

# Social surveys response to Covid-19: example of the United Kingdom

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# Office for National Statistics (ONS): Who are we and what do we do?

- The ONS is the **executive office of the UK Statistics Authority**, which is an independent body directly accountable to Parliament.
- Our main responsibilities are **collecting, analysing and disseminating statistics about the UK's economy, society and population**. These statistics are **independent** of government.

# ONS Social Survey division

- **The ONS Social Survey Division is the largest division in ONS** with over 1,400 office staff and the nationwide field force.
- We are responsible for many of the largest social surveys run in the United Kingdom.
- Uniquely to ONS we regularly compete in the commercial survey market and bring in over £12m in annual external income.

# Through our surveys, we collect information on.....

- **Employment** circumstances of people in the UK .
- Household **income distribution**, housing, material deprivation and health.
- Household **spending patterns** in the UK.
- **Living standards** and circumstances of people living in the UK.
- Households **assets and debts**, borrowing and saving, plans for retirement in the UK.
- Passengers **entering and leaving the UK**.
- **People's opinions on a range of topics** changing regularly.
- **Important information about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on society.**

# ONS Social surveys

**Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF)**

**Family Resources Survey (FRS)**

**Survey on Living Conditions (SLC)**

**Labour Force Survey (LFS)**

**Household Assets Survey (HAS)**



**Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)**

**International Passenger Survey (IPS)**

**National Survey for Wales (NSW)**

# Response to Covid-19 : adapt our surveys

- Face to face interviewing was paused for all surveys on 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2020
- Telephone interviewing started for most surveys in April

- Protect our members of staff, in particular the field force.
- Protect the respondents.
- Continue our operations whenever possible (or pause operations when no other options available).
- Collect new data to inform the public on the impact of the virus on UK society.

# Response to the pandemic from a survey point of view

- Questionnaires were **adapted to telephone** mode: they were shortened, in consultation with our users; some questions and response options were changed.
- We included **new coronavirus-related questions** to questionnaires.
- We reviewed **how to make contact** with respondents.
- We reviewed **advance letters** received by respondents..
- We made **changes to the ONS website**, to ensure that the information is up-to-date.
- We reviewed **incentives** and **sample sizes**.
- We are continuously **monitoring response rates** and **assessing the impact of changes** on data quality and data processing.

# Response to the pandemic from a field force point of view

- We enabled 700 face-to-face interviewers and 200 office-based telephone interviewers to **work from home** and **rolled out Skype to all interviewers**.
- We **developed new training material** (some delivered via Skype) for interviewers.
- The workload for our field force reduced dramatically and recruitment had to be stopped. **We reviewed resources** and some interviewers help with the wider Civil Service response to Covid-19 and new surveys.
- We reviewed **work allocation** for interviewers as they can now interview people on the phone across the country.
- Some interviewers help with **a new Covid-19 infection survey monitoring the infection rates in the population**.



# Coronavirus-related information collected on the Survey on Living conditions (SLC) survey

- Whether the household income has changed at all compared to the start of the coronavirus outbreak in the UK.
- The reasons for the decrease or increase in household income.
- Whether people have had any time off work due to coronavirus, self-isolation and whether they were paid during that time.
- The impact of new measures the Government has introduced to protect people's earnings during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

# We have developed new surveys in a very short time

- Survey 1: The **Covid-19 infection survey**, a very large survey to monitor Covid-19 infection rates in the UK.
- Survey 2: to measure Covid-19 **mass testing coverage** and infection rates in a specific town (Liverpool).
- Surveys 3-8: **5 self-isolation studies** focusing on the impact of self-isolation (for example whether it affects financial situation, work, mental health etc. ) and compliance with self isolation for 5 different groups of people.
- Survey 9: **Over 80s Vaccines Insights Study**, where 2000 responses were collected from people aged 80+ in a 10 minutes telephone interview over 1 week, with **behavioural questions around vaccination**.

# Next steps: Transforming surveys design. Moving towards large mixed modes surveys?

**November 2019 : first live mixed mode (online/phone) survey, the Opinions and Lifestyle survey (OPN).**

This enabled the ONS to respond quickly and collect important information on the impact of Covid-19 on UK society on a weekly basis



**March 2020: launch of an online longitudinal Labour Market survey**

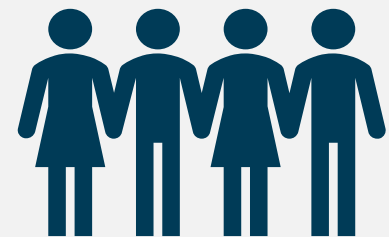
- Approximately 35,000 households a week are now being sampled (with a conditional incentive of £25 at wave 1 and £10 at subsequent waves)
- Response rates to online wave 1 is running at around a third of respondents
- The Covid-19 infection survey is being sub-sampled from wave 1 since April 2020.

# Questions time and discussion session

- What **changes in data collection** happened in your countries as a result of the pandemic?
- What are the **similarities and differences** with the United Kingdom?
- Are you **collecting any coronavirus-related information** in your surveys, and if, which ones?

More information is available on the ONS website at  
[www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

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Thank you for your attention