLING CARDS

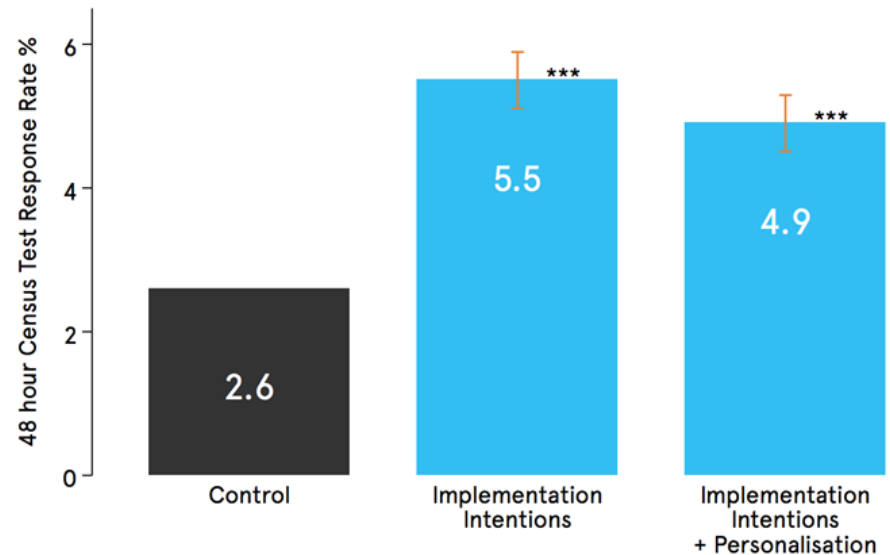
Invitation to participate online,  
followed by field force follow-up

BIT created two calling cards: both  
made use of:

- implementation intentions
- prompts to help recipients plan when they would complete the census.

In addition, one included  
personalisation by the field worker.

Response to Census Test within 48 hours  
(addresses which had not previously responded)



\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.1$

N = 27,801

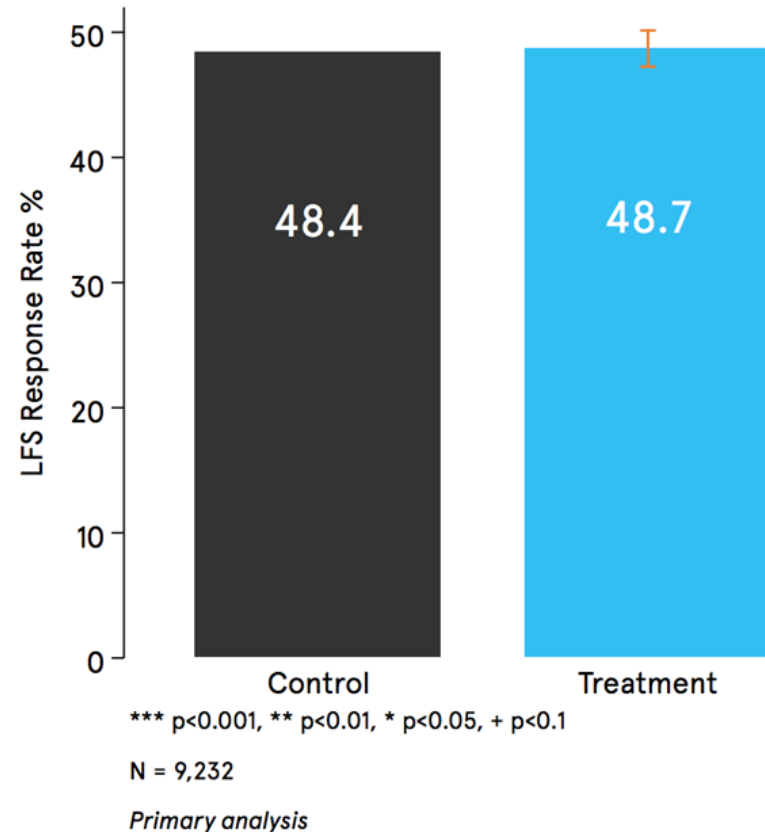
Primary analysis

# Social Survey

## LFS LETTER

BIT modified the LFS advance letter. The redesigned letter:

- was significantly shorter than the existing letter
- simplified content, stressing that respondents were chosen to represent their local area, and emphasising the expression of thanks.





# Social Survey

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## TELEPHONE INTERVIEWERS

BIT worked with ONS's Social Survey Division to improve the motivation and performance of telephone interviewers whose main task is to collect responses to the LFS.

The trial consisted of a series of eight email messages based on psychology research that were designed to boost interviewers' well-being and, in turn, productivity.

The intervention messages were tested against neutral, control messages.

BIT found no significant difference between the treatment and control groups in this trial.



# Engagement

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## STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Increasing social ties among employees should boost engagement. “Randomised Coffee Trials” are used to foster ties and boost morale.

BIT proposed that ONS trial a version of the Randomised Coffee Trial, matching individuals on employment and other characteristics.

The customer did not feel that the benefits outweighed the potential risks and costs, so did not proceed to run the trial.



## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) wanted to encourage Statistical Heads of Profession to engage positively with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, through its presentation and articulation, and by changing its own way of working.

BIT produced:

- a literature review showing how existing research could help;
- a behavioural science toolkit; and
- a workshop presented at the team’s away day.

# Randomised Control Trials?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS

## No RCT

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# Useful Outcome?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS

## No RCT

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# Useful Outcome?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

## No RCT

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# Useful Outcome?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

## No RCT

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# Positive Effect?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

## No RCT

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# Positive Effect?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

~~LFS LETTER~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

## No RCT

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT



# Positive Effect?

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## RCT

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

~~LFS LETTER~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

## No RCT

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

# External or Internal Behaviours?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS

# Useful Outcome?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS

# Useful Outcome?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS

# Useful Outcome?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

# Positive Effect?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

LFS LETTER

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

# Positive Effect?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

~~LFS LETTER~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~

# Positive Effect?

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## External

CENSUS TEST  
LETTERS

CENSUS TEST  
CALLING CARDS

~~LFS LETTER~~

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

## Internal

~~STAFF ENGAGEMENT~~

~~TELEPHONE  
INTERVIEWERS~~



# Lessons Learned

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- Don't assume knowledge
- Involve customers in solution generation
- Explore risk appetite
- Behaviour change, not culture change
- Easier to influence external behaviours
- For internal:
  - Needs commitment
  - Difficult to communicate

# Where successful, the gains can be large!

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