Understanding Society Main Study changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Wave 14 release)

Last revised 30 October 2024

Understanding Society

Economic and Social Research Council

Contents

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented and resulted in changes to many areas of society including household surveys like Understanding Society, which needed to adapt to incorporate these changes. The pandemic impacted data collection in Understanding Society, but it also meant that the survey content and data processing also had to be adapted. Many of these changes are of direct relevance to Understanding Society data users and to that end, this document sets out the relevant details of the pandemic changes on the main survey – changes to the fieldwork, the questionnaire (including new questions) the impact on response rates and derived variables.

Another important component of the Understanding Society response to the pandemic was the development of the Understanding Society COVID-19 study. The COVID-19 survey started in April 2020 and interviewed participants from the main Understanding Society sample via a web-survey on a nearly monthly basis throughout 2020 and for selected months in 2021 – in parallel to the Understanding Society main study.[1] The COVID-19 study is not the focus of the present document as detailed accounts of it can be found in several other publications including the COVID-19 user guide.

2. Fieldwork challenges

2.1 Mode transitions

The COVID-19 pandemic, and associated lockdown, meant that face-to-face interviewing had to be suspended on Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study. We were fortunate that the study already employed a mixed-mode design, with CAPI, CATI, and web versions of the questionnaire already being used. When face-to-face interviewing was suspended, all adult sample members were invited to complete their annual interview online. Those who did not complete online were issued to interviewers, who then tried to make contact and conduct the interview by telephone. However, we do not have up-to-date telephone numbers for all of the sample members, and some sample members were unwilling to complete either online or by telephone. It may also be the case that some of those who had not participated in the survey recently were more willing to take part. This has the potential to affect the representation of those sample members who did participate. In this analysis, completed in 2021, we compared the sample issued from April to December 2020 sample (part of Wave 11 Year 2, and Wave 12 Year 1), with the same samples issued from April to December 2019 sample (part of Wave 10 Year 2, and Wave 11 Year 1), we found that around three-quarters of those who had completed in CAPI in 2019 took part in 2020 using a different mode. Around one-quarter of those who had not responded in 2019, did respond in 2020. Overall, the response rate for the 2020 sample was just 1.5 percentage points lower than the response in 2019. This differs between the sample types, with smaller differences in the 2019 samples that were web-first and ring-fenced, but larger in the group that had been in the CAPI-first low web propensity sample. This is a recurring finding – response in 2020 was lower among those in the low web propensity sample. We found that response in 2020 was particularly lower for those in the higher age groups, those who live alone, and those with lower levels of education.

An analysis of the unweighted sample composition indicates that there are significant differences in the responding sample in 2020, but that these differences are relatively small, with most under 2

[1] The Understanding Society COVID-19 Study was conducted in April, May, June, July, September, November 2020, January, March and September 2021.

percentage point differences. *However, researchers should be aware of the potential for these differences to affect analyses and so use the correct weights or control for factors which may affect response in their models.*

Table 1 contains the breakdown of mode of completion combination in 2020 by fieldwork protocol in 2019 (i.e., low propensity, ring-fenced, and web first). It also differentiates the non-responding and ineligible participants regardless of the mode they were invited to complete the survey.

Table 1. Sample members by combination of mode of completion for the sample issued in 2020 (unweighted)

		Full sample		Ring-fenced		Low propensity		Web first	
2019	2020	% sample	% 2019 mode	% sample	% 2019 mode	% sample	% 2019 mode	% sample	% 2019 mode
CAPI	CATI	9.4	33.5	16.6	25.7	23.6	33.9	5.4	44.2
CAPI	Web	12.1	43.2	37.0	57.5	27.9	40.1	3.1	25.1
CAPI	Nonrespondent	6.6	23.4	10.8	16.8	18.1	26.0	3.8	30.8
CATI	CATI	0.2	38.8	0.2	32.4	0.3	55.6	0.2	37.9
CATI	Web	0.2	36.1	0.3	52.9	0.1	16.7	0.1	33.7
CATI	Nonrespondent	0.1	25.2	0.1	14.7	0.2	27.8	0.1	28.4
Web	CATI	2.3	5.0	0.3	3.4	0.3	7.9	3.2	5.0
Web	Web	39.2	84.0	7.6	83.7	2.8	78.9	53.0	84.1
Web	Nonrespondent	5.1	11.0	1.2	12.9	0.5	13.2	6.9	10.9
Nonrespondent	CATI	1.7	8.0	1.7	7.1	2.1	8.9	1.6	8.2
Nonrespondent	Web	3.9	18.6	4.9	20.8	4.1	17.6	3.6	18.0
Nonrespondent	Nonrespondent	15.3	73.4	17.0	72.1	17.2	73.5	14.6	73.8
Ineligible	CATI	0.3	8.0	0.4	14.7	0.4	15.1	0.3	6.3
Ineligible	Web	1.0	26.7	0.8	32.0	0.4	14.0	1.2	27.1
Ineligible	Nonrespondent	2.5	65.3	1.3	53.3	2.1	71.0	2.9	66.6
N		31,776		6,144		3,174		22,458	

2.2 Response rates

Table 2 presents the unweighted response rates of the 2019 and 2020 adult samples for the full sample and split by fieldwork protocol. The overall response rate barely changed between 2019 and 2020. For the full sample, the response rate dropped 1.5 percentage point after the COVID-19 pandemic. The figures are similar for the web-first – a decline of 1.4 percentage point – and ring-fenced – an increase of 1.8 percentage points – groups. In contrast, the low propensity subsample experienced a substantial drop of 8.7 percentage points following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the change in response rates varied across individual characteristics (age, ethnic background, whether a parent, whether living in an urban or rural area, education) and household characteristics (household type and household income).

The multivariate models were estimated to help identify how the factors related to response have changed after the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes in fieldwork protocols once controlled for other factors. The results of the models indicate that being older and living alone or lacking cognitive skills – low education level – explain the change in the response propensity between 2019 and 2020, especially in the low propensity subsample. For further details please see (Cabrera Alvarez, Burton & Lynn (2021).

Table 2. Response rates by sample subgroups (unweighted)

	Full sample		Ring-fenced		Low propensity		Web-first		N (2020)
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	
Total	71.8	70.3***	67.9	69.7**	70.7	62.0***	73.0	71.6**	31,776
Sex									
Male	67.6	66.2**	62.3	64.3*	65.0	56.2***	69.5	68.0*	14,807
Female	75.4	73.9***	72.9	74.2	75.6	66.9***	76.1	74.8**	16,969
Age									
16-29	56.4	56.6	50.9	55.6**	58.3	53.2*	57.7	57.5	6,878
30-44	68.1	67.4	63.5	64.8	65.2	59.5*	69.6	68.8	6,757
45-64	75.2	74.8	69.8	75.0***	74.2	66.9***	76.9	75.8	10,704
65+	83.5	79.1***	82.3	78.0***	81.5	66.4***	84.2	81.6***	7,437
Ethnicity									
White British	77.9	76.0***	74.2	76.1**	76.5	67.0***	79.2	77.2***	22,914
Black	53.2	52.7	48.9	44.4	58.7	56.7	53.8	54.6	1,525
Asian	61.3	60.8	60.3	60.1	59.4	54.2*	62.0	62.5	4,293
Other	68.0	65.9*	64.1	65.7	73.4	57.3***	68.3	67.1	2,181
Missing	1.9	7.6***	1.8	9.1**	1.6	4.3	2.0	7.6***	863
Own children in household									
No child	72.0	70.6**	68.2	70.2**	70.1	61.0***	73.4	72.1*	2,4192
Children	71.1	69.4**	67.2	68.0	72.6	65.5***	72.0	70.3**	7584
Urban or rural area									
Urban area	70.4	68.8***	67.1	67.8	67.0	57.7***	71.7	70.2**	24,443
Rural area	76.2	75.3	70.7	75.8***	76.3	68.4***	78.0	77.1	7,333
Highest qualification									
Degree	79.7	80.5	76.7	79.8**	78.0	76.8	80.6	81.0	7,909
Other higher	77.7	78.2	72.9	76.3	73.4	72.4	79.4	79.3	3,573
A level	72.0	71.4	67.3	69.0	68.0	63.0*	73.9	73.1	6,483
GCSE	72.8	71.5*	68.5	71.4*	71.3	64.3***	74.3	72.6*	6,445
Other qualification	75.8	71.1***	74.2	69.9*	78.8	60.0***	75.7	73.7	2,426
No qualification	72.2	63.8***	72.2	67.5*	74.5	56.6***	71.2	65.2***	2,871
Missing	20.7	18.3	16.5	17.5	25.8	20.9	21.4	18.1*	2,069
In paid employment									
Yes	71.8	71.7	66.7	70.5***	70.1	65.7**	73.4	72.7	17,826
No	71.8	68.5***	69.5	68.7	71.2	58.9***	72.6	70.2***	13,950
House owned or rented									
Owned outright	79.8	77.8***	77.7	77.2	76.1	66.6***	80.8	79.3**	10,312
Mortgage	70.3	70.4	64.3	69.2***	67.7	65.0	72.1	71.3	12,563
Rented	64.7	61.4***	60.8	60.9	69.5	56.6***	64.9	62.7**	89,01
Household type									
1 adult pensionable age	88.6	81.2***	89.4	82.9***	89.7	70.4***	87.9	83.9***	2,156
1 adult under pensionable age	80.3	80.3	76.1	79.4	82.3	66.1***	81.0	82.3	1,886
Lone parent	63.2	58.7**	56.2	54.5	67.8	59.1*	64.2	59.7*	1,079
Couple pensionable age	85.6	82.0***	81.5	79.9	81.4	66.1***	87.3	83.9***	4,706

Couple, no children	78.3	79.9*	73.9	82.1***	70.7	72.6	79.9	80.0	3,098
Couple, one or more children	70.9	70.0	66.8	69.5	71.1	67.4	72.0	70.4*	6,802
Other	61.5	60.9	56.3	59.0*	62.1	55.7***	62.9	62.4	12,049
Household income (quintile)									
Q1	68.7	62.9***	63.8	62.0	70.8	56.7***	69.8	64.4**	6,329
Q2	71.1	68.7***	70.4	71.0	70.9	58.4***	71.3	70.0	6,279
Q3	72.0	70.8	68.7	69.9	70.3	64.2**	73.2	72.1	6,361
Q4	73.1	73.3	67.5	71.2**	71.5	69.5	75.0	74.3	6,409
Q5	73.8	75.7***	69.2	74.2***	69.5	69.1	75.2	76.5*	6,398

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Unweighted response rates; Denominator for each percentage presented is all sample members aged 16 or over issued to the field; numerator is the number who completed a full individual interview, either in person, excluding proxy interviews. The independent variables included in this table were measured before 2019 to enable the comparison of the response rates before and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

2.3 Sample balance

Table 3 summarises the profile of those who responded to the adult interview (excluding proxy interviews) before and after the changes implemented in the field protocols. The table presents the unweighted percentages for the participants' characteristics measured before the COVID-19 outbreak. These variables are sex, age, and ethnic background. The differences observed in the sample profile between 2019 and 2020 are minimal for most subgroups and always below 1 percentage point for 32 out of the 39 subgroups. However, the relatively large sample size and the fact that most of the individuals were measured in both years – repeated measures – makes these changes significant for age and ethnic background.

Table 3. Sample profile by year (unweighted)

	2019	***2020***	
	%	**%**	**Sig.**
Sex			
Male	44.1	43.9	
Female	55.9	56.1	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Age			***
16-29	16.3	17.4	
30-44	20.6	20.4	
45-64	35.4	35.8	
65+	27.7	26.3	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Ethnicity			***
White British	77.6	78	
Black	3.8	3.6	
Asian	12	11.7	
Other	6.6	6.4	
Missing	0.1	0.3	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Own children in household			***
No child	75.7	76.4	
Children	24.3	23.6	
Total	100.0	100.0	

Urban or rural area			
Urban area	75.5	75.3	
Rural area	24.5	24.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Highest qualification			***
Degree	27.6	28.5	
Other higher	12.2	12.5	
A level	20.7	20.7	
GCSE	20.2	20.6	
Other qualification	8.3	7.7	
No qualification	9.3	8.2	
Missing	1.8	1.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	
In paid employment			***
Yes	56	57.2	
No	44	42.8	
Total	100.0	100.0	
House owned or rented			***
Owned outright	36.1	35.9	
Mortgage	37.9	39.6	
Rented	25.9	24.5	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Household type			***
1 adult pensionable age	8.6	7.8	
1 adult under pensionable age	6.7	6.8	
Lone parent	2.9	2.8	
Couple pensionable age	17.7	17.3	
Couple, no children	10.6	11.1	
Couple, one or more children	20.9	21.3	
Other	32.6	32.9	
Total	100.0	100.0	
Household income (quintile)			***
Q1	18.3	17.8	
Q2	19.9	19.3	
Q3	20.3	20.2	
Q4	20.6	21	
Q5	20.9	21.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	
N	24,349	22,338	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
The independent variables included in this table were measured before 2019 to enable the comparison of the sample profile before and after COVID-19 outbreak.

3. New survey content

As with Wave 11 the questionnaire content for Wave 12 was adapted midway through Wave 12 fieldwork to accommodate COVID-19 related questions. New questions or questions that had changed went into the field on 28 July 2020. These included a new COVID-19 module asking about Coronavirus symptoms, testing, results, whether hospitalised, shielding and long-term health conditions. The self-employment core module asked a set of new questions about the HM Revenue and Customs Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant (SEISS). To capture furlough status an additional response option was added to some existing employment variables and furlough payments were included in derived variables for total earnings and income. Questions about foodbank usage, originally intended for Wave 12 were brought forward and added midway through Wave 11. Table 4 lists these changes in detail. The questions and the order in which they were asked can been seen in the Wave 11 questionnaire and Wave 12 questionnaire. The Wave 13 questionnaire contains updates to some of these questions and introduced some additional relevant Covid-19 related questions from the Covid-19 Survey. In the Wave 14 questionnaire, questions about long covid were asked to identify areas where the pandemic has had long term impacts on life. These are based on the monthly Covid-19 survey.

Table 4. List of new or updated questions and modules in Wave 11 and 12

Module	Question/Variable	Details of change
Household Grid	ADDRCHCK	Text update: "Due to the coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic, we know that life has changed a lot for everyone in the country. When you are answering the survey, we would like you to answer according to your circumstances now, even if these are not normal. There will be a short section about the effect of the coronavirus on your health, and we have updated some of the response options in the questionnaire to reflect recent changes. However, one of the strengths of the survey is asking a common set of questions each year, to look at how people's lives have changed. To get a better measure of short-term changes in our lives, we have started a monthly Coronavirus Study, which goes into more depth about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives, and you may have received an invitation to take part in this study as well."
	HHCOVIDSYMP PCOVIDSYMP PCOVIDTEST PCOVIDRESULT PCOVIDPOS	Added new questions in Wave 11 Text "ever" added in Wave 12 Question only asked in Wave 11 New question for Wave 12
Household Questionnaire	FOODBANK FOODBANKNO	Added new questions in Wave 11. In Wave 13 these were replaced with new UN 8 item Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) questions (WRYNOFOOD thru' NOEATDAY)
	INTHHOLD	Text update: "Due to the coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic, we know that life has changed a lot for everyone in the country. When you are answering the survey, we would like you to

		answer according to your circumstances now, even if these are not normal. There will be a short section about the effect of the coronavirus on your health, and we have updated some of the response options in the questionnaire to reflect recent changes. However, one of the strengths of the survey is asking a common set of questions each year, to look at how people's lives have changed. Wave 11 and 12: To get a better measure of short-term changes in our lives, we have started a monthly Coronavirus Study, which goes into more depth about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives, and you may have received an invitation to take part in this study as well."
	MGHOLCOV MGHOLNCOV MGHOLMCOV MGHOLY4COV MGHOLOUTCOV MGHOLENDCOV	Added mortgage holiday questions in Wave 12 and removed 'COV' suffix at Wave 13
	RENTHOLCOV RENTHOLNCOV RENTHOLMCOV RENTHOLY4COV RENTHOLOUTCOV RENTHOLENDCOV	Added rent holiday/rent reduction questions in Wave 12 and removed 'COV' suffix at Wave 13
	DESKSPACE Garden HHEARNDOWN INOUTFLOWS	New question about desk space in Wave 13 New question about garden in Wave 13 New questions about managing reduced income in Wave 13
Individual Introduction	INTRO	Text update: "Due to the coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic, we know that life has changed a lot for everyone in the country. When you are answering the survey, we would like you to answer according to your circumstances now, even if these are not normal. There will be a short section about the effect of the coronavirus on your health, and we have updated some of the response options in the questionnaire to reflect recent changes. However, one of the strengths of the survey is asking a common set of questions each year, to look at how people's lives have changed. Wave 11 and 12: To get a better measure of short-term changes in our lives, we have started a monthly Coronavirus Study, which goes into more depth about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives, and you may have received an invitation to take part in this study as well."
Covid19	Entire module: CVINTRO HADSYMP HASSYMP SYMPTOMS TESTED	Added new module in Wave 11 Added option 12..22 in Wave 11 and 24 and 25 in Wave 12

	TESTNUM TESTPOS COVPOSM COVPOSY HOSPITAL NHSSHIELD HCOND_COV BRAINNERVTYPN COVIDEND HCONDCODE_COV HCONDA_COV HCONDS_COV HCOND_TREAT TESTRESULT	 Added a text fill Wave 13 Text "ever" added in Wave 12 Wave 13: This module largely focusses on questions about long covid and learning disabilities with some additional questions from the Covid-19 Survey and National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey added New compute variable and extra options added New question New question New question Removed
Demographics	JBSTAT	Added new response option code (12 Furloughed and 13 Temporarily laid off/short time working) in Wave 11. Added options (14 On shared parental leave and 15 On adoption leave) in Wave 13
Own First Job	J1NONE J1SOC00 J1SEMP J1BOSS J1MNGR	Routing updated to include two additional codes (12 Furloughed and 13 Temporarily laid off/short time working) at DEMOGRAPHICS.JBSTAT in Wave 11
Annual Event History	STENDREAS	Added new response option code (12 Furloughed) in Wave 11. Amended to Furlough/Job Support Scheme in Wave 13
Current Employment	JBOFF	Updated Help text: Added ‘furlough’ and ‘unpaid leave’ to reasons for temporary absence from work. “Include any persons who were absent because of holiday, strike, sickness, maternity leave, furlough, unpaid leave, lay-off or similar reason, provided they have a job to return to with the same employer.” in Wave 11. Updated Help text (including paternity/adoption/shared parental leave): Furloughed amended to Furloughed/Job Support Scheme in Wave 13
	JBOFFY	Added new response option code (8 Furloughed) in Wave 11. In Wave 13 Furloughed amended to Furloughed/Job Support Scheme. Help screen in CAPI: references of ‘mother’ changed to ‘parents’ and 'maternity leave' changed to 'maternity/paternity/adoption/shared parental leave'. change in option 1 and two new options added (codes 9, 10 and 11 Paternity leave, shared parental leave and adoption leave)
Employer Link	Module routing: FIRMNAME FIRMNUM FIRMSTREET FIRMTOWN	Routing into module updated to add JBSTAT codes (12 Furloughed and 13 Temporarily laid off/short time working) in Wave 11. For Wave 13 Second part of the routing into module has changed – no longer routed in JBSTAT but on JBHAS and JBOFF.

	FIRMCOUNTY FIRMCODE FIRMDECLINE	For Wave 13 - question text for ALL modes: text added in the last part of the sentence, including a textfill and 'provide' is replaced with 'confirm'. Interviewer instructions has a change in the text. The text under Question Box Label has been changed in CAWI mode.
Self-Employment	 JSSEISSAP JSSEISSBM JSSEISSBY4 JSSEISSEM JSSEISSEY4 JSSEISSAM JSSEISSNUM JSSEISSOUT JSSEISSAM1 TO 7 JSSEISSBM1 TO 7 JSSEISSBY41 TO 47 JSSEISSEM1 TO 7 JSSEISSEY41 TO 47 JSSEISSOUT1 TO 7	Added new questions in Wave 11 Text updated in Wave 12 Text updated in Wave 12 Added new question in Wave 12 "number SEISS grants" Added new question in Wave 12 "SEISS application outcome" Added Wave 13 Added Wave 13 Added Wave 13 Added Wave 13 Added Wave 13 Added Wave 13
Non Employment	JBHAD	Compute statement updated to include JBSTAT codes (12 Furloughed and 13 Temporarily laid off/short time working) in Wave 11
Parents and Children	STILLPRIV STILLSTATE	Text update: "still attending" replaced with "still a pupil at" in Wave 11
Non-Resident Relationships	NCRR6	Added new response option codes (12 Furloughed and 13 Temporarily laid off/short time working) in Wave 11

4. Income and employment

4.1 Questionnaire and derived variable changes

The Understanding Society main study was adapted in several directions to ensure we continued to accurately capture income and employment during the pandemic. The relevant features of the pandemic that data collection and processing needed to account for: periods of lockdown and associated impacts on employment and earnings; new state support for employees (furlough); new state support for the self-employed (Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)); and pandemic related increases in state benefit amounts, e.g. Universal Credit.

Several changes were made to the main study. They can be summarised as: new survey content on furloughing and self-employment grants; a new set of derived variables relating to the self-employment grants; revisions to income derived variables to include new amounts of state support; revisions to imputation processes to account for periods of lockdowns and the fast moving policy environment within a wave.

To capture furlough status, an additional response option was added to the variable **w_jboffy** in the current employment module. In this way respondents away from work last week, but still employed, can report as being furloughed. An additional response option of "furloughed" was also added to the variable asking about current economic status (**w_jbstat**).

As furloughed workers would receive payment in their **paycheck** through their employer, respondents will have included furlough payments in their reported employer pay (variables **paygl**, **paynl**, **payu** and corresponding derived variables **payg_dv**, **paygu_dv**, **paynu_dv**). Also, the employer pay variables form the source for the variables containing derived earnings totals - which are themselves a component of total individual incomes. Therefore, furlough payments are included in the derived variables for total earnings and total income at both the individual and household levels (see the main user guide for a list of income variable names).

Mirroring the treatment of furlough for employees, SEISS amounts have automatically been reported by respondents in with their self-employee profits and so are automatically included in the derived variables for total self-employee earnings (**w_seearnnet_dv**; **w_seearngrs_dv**) and total earnings and income (again see the main user guide for a list of income variable names). This occurs as most self-employees were asked to report profits on their accounts reported to HMRC – where HMRC explicitly required amounts from SEISS to be included (variable **jsprf**). A smaller group of self-employed instead reported "average business income over the last 12 months" (variable **jspayu**). We believe this smaller group also included SEISS as part of their self-employee profits.

It should be noted, that the reference period for self-employee income may predate the interview date by some distance. This is because the reference period is either the period for which HMRC accounts are prepared - typically the previous financial year – or if not "average business income over the last 12 months". Therefore, derived profit totals include an individual's average SEISS for the period over which they reported profits e.g., those interviewed in 2020 but reporting profits for 2019 will report zero SEISS in the 2020 survey, but have it included in 2021 where they will report their 2020 profits.

New questions added to the self-employment module asked about receipt of the SEISS, how much was received and covering what period (**w_jsseissap**, **w_jsseissam**, **w_jsseissbm**, **w_jsseissby4**, **w_jsseissem**, **jsseissey4**). A set of derived variables relating to the SEISS were produced and are

summarised in table 5. Users should take note that the derived variables suffer from missing data which has been filled by imputation (see below subsection on imputation). Aside from respondent refusal, missing data arises because the new SEISS questions were only fielded from 28 July 2020 (approximately one month after the announcement of the scheme), but the period covered by the grant includes the earlier period from March 2020. Therefore, observations between the start of the grant period and first fieldwork have been imputed. Imputation flags are included in the data and are summarised in table 5.

Table 5. Derived variables for self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

Variable name	Description	Data file
w_seiss_receipt_dv	Indicator for receiving SEISS	w_indresp
w_seiss_receipt_if	Imputation flag for w_seiss_receipt_dv	w_indresp
k_seiss_amount_dv	Monthly amount of SEISS received	w_indresp
k_seiss_amount_if	Imputation flag for k_seiss_amount_dv	w_indresp

For unearned income and state benefits the pre-pandemic questionnaire asked, for each unearned source, the amount received and period the payment covered. This question design will therefore handle well any benefit increases associated with the pandemic (e.g., Universal Credit) as respondents report the amount received directly. Therefore, adaptation of the unearned income and state benefits module was not required.

4.2 Imputation

Understanding Society imputation processes have two main stages: a cross-sectional imputation stage and a longitudinal imputation stage (Little and Su method, Little and Su (1989)). For each stage, we review here only the modifications that have been implemented in relation to the pandemic, a detailed review of Understanding Society imputation processes can be found in Fisher, Fumagalli et al (2019).

To account for periods of lockdown and abruptly changing labour market conditions throughout 2020 and 2021 all cross-section imputation models for employment income were run on shorter sample windows: Models for employment income (earnings, self-employment, and 2nd jobs) were estimated on quarterly samples across waves 11 and 12. State benefits and unearned income were estimated on samples that match the timeline of policy developments, e.g. imputation models for Universal Credit are run separately for the months preceding the pandemic, months during which Universal Credit was increased, and months when the increase was withdrawn.

The implementation of the Little and Su imputation was revised to account for the rapidly changing labour market conditions throughout 2020 and 2021 and also because the implementation, in its previous form, had become infeasible with the lengthening panel. Three key changes were made. First, from the wave 11 release, Little and Su column and row effects were calculated on a backward

looking window of fixed length (8 waves) and with decreasing weights.[2] Second, Little and SU donors were matched to recipients on interview quarter, gender, age and education. Third, Little and Su continued to be implemented for earnings and private pensions, but was dropped for other income sources that are reported with less frequency and make estimating column effects problematic. The other income sources received a cross-sectional impute as above.

The new SEISS derived receipt and amount variables contain missing data that have been filled by imputation. Imputation proceeds by simulating eligibility for the scheme using information on a respondent's self-employment pay reported in the previous 3 waves and comparing the values to eligibility thresholds specified in the rules of the scheme. Receipt is then predicted by applying probabilities from a probit model where simulated eligibility; lags or leads of SEISS receipt if available; and industry dummies are used as predictors. To impute missing amounts, the rules of the scheme are applied where amounts are imputed as a fixed percentage of last waves profits[3].

5. Weighting

To reflect change in mode of data collection, changes in response rates and response propensities by different subgroups before and after the pandemic (specifically, before and after March 2020) the nonresponse in waves 11 and 12 is modelled separately before and after this date (specifically, separately for issue months 1-14 and 15-24 for wave 11, and issue months 1-2 and 3-24 for wave 12). This approach will enable future analysis of data before and after the first lockdown, or allow better representation of sample months, sample years or calendar months, or calendar years. *This does not influence the use of weights from the user perspective. The weights should be included in analysis as usual*.

5.1 How can researchers analyse change during the pandemic, pre- and post-pandemic?

Researchers interested in doing this type of analysis will want to analyse 2019 and 2020 calendar year data and are advised to read : "Running analysis on a calendar year/month". To analyse:

- the 2020 calendar year (pandemic), analysts should use data from Wave 11 (Year 2) and Wave 12 (Year 1) as the fieldwork period for Wave 11 is January 2019 – December 2020 and that of Wave 12 is January 2020 – December 2021.
- the 2019 calendar year (pre-pandemic), analysts should use data from Wave 10 (Year 2) and Wave 11 (Year 1) as the fieldwork period for Wave 10 is January 2018 – December 2019 and that of Wave 11 is January 2019 – December 2020.
- Alternatively consider using the Calendar Year Dataset 2020 which brings together the data for 2020. This is part of a series of calendar year datasets released under a new study number. A user guide accompanies the dataset which is recommended for cross-sectional analysis use only. Each year this dataset will be updated with an additional calendar year of data.

If you have further questions please contact our User Support team
usersupport@understandingsociety.ac.uk

[2] At the start of the panel – with no prior waves - each window will have a forward-looking component. E.g. wave one will have a completely forward-looking window covering waves 1-8. It is not until wave 8 that it is possible to have a fully backward-looking 8 wave window.
[3] This percentage is specific to the round of the scheme which we assign on the basis of interview month.

6. Wave 11, 12, 13 and 14 interviewing

Wave 11 (2019-2020) and Wave 12 (2020-2021) of the main survey cover the pandemic period. Wave 13 (2021-2022) introduced some additional relevant Covid-19 related questions from the Covid-19 Survey. Long covid questions from the Covid-19 Survey were introduced in Wave 14 (2022-23) to identify areas where the pandemic has had long term impacts on life.

We intended to re-introduce face-to-face interviewing in the final quarter of 2021 – that is, for sample members issued in October-December 2021 (Wave 12). This was introduced, but after a few weeks the COVID-19 restrictions were once again tightened, and so it was suspended again. We did re-introduce face-to-face interviewing in April 2022 (Wave 13 Year 2, Wave 14 Year 1) – that is, for sample members issued in April-June 2022 (the first quarter of Wave 14 (January-March 2022) was issued web-first with telephone as a follow-up mode.) Face-to-face interviewing was also used for the first quarter of the Wave 14 boost sample, starting in late-February after an extended web-only period.

Once face-to-face interviewing resumed, the advance letters for this quarterly sample were updated to mention that face-to-face interviewing was now possible, and an extra leaflet about the procedures for in-home interviewing was included with the letter. The interviewers were requested to use a lateral flow test and report a negative result each day that they work. They were also required to ask a short set of screening questions to ensure that it was safe for them to enter the home. The leaflet that was included with the advance letter also stated that the interviewer will try to maintain social distancing, will wear a mask, and sanitise their hands and laptop and other equipment before entering the participant's home. The participant was also requested: to open doors to provide a clear entryway; choose a place for interview where social distancing can be maintained; open a window to provide ventilation; minimise the number of other people in the room during the interview; and, where possible, to consider having the interview done outdoors. If the participant or anyone else in their household tested positive in the ten days after the interview, they were asked to contact the fieldwork agency.

At that point, most of the adult sample members were invited to complete online, with non-responders followed up face-to-face. Although there will no longer be a ring-fenced sample, those who were least likely to complete online were issued directly to interviewers for a face-to-face interview. Prior to visiting the household, the interviewer would try to contact the sample members by telephone to arrange an appointment for the interview. At that time, if the sample member expressed reluctance towards a face-to-face interview, or expressed a preference for a telephone interview, then the interviewer would arrange a suitable time for the telephone interview.

The resumption of face-to-face interviewing was driven by changes in the guidance from the government, the Market Research Society, and the University of Essex Ethics Committee (ETH2122 0107). From May 2023, the COVID leaflet was no longer sent with the advance letter, although interviewers were still following the other COVID guidelines. These were no longer required by the MRS but were maintained by Kantar Public to keep interviewers safe.

7. Citation

The citation changes at each release to reflect the addition of the data from the new wave. Please visit https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/citation for the citation for the latest version of the data. Please cite each dataset that you use.

If you use Understanding Society data you must acknowledge this.
All works which use or refer to these materials should acknowledge these sources by means of bibliographic citation. To ensure that such source attributions are captured for bibliographic indexes, citations must appear in footnotes or in the reference section of publications.

Citing this document

When citing this document you can use the citation of this particular version quoted below. Note that the version available on the Understanding Society website is always the most up to date.

Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2024). *Understanding Society Main Study changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Wave 14 release), 30 October 2024*, Colchester: University of Essex.

8. References

Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2024). *Understanding Society: Waves 1-14, 2009-2023 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009, User Guide, 30 October 2024*, Colchester: University of Essex.

Institute for Social and Economic Research (2021) Understanding Society COVID-19 User Guide. Version 9.0, July 2021. Colchester: University of Essex.

Pablo Cabrera Alvarez, Jonathan Burton and Peter Lynn (2021) COVID-19 and Mode Selection Effects in Understanding Society, Understanding Society Working Paper 2021-10, Colchester: University of Essex

Fisher, P., L. Fumagalli, et al. (2019). "Understanding Society and its income data." Understanding Society Working Paper 2019-08.

Little, and Su. (1989). "Item non response in panel surveys." In Panel Surveys, by D. Kasprzyk, G. Duncan and Singh. E. panel Surveys. New York, John Wiley.

To see an up-to-date list of research publications using Understanding Society data, visit the Understanding Society website: https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications