Methods to improve respondent engagement in online surveys

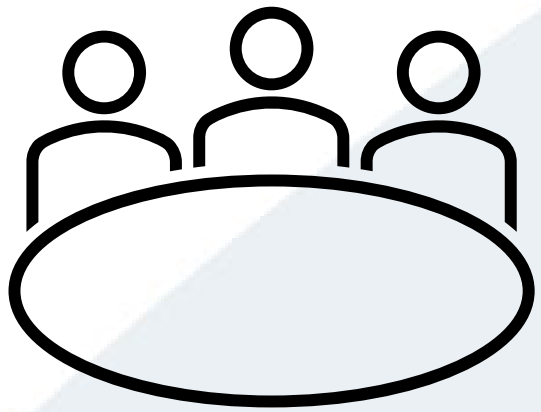
Office for National Statistics
Social Survey Transformation

Maria Tortoriello and Claire Tiley

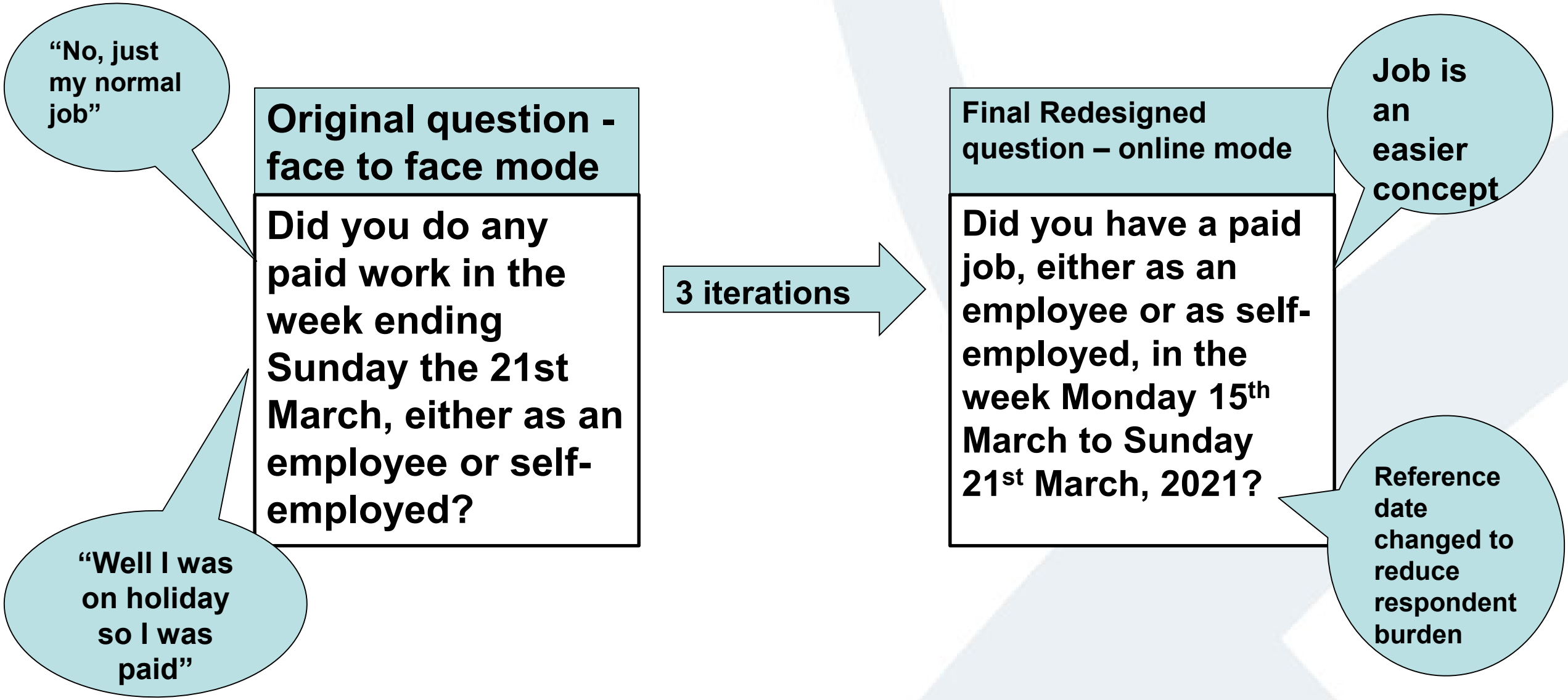
Key Research Areas

Qualitative Development and Testing Process

- User Centered Design approach to developing materials and questions.
- Discovery – collecting data user requirements
- Qualitative testing methods:
  - Pop-up testing
  - Cognitive testing
  - Focus groups
- Iterative process – usually 3 rounds of cognitive testing
- Language used



Adapting Questions for Online Mode



Office for National Statistics

The Resident
<Address line 1>
<Address line 2>
<Town>
<County>
<Postcode>

Segensworth Road
Titchfield, Fareham
PO15 5RR

<Month Year>
<REF XXXXXX>

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is an independent government department and the UK's largest provider of statistics. We collect and publish official statistics about our society and economy and we run the census every ten years. As Director General of the ONS, I would like to inform you that we are runnin a UK-wide online study, and we would like you to be a part of it.

Why should I take part?

Your address has been selected to make sure your area is properly represented in Offici Statistics. This letter came with an information slip, explaining how taking part can impact on government decisions that shape facilities and services you may use.

What happens next?

In a few days you will receive a letter inviting you to take part in the online study. This will contain a household access code and instructions for accessing our secure system. You can take part on any computer, smart phone, or tablet with internet access, and ca call us on **0800 085 7376** if you need help.

Who can take part?

All adults in your household over the age of 16 have been chosen to take part. Any related adult may respond on the behalf of another household member. They will only be asked about facts, not opinions.

How can I find out more?

The information slip that came with this letter tells you more, or you can visit **www.ons.gov.uk/surveys** or phone us for free on **0800 085 7376**.

Thank you for your time.
Yours faithfully,

Iain Bell – Director General

To request a large print or Braille letter, phone us for free on 0800 085 7376.

The information you give us is protected by law and is treated as confidential. It will be used for statistical purposes only. The Office for National Statistics is not linked to any political parties.

Office for National Statistics

The Resident
<Address line 1>
<Address line 2>
<Town>
<County>
<Postcode>

Segensworth Road
Titchfield, Fareham
PO15 5RR

<Month Year>
<REF XXXXXX>

Dear Sir/Madam,

I recently wrote to inform you that the Office for National Statistics is running a UK-wide online study, and we would like you to be a part of it. The study covers a range of topics, including work, retirement, higher education, unemployment and looking after the family or home.

How do I take part?

Here is your household access code. Use this to complete the study following the steps below.

1234 5678 9012

Step 1 — Using your computer, tablet or smart phone, go to **www.ons.gov.uk/takepart** and click 'start now'

Step 2 — Enter your **access code** in the boxes provided

Step 3 — Complete **the study** and submit when done

How long will it take? The study should take between 10 and 20 minutes to complete.

Who should take part? All adults in your household over the age of 16 should take part. Any related adult may respond on the behalf of another household member - they will only be asked about facts, not opinions.

When should I complete it by? You should complete the study by DATE. If you do not take part online by DATE, one of our interviewers may contact you to conduct the study in person. Most people we invite to our studies take part – don't miss your chance to be counted.

What if I need help? If you need help to take part online, please phone us for free on **0800 085 7376**. For further information go to our website **www.ons.gov.uk/surveys**.

Thank you for your time
Yours faithfully,

Iain Bell – Director General

To request a large print or Braille letter, phone us for free on 0800 085 7376.

The information you give us is protected by law and is treated as confidential. It will be used for statistical purposes only. The Office for National Statistics is not linked to any political parties.

Office for National Statistics

The Resident
<Address line 1>
<Address line 2>
<Town>
<County>
<Postcode>

Segensworth Road
Titchfield, Fareham
PO15 5RR

<Month Year>
<REF XXXXXX>

Dear Sir/Madam,

I recently invited you to take part in a UK-wide online study for the Office for National Statistics. At the time of writing, your whole household does not appear to have completed the study. If you have all completed the study in the last few days, please ignore this letter. If you have not completed it yet, I would like to remind you of the importance of doing so.

How do I take part?

Go to the study website and enter your household access code in the space provided.

Study website: **www.ons.gov.uk/takepart**

Household access code: **0123 4567 8901**

About the study

The study takes between 10 and 20 minutes to complete. All adults over 16 in your household should take part by DATE. If you do not take part online by DATE, one of our interviewers may contact you to conduct the study in person or you may lose your chance to participate. If you need help or cannot take part online, please phone us for free on **0800 085 7376**. For further information go to our website **www.ons.gov.uk/surveys**.

Why you should take part

The information we get in our studies goes on to inform government decision making. This is not just on policies at a national level, but can also influence facilities and services local to you. We want to hear from you no matter what your situation is, so we have made sure that no special knowledge is needed to complete the study. The statistics we publish do not contain any information that could identify you.

Thank you for your time.
Yours faithfully,

Iain Bell – Director General

To request a large print or Braille letter, phone us for free on 0800 085 7376.

The information you give us is protected by law and is treated as confidential. It will be used for statistical purposes only. The Office for National Statistics is not linked to any political parties.

Leaflet with Pre-Notification Letter

Office for National Statistics

What you need to know

The Office for National Statistics is the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and the recognised national statistics institute of the UK. We are not a commercial organisation and do not work for political parties.

We would like your household to take part in a UK-wide online study. The steps to the right show how our studies inform government decisions, for example past statistics from our studies led to the introduction of the winter fuel allowance. By taking part you are ensuring your local area and the UK are properly represented in statistics, which go on to have a big impact on us all.

Whoever you are, whatever you do, we are keen to hear from you.

To take part, all you need to do is complete step 2

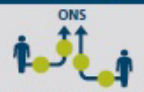
Step 1

Your household is chosen

Step 2

You complete the study

Step 3



We collect the data

Step 4

We analyse and release the data as statistics

Step 5

Statistics inform decisions

How to find out more

Online

Our website contains more information about how you were chosen and what we do with your data: **www.ons.gov.uk**. You can also read our statistics here for free.

If you would like to see the stories behind our work, you can also visit: **http://visual.ons.gov.uk**.

By telephone

You can call us for free on **0800 085 7376**.
NGT service (18001) **0800 085 7376**

Our phone lines are open:
Monday to Thursday – 9am to 9pm
Friday – 9am to 8pm
Saturday – 9am to 1pm

Confidentiality

The information you give us will be treated as confidential as directed by the code of practice for Official Statistics. It will be used to produce statistics that will not identify you or anyone in your household. Survey information is also provided to other approved organisations for statistical purposes only. All such statistics produced are subject to the code and the same standards of protection are applied to your information at all times. Subject to the code, a third party will be processing the data from this study. None of your information will be sold on.

We can also be found on social media:

www.twitter.com/**ONS** www.facebook.com/**ONS**

To request a large print or Braille letter, phone us for free on 0800 085 7376.

Communication Strategy - Test

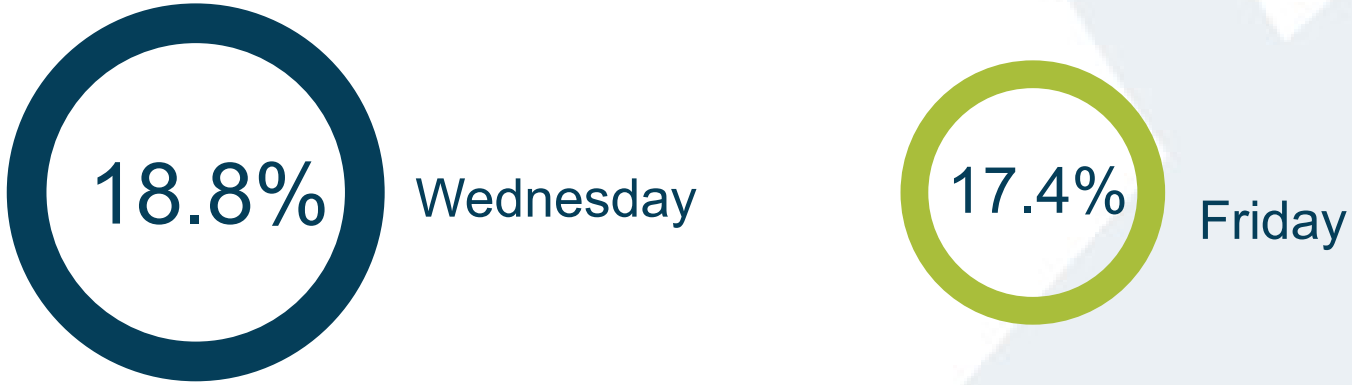
- We tested 3 different communication strategies, using combinations of these materials, to see which yielded the highest response rates.

- We also tested if the day of the week letters were despatched made a difference to response rates.

Communications Strategy – Test Results

- Letter Combinations:

- Letter Dispatch Day:

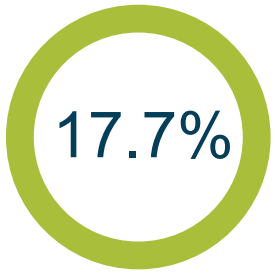


Envelope branding and colour - Quantitative testing

Brown versions also…

Envelope Colour – Test Results

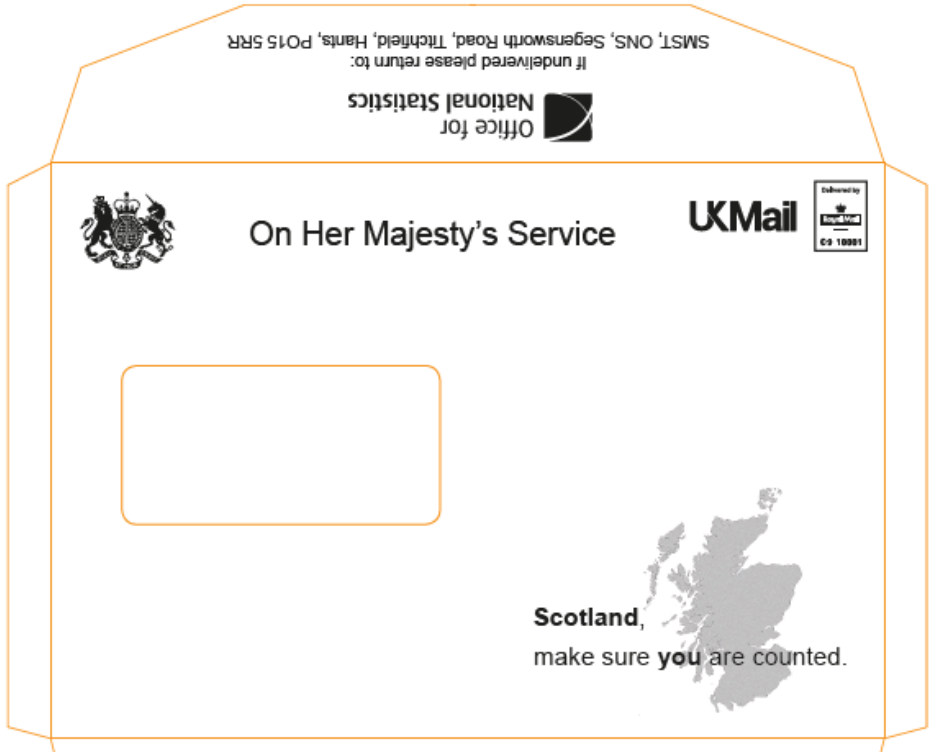
Brown Envelope



White Envelope

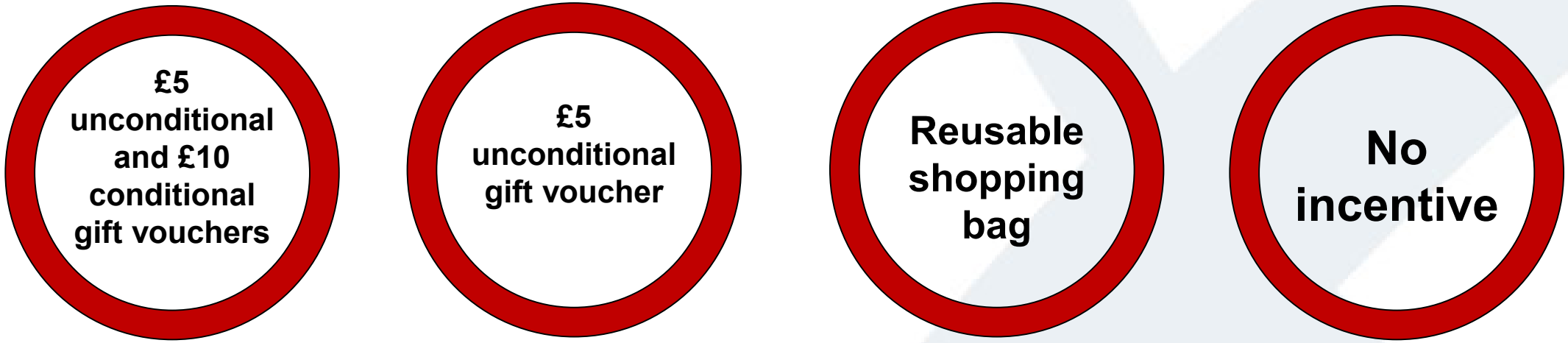
Envelope Branding – Test Results

Country	With branding (%)	Without branding (%)	Total (%)
England	-	-	19.6
Scotland	16.8	17.2	17.0
Wales	18.0	17.4	17.7



Incentives

- We also looked at the impact of using different incentives to improve response rate.
- We compared the use of monetary incentives (gift voucher) with non-monetary incentives (reusable shopping bag)
- We also compared the use of conditional incentives with unconditional incentives
- We tested 4 experimental conditions:



Incentives - Test Results

- Overall (adjusted for 95% eligibility):

Incentives - Test Results

- Cost & Effectiveness:

£1.33 Shopping Bag

£15.72 £5 unconditional / £10 conditional

£5.33 £5 conditional

£0.33 No Incentive

Discussion Time!

- What materials do you send to respondents in your country? (E.g. invitation letter, reminder letter, thank you letter)
- Do you adapt materials for different population groups in your country?
- Have you ever used any monetary (e.g. £5 voucher) or non-monetary incentives (e.g. a re-useable shopping bag) to improve response to surveys in your country?
- If so, are these effective in improving response rates?

Office for National Statistics

1) Adapting online surveys during the pandemic

2) Maintaining quality when delivering at pace

Changes due to the Pandemic

- Designing Surveys at a fast pace
- New and Changing Requirements
  - Requirement to implement an online survey within a month
  - New question requirements
  - Requirement to use the online Labour Market Survey (LMS) as a sub sample for new surveys: Covid-19 Infection Survey and Opinions Survey

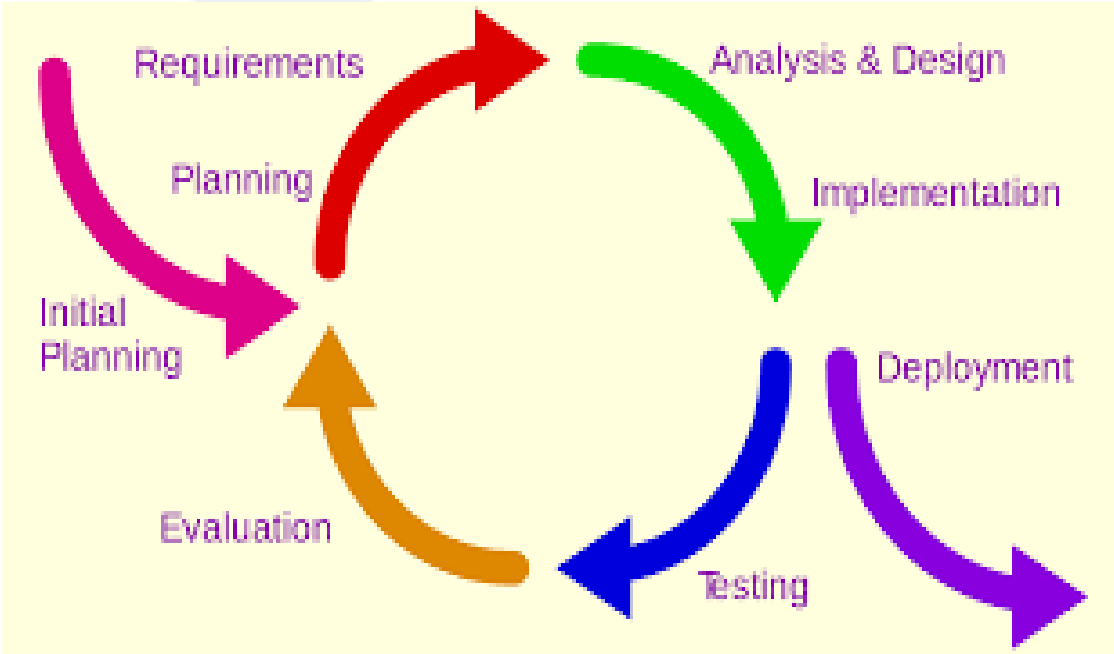
Responding to the pandemic with iterative analysis and design

Use the survey data to respond to new requirements and to refine the survey

- Prompt and continuous analysis of:
  - Response data
  - Paradata
  - Characteristic profile of responders

- To identify change, problems and where
- improvements could be made

- Iterative evaluation and continuous development of the survey design (questionnaire, materials, field processes)



Response data

Response had changed in many ways

- Face to Face response stopped
- Online response had room for improvement
- Day of completion had changed – no longer peaking at the weekend
- Time taken to complete the survey could also be improved

Encouraging quicker response

Requirement: The Covid-19 Infection Survey required us to process the data as quick as possible to produce key statistics for government

Our analysis of response data prompted us to:

- reduce the field period from 2 weeks to 10 days to encourage a quicker response
- experiment with changing the ‘landing day’ of materials to account for increased working from home/staying at home and postal delays
- increase the incentive to £25 to encourage response
- introduce a second reminder to improve response

Paradata

“Data automatically generated when respondents answer online surveys”
e.g. Device type, browser type, question ‘drop-out’

- Provide valuable insight into respondent interaction with the survey
- Allow us to monitor quality

  - **Type of Device/Browser**
    - Discovered problems with IPADs
  - **Survey ‘drop out’ and non-response**
    - No identified problems
    - Consistent with previous tests
  - **Number of times a respondent ‘accessed’ the survey**
    - Consistent with previous tests
    - Reassurance of good user experience

Who is responding to our survey?

- Explore characteristic profile of respondents
- Compare with other surveys

- **Labour Market Survey 2019** (mixed mode test)
  Under-representing
    - Younger age groups
    - Younger males
    - Deprived areas

- **LMS (Beta) 2020** (Online only survey launched during Covid19)
    - Bias grown during the pandemic

	Labour Market Survey		Labour Force Survey		Mid Year Population Estimates
15 and under	3,072	17.7%	12,667,269	19.2%	18.9%
16-24	1,601	9.2%	6,935,588	10.5%	10.7%
25-34	2,039	11.8%	8,950,872	13.6%	13.5%
35-44	2,169	12.5%	8,337,253	12.7%	12.6%
45-55	2,418	14.0%	9,037,207	13.7%	13.8%
55-64	2,362	13.6%	8,042,707	12.2%	12.0%
65 and over	3,666	21.2%	11,902,618	18.1%	18.4%

Inclusivity project

Multi-discipline team

Objective = to achieve a more balanced **mixed-mode** responding LMS sample

Targeting respondent materials?	Adapting sampling design?

Discussion Time!

- Do you struggle to reach certain population groups in your country?

Thank you for your attention

More information is available on the ONS website at https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/programmesanddprojects/censusanddatacollectiontransformationprogramme

Contact details:
Maria.Tortoriello@ons.gov.uk
and
Claire.Tiley@ons.gov.uk